

ENVIRONMENTAL ACTIVISM IN ADAMU'S THE DEATH OF ETERNITY, THE LONE PIPER AND THE BIRD'S CASE AND EKWO'S THE FALL OF SILENCE: IMPLICATIONS FOR THE ERA OF COVID-19

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Abstract

It is now common knowledge that man in his efforts to improve the standard of living for humanity, the natural world has continuously been put to danger of global warming, pollution of water, land and air, ozone layer depletion and climate change etc; resulting from industrial and exploration activities, as well as scientific, technological and medical advancements. This paper examines the ways in which writers have highlighted the importance of a safe and pristine environment to mankind. It also focuses on how writers have raised advocacy against human activities which have negative impact on the well-being of the natural environment and by extension, how they literally engage their main characters in active roles necessary to challenge or contend against the structures aiding ecological damage. To achieve these, Adamu's *The Death of Eternity*, *The Lone Piper* and the *Bird's Case* and Ekwo's *The Fall of Silence* are selected for analysis using ecocritical framework. Data for analysis are excerpts drawn from the same texts. The findings reveal that environmental preservation is only possible through sensitization by which the people would be stirred not only to protect their environment, but also to rise and fight for their rights, seeing that a healthy environment is people's right without which their potential cannot be realized. The findings also reveal that, consciousness and advocacy are being raised against environmental degradation and ecological devastation. These activities are plunging people's lives into socio-economic and health problems. Therefore, being ecologically conscious would also help to motivate the reader to take proactive steps against any activities which threaten the peaceful coexistence between man and his environment. The paper concludes that human comfort and wellness depend on the comfort and well-being of his environment. When the environment is polluted and devastated, the lives of the people will definitely be endangered. This is so because there is a symbiotic relationship between man and his environment which makes it difficult to separate one from the influence of the other. Finally, the paper notes that Covid-19 pandemic also has its attendant adverse implications on the environment as the dead are buried within the environment without environmental impact assessment reports; thus adding to the risk factors in the environment.

Key words: Environment; Activism, eco-criticism, degradation and preservation

Introduction

The singular task of making their societies conducive for human habitation has always been the preoccupation of writers. This is because the writer is not just an entertainer, but also a visionary agent of social change who uses his/her writing to challenge the readers' consciousness and in turn contributes to societal transformation. This consciousness raising could be for the masses to liberate themselves from the shackles of enslaving traditions, religious dogmatism, political dictatorship and the hazards caused by environmental degradation. Although the

transformation may not be immediately seen in the actions of the readers of a literary work, it is worthy of note that as Nixel Smith asserts, "through literature, people revised their understanding of themselves and attempted to transform their predicaments" (web). It can thus be inferred, from Smith's comments that literature poses an insidious challenge to the consciousness of the readers, which is capable of propelling them to necessary actions. It thus implies that the writer has the ability to educate or impart knowledge on how people can protect their environment, not only against social ills, but also against environmental

pollution.

Writers who care about the harmonious relationship between human and non-human aspects of their society make maximum use of this opportunity to ensure that people are educated on how to relate with their environment. That is, through their literary works they can “rise and fight against the despoliation of the environment so prevalent in this twenty-first Century” (Basit 8). In the same vein, Oppermann opines that “raising consciousness in environmental thinking, and the ethical and aesthetic dilemmas posed by the global ecological crisis, can force literary scholars to recognize the important role literature and criticism play in understanding man’ position in the ecosphere” (3).

The current degradation of the natural environment, how it affects people’s lives as well as the measures for tackling the menace among others, form the basis of this paper. A lot may have been said and done on environmental issues, but as long as the society is still in the shackles of wanton exploitation and destruction of natural resources, and engulfed in its effects of global warming, hunger, poverty and health hazards caused by the pollution of water and air as well as land degradation, writers will not stop addressing and seeking ways of redressing the situation. This is the reason this study is looking into Adamu’s *The Death of Eternity*, *The Lone Piper and the Bird’s Case* and Ekwo’s *The Fall of Silence*, focusing on environmental problems in Nigeria. Environmental effects of covid-19 pandemic will also be highlighted in this study.

Theoretical Framework

This paper adopts Ecocriticism as the theoretical framework for analysis. It is a theory that shifts one’s consciousness from being human centred to nature centred. The word “ecocriticism” according to scholars first appeared in William Rueckert’s essay *Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism* in 1978. Yet, it remained inactive until 1992 when the Association for the Study of Literature and Environment (ASLE) was established. The theory is said to have been heralded officially by the publication of two seminal works: *The Ecocriticism Reader: The Landmarks in Literary Ecology* edited by Cheryl Glotfelty and Harold Fromm in 1996 and *The*

Environmental Imagination: Thoreau, Nature Writing and the Formation of American Culture by Lawrence Buell in 1995.

There are two waves of ecocriticism as identified by Lawrence Buell. The first wave ecocritics focus on nature, writing nature poetry and wilderness fiction (Buell 138). They uphold the philosophy of organism. Here, environment effectively means natural environment (21). According to Buell, the aim of this wave was to preserve biotic community. The critic of this wave appraised “the effects of culture upon nature, with a view toward celebrating nature, berating its despoilers, and reversing their harm through political action” (Howarth, 69). So, ecocriticism initially aimed at earth care.

The second wave of ecocriticism inclined towards issues of environmental justice and “social ecocriticism” that takes urban landscape as seriously as “natural landscape” (Buell 22). This wave of ecocriticism is also known as revisionist ecocriticism. It seeks to locate the vestiges of nature in cities and expose crimes of eco-injustice against society’s marginal section. The ecocritic interprets nature writing texts, at the same time, they use them as context for analysing the principles and customs of our society in relation to nature. Often, the result is a critique of how our culture devalues and degrades the natural world.

Ecocriticism is an intentionally broad approach which is by its very nature interdisciplinary. It draws its sustenance from the existing literary theories. All theories came forward to contribute to the field. Therefore, new theories like post-colonial Ecocriticism, Eco-feminism, Ecomarxism, Ecospiritualism are coming into light. But it differs from the other theories in that while all of them consider earth as a social sphere, Ecocriticism considers it as an ecosphere. All other theories are marked by their individual ego-consciousness while ecocriticism is characterized by eco-consciousness. In short, it is an earth centric approach to literary studies which promotes the understanding of who we are, where we stand, how we should behave with our Mother Nature, et cetera.

The four evaluation criteria for a writer to be considered environmentalist as proposed by Lawrence Buell show that: “Firstly, nature must be

a character in his texts, secondly, human interest must be mixed with environmental interest, thirdly, man must be accountable for the environment and finally, there must be some human progress which in turn causes environmental degradation and which the writer decries” (qtd in Fai 99). Based on the above criteria therefore, the texts mentioned above will be ecocritically studied.

Synopses of the Novels

Synopsis of *The Death of Eternity*

The Death of Eternity by Adamu Kyuka Usman is a story of Tibor, a Hungarian ecoactivist who is sent to Africa by a non-governmental organisation committed to the fight for nature’s preservation called Justice for Nature International. This organisation has entered into an agreement with a country in West Africa and sends Tibor to oversee the implementation of the agreement. Tibor agreed to come to Africa to help create awareness among people who are unaware of the hazards of pollution caused by what he calls “the European’s dirty industries” all in the name of globalisation of production. In Africa, he observes that what he thought to be a pristine environment is under threat by the use of chemical fertilisers, pesticides and activities of loggers. He goes from place to place in the fictional country, Cockde, preaching the gospel of environmental protection. His passion for the environment and his actions do not go down well with some people who plot to kill him despite all his efforts to help them.

Synopsis of *The Lone Piper and the Bird’s Case*

Adamu Usman’s *The Lone Piper and the Bird’s Case* is the story of the Lone Piper, a black crested bird and the other birds living together in the forest of Kirkina Savannah. Among the birds of Kirkina Savannah, no bird can sing like the Lone Piper. The words and melodies of the Piper’s song come with magical powers, capable of performing wonders in the life of the hearers. The melodies of the Piper’s song can heal the broken-hearted, bring recovery for the sick and facilitate the works of the craftsmen in a wonderful manner. Suddenly, a strange disease and illness starts befalling the birds of the Savannah amidst other afflictions. When the cause of the problems is traced to the aircrafts flying over the Savannah, the Lone Piper, by never-before-heard melodies and

moving rhapsodies arouses the birds to war with aircraft. The Lone Piper mobilizes and trains fellow birds to war with human beings and their aircraft in a way and manner that is beyond human imagination.

Synopsis of *The Fall of Silence*

The Fall of Silence is the story of a man resolute on helping his community. Udonne Mbana, a retired civil servant, relocates to his village in order to help his community tackle the challenge of environmental pollution caused by the oil rig located in their community. The wrong he sees troubles him. He becomes a protagonist for the environment damaged by oil exploration. He seeks restitution for the ravaged lives and devastated ecosystem. He never envisages that what he wants to do can turn out to be as hazardous as it turns out to be. He discovers to his amazement that two chiefs (Unannah and Nneke) are being paid the compensation meant for the families whose lands are affected by oil spills in the community. He reveals this to the community and the two chiefs disappear from the village only to send kidnappers to kidnap Udonne and they also threaten his family in Abuja. He was later released but refuses to give up the campaign until the issue of the community is looked into by the National Assembly. The story ends with Udonne’s return from the National Assembly, Abuja, to discover that his friend Sese has been attacked and is unconscious. He is devastated but resolves to continue the campaign until justice is done to the community.

The Textual Analysis of the Novels Environmental Pollution, Logging and Corruption in *The Death of Eternity*

Adamu Kyuka Usman’s *The Death of Eternity* explores the need for the protection of the environment by everyone in order to save it from ecological damage. He presses for the preservation of land, animals, the air, forests, rivers and he does this from the perspective of Tibor the protagonist. The story begins with the protagonist enjoying the beauty of Africa’s natural environment, as the author describes him below:

as he was on top of the Plateau, he was in direct communication with the open skies and was enjoying the thrill of taking his coffee in the sky. At the peak

of the rainy season such as now, fog rolled down the plateau in thick masses, and he was sometimes, while taking coffee, encased in a mass of fog sliding down the plateau. The only thing in Europe he could perhaps trade for this was a dream he had nursed as a child but could not raise as an adult (3).

He comes out every morning after getting out of bed to sit in a particular point outside his house to breathe in fresh air and to enjoy all the good things nature has to offer, all these features highlight the images of nature. In *The Death of Eternity*, the protagonist's love for nature is not disputable as evident from the above excerpt. The writer stresses the close relationship human beings have with non-human objects. According to the protagonist, the fulfilment he gets from the natural environment cannot be exchanged for anything in Europe. Usman's commitment and conviction about the desirability of ecological conservation can be said to be what informed the way nature is represented in the novel. He celebrates the fog, winter, moon, and air which are all aspects of nature. He abandons himself to the expectations of rapture in the fog and gathering the fog into his embrace. To him, "the mass of fog looks like the moon with the image of the nursing mother inside it" (5). Tibor's happy experience is beyond description, as he cries out "I will trade the whole of Europe for this...Besides this, what is Europe worth with its polluted air and waters?"(5), he questions rhetorically. Here is a man who could give up anything including his origins because of his love for nature. This natural environment which the protagonist values so much is under the threat of extinction by some human activities. In fact, he has to renounce terrorism in his home Country in order to atone for the violent death of a dog and dedicates himself to preservation of nature.

Before coming to Cockde, Tibor's conception of this West African nation had been that of pristine wilderness undefiled by the hand of man. He does not bargain for the carnage left behind or by tin miners on the Tanka Plateau and the erosion of nature by chemical fertilizer and pesticides. He is shocked when he finds out that

Europe's industrial machine had scarred everywhere on earth in one way or the other. He decides to settle on Tanka Plateau in Cockde to fight the despoliation of 'the earth by modern industry. He sees it as his duty to save the earth that is under threat of death as much as it is in his power to do so. He preaches the gospel of environmental salvation to the poor innocent people on the Plateau who were gleefully using chemical fertilisers and pesticides hoping for a life more abundant. He reveals to them that they are being served with their death and the death of their children through the use of these chemicals on their land. According to him, "he would not allow the cancer of Europe to spread to the innocent lives of the Plateau and its environs. Europe and its cancer had excised him; he would excise them from this place" (24).

According to the protagonist, the three major threats to Tanka Plateau in Cockde where he resides are chemical fertilizer, pesticides, and tin mining. People dump fertilizer into the earth and apply pesticides on their farms without knowing the dangers they pose to the soil. Other parts of Cockde are faced with the threat of pollution from refinery and the activities of loggers. The author here, highlights some of the issues that many environmental novels fail to highlight. Most of the environmental novels available usually focus on the Niger Delta's degraded environment due to oil exploration. However, Usman, who is from the northern part of the nation, has focused his literary lens on other issues ravaging the whole of the Nigerian environment. He states humanity's plight in these words: "Today, if you don't die of AIDS, terrorism will claim you. If you escape the arrow of terror, you will without fail find death under the canopy of environmental pollution. This is the new Bermuda Triangle no man, animal or plant can fly over" (27). This can be said to be the situation of all living organisms today. The threat is not only limited to African society but the whole world. In Nigeria for instance, citizens are faced with the exact situation described above. While terrorism is claiming many lives in Nigeria, environmental pollution is ravaging the whole of the country's environment in its entirety, and the HIV/AIDS pandemic and other diseases like ebola, lasa fever and the recent covid-19 claiming lives in the

nation.

In *The Death of Eternity*, Usman reveals that corruption has eaten deep into the fabrics of the society. Man's excessive desire has generated excessive greed which has led to the wanton destruction of the earth for personal aggrandisement. The cost of environmental pollution is shared by all humanity while the benefit goes to the polluters. Put differently, what nature has given to mankind, the selfishness of man is taking and giving to a few. For instance, the author portrays the character of Francis a teacher in Nomato village. The author refers to him as *ecological buccaneer* and *ecological butcher*" (122). Francis' appetite for wealth makes him become a logger in the village of Nomato and its neighbourhood. He steals the common wealth of the land for himself alone. The elders of the village who are supposed to challenge his action do nothing to stop him. Even some natives of the village living in cities, who are more conscious of the havoc he was wrecking are reluctant to challenge him for fear of being accused of jealousy.

To Tibor, Francis has become a pest feeding on the trees of the village (124). The author condemns the situation whereby those in government steal all the money meant for the people, leaving everybody yawning from hunger. To him, modern industry is an elephant. It tears down the commonwealth on which society thrives. "Wherever the elephant lives in the forest, there are no trees for the monkey to climb and no grass for the antelope to eat" (106). Those in the helms of affairs in the society, take all there is for themselves and their families not minding what happens to others in the society. In fact, if it were possible or in their power to do so, they would have stored up all the air for themselves and their unborn children. Tibor describes the extended family system in Africa as that of the elephant. According to him:

Of all animals, elephants are the most clannish. They move in clans, celebrate the birth of a child, and mourn their dead. They can uproot the trees of a whole forest just to create bathing space for members of the clan. It matters not if other animals are thereby left homeless.

It is the same thing with the Cockden extended family (145).

A man in government in charge of common resources appropriates them for himself and his family and thinks nothing of others. So much love is heaped on his family that there is little left to be extended to the rest of the society.

Furthermore, because of the pollution of Kodewa river, Tibor visits the Pollution Control Manager of Chinaka Refinery to battle the refinery into accepting liability for the damage done to Nunsa village, and to pay compensation, and stop polluting River Kodewa on which the village rely for its drinking water. He believes that, "if he could achieve these, he is not wasting his time in Cockde"(177). It did not occur to him that corporations like the refinery, feeding on the bounties of the environment, will do anything to maintain the status quo. Tibor clearly tells him that, "It is the wastes from your refinery that is wasting this village, and you know it. You don't in the least treat your wastes before discharging them into River Kodewa, which you have turned into drainage of your refinery" (149). When the Pollution Control Manager senses that Tibor is serious, he offers to pay him off. "Tibor was incensed by the smell of the familiar. What is wrong with the Cockdens? Why do they hate themselves so much? The money he is offering as bribe, why can't he use it to solve the problem of his people once and for all?" (149). The Pollution Control Manager does not want his activities known because he is the head of the Pollution Control Task Force of the refinery, which has been given the lump sum of money allocated to the refinery by the Cockden government's annual budget for pollution control. He has compromised all members of the Task Force, and indeed the management of the refinery with bribes from money allocated for the treatment and proper disposal of the refinery's wastes, he siphoned the money and passed the wastes into River Kodewa. If by any means it comes to the ears of the Cockde Petroleum Company (C.P.C) that he was not treating wastes before discharge, he was on his way out of the company (147). This is why he offers to bribe the protagonist so that his dirty secret will be covered.

The corrupt tendency of the Pollution

Control Manager highlighted above is everywhere in the society today. Monies that are provided for the provision of social amenities for the populace is often time misappropriated and embezzled. The pollution of this river by the refinery becomes a night mare in the village of Nunsu and a neighbouring village. In the course of investigation, Tibor discovered that:

Indeed, the refinery's treatment plant had broken down completely due to lack of maintenance. The result of the refinery's failure to manage its wastes had led to devastation of man, animal and plant life in Kudima village behind the refinery. Well waters in the village tasted oily; so did sugar cane. Water kept outside for some hours become as black as charcoal.... A hundred kilometres away from the refinery, River Kodewa transported the hazardous wastes of the refinery to also pollute the otherwise pristine forest of Nunsu. (35)

This is the situation of not only the Nunsu village but also of Kudima village located behind the refinery. This village of Kudima is even more affected by the pollution. The environment of Kudima village is so polluted that there is no clean water to drink. Even their underground waters have become polluted by oil. For Nunsu village which has no connection with the oil company but for River Kodewa, their situation is rather pathetic. Instead of the pristine environment they inherited from their forebears, they now have a devastated and polluted environment that is under the threat of extinction and the people are oblivious of the cause of the mishap until much later, when investigation reveals chemical substances which are refinery pollutants in the drinking water of the people. Mmanya laments that: "Something is really happening!" he cried. "Disease is in the air, in the Water and on the land and death is lurking everywhere" (38). "Now instead of the water radiating eternity of health, it sprang a plague of disease and death" (38). Every part of the ecosystem is connected in one way or the other. Therefore, when the environment is degraded and polluted, no part of the ecosystem will be spared. The land, water, animal, trees and even human are

in one way or the other affected because they are all connected. A practical example of the above is the battle against the covid-19 virus which has killed thousands of people in the world because people are connected. What came from probably a single individual has spread to thousands of people. The corrupt tendency of the Pollution Control Manager highlighted above is everywhere, when the environment is contaminated, not only nature suffers but also human beings.

In *The Death of Eternity*, there are no instances of youth militancy. However, other effects such as loss of habitat, climate change, disruption of the water cycle and drought are highlighted. Birds and animals such as the hyena, vulture and butterfly have disappeared or gone to places where they can survive. Here, the author reiterates the situation that he portrays in his *The Lone Piper and the Bird's Case* when the Pollution Control Manager laments the disappearance of birds. This shows how a disruption in ecological balance affects both human and non human. The birds have all gone to environments that are more conducive for their survival.

Furthermore, a very important effect of environmental degradation highlighted in *The Death of Eternity* that cannot be ignored is the issue of global Warming. The author is of the view that "Global warming is creating dead zones in the seas and the rivers. Fish, crabs and birds are dying in the dead zones of the seas and rivers because of low oxygen in the water. "From lack of oxygen for fish, we will come to lack of oxygen for men"(277). Excessive heat as a result of global Warming is making the surface waters of the rivers and seas to boil and evaporate. Today, we are being tormented by excessive heat and heat-based diseases such as cerebrospinal meningitis; malaria and so on. The most dangerous aspect of our situation is that unlike the birds and butterflies, man has nowhere to flee to. It is either people change their attitude towards the environment or stay where they are and die as a result of nature's revenge. "In our exploitation of nature, we must gauge the tolerance limit of the things we exploit" (279).

In addition, the author brings to fore the relationship between deforestation and drought. In the novel, the people of Poola District led by

Bilami who is the head of the district allow ‘the deforestation of their forest for personal gains. He Wants to be rich like the chiefs in the oil-rich Sakotel region who get royalties from petroleum companies. To him, “why shouldn't he benefit from the natural resources of his own domain? He was more interested in the money he was getting from the loggers than the future of his land. When Tibor gets to that place, he was amazed at the revenge nature was taking on the people (60). He, nonetheless, takes time to educate them on the consequences of their actions. He tells them that, trees are part of the water cycle. “They take water from the atmosphere and the soil, and return it to the atmosphere, only for the atmosphere to send the same water back to the earth during the rainy season for the trees to take once more”(63). This shows that the trees serve as a sort of storehouse for water. If all the trees are lost to logging activities because of the profit people get from it, then the water they would have stored would find no place to rest, thereby evaporating into space. Once again, the connectivity of all things is highlighted as the disruption of the water cycle discussed above affects both human beings and non human adversely. The people of Poola district suffer because they allow their trees to be felled by loggers and the end result is the drought which leads to hunger and starvation as well as death, resulting from eating of treated seeds meant for planting.

Effects of Deforestation, Hunting and Aircraft Operation on the Natural Environment, as Captured in *Farewell to Peace*

The prologue to *The Lone Piper and the Bird's Case* readily captures the essence of the novel, as it states:

There is space for everyone
If everyone stays where he is.
There is peace for everyone
If no one tries to eat
What belongs to another.

The opinion of the writer here is that, the world is created in such a way that every creature, both living and non-living things have their respective places of habitation and means of survival. As long as they all keep to their various natural limits without any undue interference with another or try to take what is meant for another, the space will be

sufficient and there will be peace on earth. In this book that could be called a fable, the writer's focus is on man's activities that encroach on the right of other creatures, especially the birds of the air. The various activities of man such as deforestation, logging, hunting, industrial activities which include harmful chemicals, science and medical advancement, and so on, pose dangers in a great deal to birds' existence and survival.

The Lone Piper and the Bird's Case is the story of the Lone Piper, a black crested bird and all other birds living together in a fictional forest of Kirkina Savannah. These birds lived their lives undisturbed, peacefully and harmoniously, enjoying the piping magical music of the Lone Piper until suddenly strange diseases and sicknesses start befalling them. Initially, the cause of the sickness was unknown but the transforming song of the Lone Piper when he plays his pipe is capable of reviving the sick. “whichever sick bird did not stir when the Piper arrived with his music was not likely to survive that sickness, because the healing virtue flowing from his music had a way of making the very sick stirred in their sick-nests where they had lain for days without moving a limb and some who had not talked for days to talk” (4). The melody that comes from the tune of the Piper's music speaks to the souls of the birds, appeals to their emotions and organizes life into a beauty that no words can.

Apart from emotional transformation and the natural beauty springing from the Lone Piper's music, the atmospheric peace and tranquility that it enhances signifies the serenity and peaceful coexistence with which the birds live together prior to the modern era when human beings had not started intruding the air to disturb their peaceful habitat. It was the time when everyone stayed where he is supposed to be. It was the time when the forest trees are not cut down and the thick bushes are not burnt in order to create space that would accommodate human population growth. Suddenly, man who is referred to as “*the merciless guest of tears*” (7), start burning the bushes and the leaves in the dry season. The birds stared in fear as the fire destroys their environment and places of abode. Unfortunately for man, he fails to realise that he has consequently destroyed the shadow of the leaves which shades him from the heat of the

sun in dry season.

Apart from the bush burning which renders the tranquil and homely Savannah unhomely and restive, strange diseases start afflicting the birds with sicknesses and deaths. The symptoms of the disease are whitening of the plumage of the afflicted bird and eventual falling off of its beak. When the beak falls off, the bird dies. Many birds have died from the strange disease whose cause is unknown. After series of investigation, it is discovered that the disease is caused by aircraft activities. This information is revealed by the Lone Piper to the other birds thus:

‘We now know from where death was coming to us,...Humans flying in aircraft over our beloved savannah have been the cause of our sickness and death by the toxic substances they dropped in our precious savannah. They have brought human flu to the savannah. Human flu we all know is the most deadly disease. Now is the moment of decision,’ he said and looked about him for affirmation, which came instantaneously (34).

From the above statements, the Lone Piper has discovered that when the aircraft is in operation, it releases toxic substances and human flu which are the causes of the strange diseases afflicting the birds of the savannah. Man is considered to be an intruder in the sky. This is because their divinely ordained place of abode is on land. But he goes to the sky to fly in the air, to compete with the birds and insects, the original children of the sky. When this happens, problems and confusion result, such as the killing of innocent birds and release of disease-causing toxic substances. The Lone Piper also states that, when men fly in their aircraft, “they eat the corn and throw the cobs at us” (36). The impression of the writer here is that, man’s invention of the aircraft does not only make him to over-step his bound but has brought afflictions upon innocent creatures of the air. Hence, the Lone Piper implores humans to “stay on the ground with the mort beetle and the earthworm where you were meant to live as neighbours. The sky is for the birds and insects” (114).

Apart from the aircraft activities, man’s

hunting activities have led to the killing of many birds. “A bird shot by a hunter in mid-flight was, while falling down, seen by some birds...the birds that flew to where the bird had fallen were disappointed to find it was...a bird that had been shot dead” (38-39). This is why Rinkesh in his work, opines that birds and their existing habitats should be protected and exempted from man activities of hunting, logging and deforestation. Other activities that have endangered birds’ existence include the use of chemical pesticides by farmers. While the chemicals are very effective as pesticides, they do not decompose quickly and can be passed from pest to bird. This means that any birds that feed off pests or seeds that have come into contact with these chemicals would eventually die. Natural pest control measures ensure that this does not happen. Global warming increases pests that kill birds. Pests such as ticks, mites and other parasites are part of the reasons birds suffer and dwindle in their numbers. Increase in pests can be traced to the rise in global temperatures that reduces the harmattan period with higher average temperatures. This means that more pests survive the harmattan cycle every year. To combat this, the rate of gas emissions should be reduced. This is just to mention a few of several activities of man that have contributed immensely to birds’ reduction from the earth’s surface.

In *The Lone Piper and the Birds’ Case* however, the reader is told that the birds have decided that they will not continue watching until human beings wipe them away from the world, but will fight to defend themselves and preserve their habitats. They will ensure that man is excluded from the sky because he is considered a greedy being. He wants to eat both his own portion and that of others; this is aptly captured in the following lines:

Meat was shared equally
Between the hyena and the leopard
But since the hyena is a glutton
He must eat his share and that of the leopard
And that was why he fell into the hole
The leopard dug for him (52).

The quotation above describes the greedy nature and insatiable tendencies of mankind, especially as he relates with the other creatures of nature. Man is always not content with what he has. He is

symbolically referred to as the hyena which is a glutton and must eat both his own share of meat and that of the leopard and as a result, he falls into the leopard's trap. Man has taken too much of the universe and gone far beyond his limits, leaving little or no space for other creatures of nature to exist or survive.

In order to make allowance for population growth, provide building and furniture materials as well as charcoal fire for human beings, the forest trees have been destroyed, rendering many birds and forest animals homeless. It is the same way that industrial wastes and oil exploration activities also destroy aquatic life. Just like the hyena, man has also fallen into the hole of global warming, climatic change, environmental pollution, drought, and so on, as consequences for his actions. "Because they sow misery for other creatures, human beings will always be miserable...you cannot sow misery for others and reap happiness for yourself" (51). As the popular saying goes, "the evil that men do live after them". The Lone Piper states further in his song that:

The hyena was not meant for the aqua regions
Roamed by the crocodile and the shark
The hyena was meant for the rocky regions
Where he lives in the ancestral caves of his forebears
If the hyena is moved by glutton to the river
He is courting the anger of the crocodile and the
Water snake (114).

The above lines reiterate the fact that all creatures have their respective places of existence. If they over-step their bounds to places that are meant for other creatures, there will be conflict. Human beings have incurred the wrath of the birds the same way that the hyena "is courting the anger of the crocodile and the water snake" because of his greed.

Essentially, birds are benevolent and harmless creatures, but they have become enemies of human beings because of the greed and vanity of man. With the wisdom and counsel of the Lone Piper, the protagonist, the birds have been trained and prepared to attack humans and their aeroplanes. The Lone Piper travels all the way across the seas to Kansand Island in order to learn and acquire the art of aerobatics. These skills have helped him to fly higher than the human aircrafts and perform magical manoeuvres in the air better

than the human planes. With this, he comes back to train the other birds and tells them that "all a bird needs to perfect the art is practice, patience and perseverance against all odds...we will combine the science of a bird and the art of his flight to fight and exclude from the skies the intruders" (106). With this, the birds are fully prepared to wage war against human beings and their aircraft, their war slogan goes thus: "we must attack those attacking us. Those killing us we must kill. We were in the air before they intruded into it. We can exclude them from it and we will exclude them from it" (36). The war starts from the airport when the birds pretend to go and feed on grasshoppers. There, they deposit the poisonous excreta of the minta birds into the engine of aircrafts. The operation is successful as the planes all crash while on flights. It is all jubilation for the birds of the air when they hear about the crash, and wish they are there on the spot "to watch the joyful mishap taking place, when the intruder got a kick from the sky" (66). Without any waste of time, the birds trace and locate the scene of the crash in the forest in order to search and steal the black box and the cockpit voice recorders. This is because these equipments are capable of detecting the cause of the crash. The birds therefore engage themselves in a relentless search for the recorders so that they can hide them from human beings and keep the secret behind the crash.

As the birds search for the recorders, a helicopter brings three men into the forest to find the recorders. For about three to five days both men and birds search for the two flight recorders without finding any. Angered by the tiring and endless search, the birds decide to chase away or kill the people who are searching for the recorders so that the people would not find them either. With this decision, the birds descend on the three men, violently attacking them as described in the following lines:

At once, the birds descended on the three men searching for the recorders and started pecking them viciously. Screaming in fear and shock, the men fled to where their helicopter was, pursued by the birds. Longneck kept pecking the eyes of the man he was attacking until he removed his two

eyes...The birds did not leave the man on the ground until it was clear to them that he was dead (86-7).

The terrible and unimaginable attack on human beings by the birds leaves the men shocked and short of words. As they wonder how unnatural and shocking it is for birds to attack human beings like honey bees, Ojames, one of the men remarks that “we human beings have done strange things...so we shouldn’t be surprised to see strange things happening” (89). Ojames’s statement here is however very instructive to humans because man has over-stepped his bound and gone beyond his natural limits, he can therefore expect strange things as a result of his actions. To be pecked and clawed to death by birds is one of the results for his flying into the space that is meant for the birds of the air.

Through this medium, the writer has made conscious efforts to bring to human understanding that the other natural creatures and resources that are assumed to be minor, common and are taken for granted are very important and hence should be valued. In fact, human peace and welfare depend largely on their existence and welfare. If this important fact is ignored by human beings, they stand to face the consequences such as can be seen above. From the birds’ attack, it is obvious that these creatures are very intelligent and wants their rights to be respected by human beings. The Lone Piper states this categorically when he says “To them we have no intelligence beyond the instinct of scratching the forest for food”. According to the Lone Piper, making nests and finding food is not all that matter to the birds, unknowingly to human beings, the birds know their rights and can fight for them. This applies to all other creatures of nature and hence, they all should be respected and accorded the right to enjoy their natural space, exist and survive.

Unfortunately, man’s anthropocentric nature does not make allowance for the survival of other creatures. He wants to occupy and subdue the whole earth to fulfil his selfish interest without due consideration for the peaceful existence of the other creatures. Man needs to understand that his comfort and happiness depend largely on the peace and happiness of the other creatures. All he needs in order to live a happy life is to learn to coexist

with other natural creatures without over-dominating, hurting or destroying them or their well being. He should consider himself a co-inhabitant with other creatures of nature because there is a symbiotic relationship between man and nature which makes it impossible for one to separate from the influence of the other.

Environmental Despoliation, Gas Flaring, Oil Spillage and Corruption in *The Fall of Silence*

Inyang Ekwo’s *The Fall of Silence* is set in the fictional Enemese community in the oil-rich Niger Delta region of Nigeria. It explores the relationship that exists between the people and the natural environment before the advent of oil exploration in the land, and the effects of the exploration on the beautiful landscape and vegetation of the community. Right from the title of the text, the author makes it very clear that the literary artist has a role to play in the maintenance of cordial relationship between man and nature. The author believes that silence in the face of oppression and brutalisation is contributory factors to the rise of corruption and environmental degradation in the society. Therefore, in the face of environmental degradation and oppression, silence cannot be said to be golden. It is used by many as an instrument of complicity and selfishness. Thus, writers are encouraged to rise against the challenge occasioned by environmental crisis instead of watching their environment being degraded. S/he must raise his/her voice against whatever is capable of causing chaos in such a society. In *The Fall of Silence*, the protagonist is disturbed by the pretence of those at the helm of affairs that nothing is really wrong. For these people, their privileged position means sustenance of the status quo for what they could get.

The concern of the author for nature makes him highlight aspects of nature such as forests, landscape, trees, rivers, seascape, and animals. He decries the disappearance of the vegetation and land that are being scrapped in the community. According to him, even though he has no control over nature, he could raise consciousness for its protection by highlighting the harmful activities of man that degrade the environment. He looks back nostalgically to a time when the environment was in its pristine form untouched by civilisation and describes it thus:

...I had witnessed the fecundity of the land. It made agriculture the mainstay and nobody seemed to lack. There was no family in the place that was not known for farming. Every family had its farmland and the yields could sustain us till the next harvest. The weather was predictable and the planting season and harvest revolved around its foreseeable circles. Nevertheless, the greenery of the land was by no means seasonal. Its lushness extended and covered the horizon beyond where the eyes could see. It was then a futile exercise to attempt to see the boundaries of the forests. The hunters were the ultimate beneficiaries of the thick forests. Their expeditions were bountiful and they prospered. They were not only the ones who benefited. The few herbalists around them kindled their trade in the abundance of shrubs that were hard to find. The most impressive were the assorted species of grasses. They were in their thickest appearance everywhere... There was the central stream called Adime. It's clear and clean water was always cold.(76,77)

From the above excerpt, the author portrays images of nature such as the landscape, the stream, the weather, the flora and fauna that have been bastardised by oil exploration. The picture created is that of a land blessed with all the natural endowments that nature has to offer. Agriculture is the main occupation of the people because every family has a farmland on which they could plant crops. And the produce from the farm could feed the family till the next planting season. The land is fertile and everyone benefits in different ways from its lushness. Even those who could not farm like the hunters/fishermen and the herbalists were not left out, they had their own fair share of the wonderful gift nature has to offer until oil exploration started in the region and everything changed drastically.

The Fall of Silence has also highlighted the usefulness of natural things. For instance, the author through the perspective of Sese the palm wine tapper does not only tell how useful the raffia

palm is, but also dissects it botanically. He is such a conservationist that he can tell the age of a tree by sight and when it would mature for tapping. Furthermore, he is able to tell the exact quantity of wine that it would yield and the duration of the extraction. Udonne describes the degradation of palm trees in the following words by re-echoing Sese's complaints that:

...the palm trees were becoming drier day by day and producing less palm wine than before. Even the palm trees in the swampy part of the village that were noted for being more liquefiable were not spared. He was afraid that the low out-put could affect business. Apart from that, he felt the palm trees were getting less robust stems. (51)

Sese here, laments the continuous dryness of the palm trees as a result of environmental degradation. According to him, even the palm trees in the swampy part of the village are dying up and he is afraid that this might affect his business negatively. This shows the connection between nature and human beings. This is the situation of many people in oil producing communities. Instead of oil bringing them wealth, many have had their means of livelihood taken away from them due to oil exploration activities.

In *The Fall of Silence*, the author presents a natural environment that is devastated by the activities of oil exploitation. The land which hitherto was fertile and productive has now become infertile and unhealthy for human habitation. Industrial scale pollution and developmental activities in urban centres are seen here as the main threat to the existence of the people. The protagonist of the novel comes face to face with the pathetic condition of the land on his way to Uyo as he sees the developmental projects going on here and there which in turn lead to the destruction of the natural environment. The protagonist bemoans the negative effects of these construction projects as he states that:

The problem I saw in all that was happening was that vegetation was disappearing. The places which were before then thick forests were being cleared as the city expanded. I could not tell if there were others who took

notice of what I saw and were also concerned. There were ageless trees in some of those places and most of them were rare species. I knew as they fell to the power of the earth-moving machines, history also went away with them. I could see open spaces that stretched beyond the horizon the eyes could not see. If I had my way I could have made those behind the deforestation to see reason to preserve some vegetation. It was vegetation that gave life to the environment and made it eco-friendly. (110)

As the protagonist rightly puts it, not everyone can see what he sees. It is only an eco-sensitive person that sees when harm is being done to the environment. While others would be happy for what is happening to the environment in the name of development, the environmentally conscious person sees beyond the immediate to the devastation being caused to the natural habitat. A land that is made bare by developmental activities is open to strong winds and can be seriously devastated by it. This is because when the trees are being cut down and there is nothing left to break the wind, then freak winds can wreck havoc. He sounds a note of warning that nature has no respect for those who put themselves in its way, that if men dare nature, they would reap the unpredictable (110). Those who cut down trees and scrap the land bare are putting themselves in harm's way. In other words, those who dare nature would face the consequences of their actions when the time comes.

Many changes have been caused by oil exploration activities; the land is polluted, the stream has lost its attraction, the colourless and tasteless water has become grimy, and the leafy banks have disappeared. He cannot believe what he sees on the first day he goes to the stream since his return from the city. He explains his sense of loss in the following words:

I felt terrible as I took a long look at the emulsified water. The sight was appalling and unbelievable. It gave the feeling of deep loss. It was like the loss of someone dear. People no longer drank from the stream. There

was widespread tales of how the water was responsible for the outbreak of malaria, cholera and infectious mononucleosis. Many people had died on that account. Accusing fingers pointed at the rig; a visible object at the adjoining ocean. Toxic water from the ocean had infiltrated the stream over the years, unknown to many. There were two oil wells around the location of the stream too, with big pipes that circled around them...they radiated heat that could be felt within a wide circumference. I suspected that it was the heat that also dried up the water. (78)

The quotation above reveals the havoc that oil exploration can wreck on a community. Diseases and sicknesses, untimely deaths, air and water pollution are all resultant effects of toxic wastes and heat radiation from oil wells. When the polluted water overflows its bank, the land is polluted and degraded. Sometimes, this pollution extends to places beyond one's imagination and causes terrible havoc in such places. The protagonist also reveals the continued heating up of the environment, as he states that "The heat of the sun meant nothing compared to the heat of the environment. For some years now, the village had been gradually heating up" (169). This type of temperature that the protagonist describes would definitely affect the condition of weather in that area.

Oil exploration activities no doubt, has great impacts on climatic conditions. This is in consonance with the view of Uyique and Agho that "oil exploration, gas flaring, oil spills, pipeline explosions among others, negatively contribute to the depletion of the ozone layer thereby radically changing the weather and also decimating species of plant and animal life in areas where oil is sourced" (qtd in Aliyu 130). This implies that man's activities on the natural environment have led to changes and transformation that affect harmony between man and nature negatively. The environmental pollutions that result from such activities have greatly impacted on air, water and land.

Oil exploration does not only impact on the physical environment, it destroys the social life of the people. As a child, Udonne recalls how they used the sea shore as a race track. It is a place he loves so much as a child, but the place has instead, become a shadow of its former self. There was a large fish market there that was always busy, but now, he notes with dismay the disappearance of the fishmarket:

What I noted as I stood there was that the fish market was gone. Someone who never knew what used to happen there would vouch it never ever happened. The place was so deserted. There was no shred of evidence on the land that anything like that ever happened there. (80)

The disappearance of the fish market here is a result of fish dearth, caused by water pollution due to oil exploration activities which destroy aquatic life. For most of the marine communities in the Niger Deltar, their fate seems to be hanging in the balance due to activities of oil explorers. Like the fish market, their chance of survival is at stake.

Creating awareness among the people requires some form of activism which the author has here adopted through the action of his protagonist. Udonne takes his campaign to various places including government ministries and parastatals connected with oil drilling in that area, seeking their intervention to check the activities of oil companies that are detrimental to the wellbeing of the people. Although this does not augur well with some people as they see the campaign as a threat to their selfish interest, but the protagonist is not deterred, rather, he becomes more resolute in his fight against exploitation in his environment. For this reason, he relocates to the village in order to correct the impression that, though the village may exhibit all kinds of ills, it is the duty of its citizens to do whatever lies in their power to correct the surrounding ills and make their community a comfortable place of habitation. The novel therefore tells the story of a man who would not be discouraged by the threat to his life in the course of his advocacy against the ills in his domain. He sees it as a duty he must perform and this is evident from his statements: "Tell me, if we all assume this mentality about death and abandon

the place, to whom do we abandon it?...There comes a time in a man's life that he had to stand up for what he believed in" (24,27). He envisions that things will certainly change for good, sooner or later, if somebody rises to effect the positive change with determination.

Chief Isaka commended the protagonist for demonstrating undaunted loyalty to the fight against the exploitation of his community. According to him, the protagonist has shown tenacity in the course of the campaign and has opened the eyes of those who were blind in the village and has also awakened trust in the minds of people as well as bringing the plight of his people to the attention of the government and they promised to do something about it. Udonne raises his voice to project the problems of his community and his voice is heard. Therefore, the status quo of corruption and environmental degradation crumbled. The fall of silence is also the fall of the status quo. For people to be brought out of their prison of ignorance, the literary artist must use his art to wake them to consciousness, not only on issues regarding the environment but on other issues in their social milieu. The novelists in this study have used their works to show that the natural environment is very important to man, and that man should endeavour to live in harmony with his environment to ensure his total wellbeing.

Environmental Effects of Covid-19 Pandemic

The global outbreak of coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) is affecting every part of human lives, including the physical world. The measures taken to control the spread of the virus and the down turn of economic activities have significant benefits on the environment. However, the increase in medical waste, haphazard use and disposal of disinfectants, masks and gloves, and the burden of untreated wastes continuously endanger the environment.

Since the outbreak of covid-19, medical waste generation is increased globally, which is a major threat to public health and environment. For instance, the bio-medical waste generation from the hospitals through the collection of samples of the suspected covid-19 patients, diagnosis, treatment of huge number of patients, disinfection, and lots of other related activities, renders the environment infectious and hazardous as their

proper management remain a significant challenge to local waste management authorities.

Furthermore, to protect from the viral infection, presently people are using face masks, hand gloves and other safety equipment, thereby increasing the amount of healthcare waste. Due to lack of knowledge about infections waste management, people dump those materials in open places and in some cases with household wastes. Such haphazard dumping of these trashes creates clogging in water ways and worsens environmental pollution.

Most worthy of note is the fact that corpses of covid-19 deceased victims which are buried in the earth without adequate precautionary measures and environmental impact assessment are of grave concern in this paper. According to United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), "Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) is a process of evaluating the likely environmental impacts of a proposed project or development, taking into account inter-related socio-economic, cultural and human-health impacts, both beneficial and adverse". (web) This means that, in order to ensure the safety and the wellbeing of the soil/land, there is need to assess the effects of covid-19 corpses on the soil in order to avert further pollution or degradation of the environment and or

further outbreak of same. Again, waste generation from the hospitals such as needles, syringes, bandages, masks, gloves, used tissues, discarded medicines, etc ought to be managed properly, in order to reduce further infection and environmental pollution, which is now a global challenge.

Conclusion

This work has studied Adamu Usman's *The Death of Eternity*, *The Lone Piper and the Bird's Case*, and Inyang Ekwo's *The Fall of Silence*, and analysed the presentation of the natural environment in the novels. The study also ascertains that the presentation of the natural environment and the active roles played by the characters in these novels to ensure the preservation of their environment can go a long way to shape the reader's concern for nature and its preservation, thereby minimising the present day ecological crises. The study reveals that in this era of covid-19 has added more to the global environmental crises, through the activities by which care and treatment of suspected victims is carried out. This calls for more attention to be paid to environmental issues by carrying out more ecocritical studies in order to raise consciousness about the grave dangers posed by the pandemic and the degradation of the environment.

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