

**ECOCRITICISM AND POETRY:
A COMPARATIVE STUDY
OF NIGERIAN AND ENGLISH POETRY**

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this dissertation has been written by me and that it is a record of my own research work. It has not been submitted in any previous application for a higher degree. All quotations are duly indicated and the sources of information well acknowledged in the references.

OKOLO, PRINCEWILL EDWIN

CERTIFICATION

This dissertation entitled *Ecocriticism and Poetry: A Study of English and Nigerian Poetry* meets the regulations governing the award of the academic Degree of Master of Arts (Literature), Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria and is approved for its contribution to knowledge.

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DEDICATION

To my Mother,

Rose Nwigwe-Okolo
With love and gratitude

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ABSTRACT

This research restricts itself to the poetic-environmental focus of the selected poets. Keats, Wordsworth, Okigbo and Okara have been chosen because they radically express environmental consciousness. Thus, there are some unique environmental issues inherent in their poems. The concern with environmental issues is no longer limited to geographers, scientists, climatologists and environmentalists. Literary artists, especially poets are becoming meaningfully committed in portraying environmental problems in their works. This study investigates the radical call for environmental affinity and advocacy for nature; using poetry as the major instrument. The study is premised on the fact that ecological or environmental problems are amongst the major problems facing the world in this twenty first century. Keats and Okara demonstrate great sense of ecocriticism in the collections selected in this research. They reaffirm to the fact that most of the human problems and chaos come as a result of not having a close affinity with the natural environment. The poetic voices echo the feelings about their natural environment. On their own part, Keats and Okara are bothered by the seemingly insurmountable obstacles to man's progress that he witnesses every day due to their negligence towards the natural environment. Okigbo and Wordsworth consider Nature as the best teacher for mankind. One endearing quality of their poetry is their great concern for the scapes – landscapes and seascapes. The poets, being environmentally conscious show the sensitivity to the survival of the environmental creatures. The theory for this research is Ecocriticism which is the study of the relationship between literature and the natural environment while the methodology is basically the use of library and other forms of pedagogical research. To achieve this effectively, four collections of poems therefore form the foundation upon which the analyses, findings and critical comments of the research is based. This study examines the ecocritical study of selected English and African poems.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

CONTENTS AND CONTEXTS

The earth is ours to plough and plant
... relieve heavy heaps of their tuberous
burdens
... let legumes clothe the naked bosom
... from earth's unfathomed fountain
our earth is an unopened grainhouse,
a bustling barn in some far, uncharted
jungle

- NiyiOsundare.

1.1 Background

This study investigates the passionate call for environmental protections and advocacy for nature; using poetry as the major instrument. The study is premised on the fact that ecological or environmental problem is one of the major problems facing the world in this twenty first century. This problem comes as a result of environmental negligence, racism and hazards. There are malevolent abuses on the environment that set forth a vicious chain of reprisals. These reprisals come in the form of global warming and depletion of the ozone layer which are ravaging the present day world. These encompasses economic, social, political, and cultural dysfunction.

The issue of environmental hazards is not a new thing in the human physical environment. The earliest urban civilizations created severe environmental damage. The accumulation of agricultural surpluses necessary to build cities, construct pyramids and temples, equip armies, provide regalia for priestly rulers and maintain bureaucracies led to over-farming, soil erosion and the destruction of natural habitats. Goodie (1981:113) noted that Irrigation, in ancient Mesopotamia and the Indus Valley, led to over-salinization as the evaporation of large bodies of

water left to toxic salt on formerly fertile land in a ‘Satanic mockery of snow’. Huge areas of forests were removed to make way for fields of wheat. Loss of tree cover and over-enthusiastic farming practices resulted in widespread soil erosion.

Buell (2005:345) shows that in Mesopotamia, water was likely to be polluted, smoke from thousands of fires poisoned the air and the death rate was presumably high. The attitudes of early societies, especially those of classical Greece, strongly influence contemporary approaches to the environment. The Mesopotamia saw nature as a wild beast to be tamed. Aristotle (384-322 BC) and the early stoics claimed that nature was a response placed before humanity for its exclusive use. Already at this early date, arrogance towards nature seemed to be the dominant trend. This environmental negligence and degradation is what constitutes some environmental hazards which man experiences until this modern time. Man’s insatiable quest to develop his environment, industrialize his environment and transform his environment came to its greater increase in this twenty first century. This explains the reason why there is high rate of environmental hazards resulting in the depletion of the ozone layer and global warming.

In Niger Delta for instance, there is a high rate of oil spillage and other forms of environmental hazards. All these constitute harms to the physical environment. Man’s callous action towards the physical environment have raised hue and cry by many including poets. Following these hazards, Ojaide (2006:93) stated vociferously:

The Niger Delta and its people and just as the land, air, and rivers were being poisoned; so were the residents themselves, the activist believed. He had observed in the short time since he returned, the epidemics of dysentery and worm diseases that afflicted the people. The paradise of olden days was degenerating fast into a kind of hell. The water that used to be an elixir had become a poisonous brew.

Environmental devastation is all encompassing in areas such as habitat destruction and species extinction, air and water pollution, ground water depletion and contamination, and chemical risks (ocean) supertankers discharge oil sludge on water. This fact is further raised in Ojaide (2006:91) as follows:

The magnitude of the desolation of the water shocked them. Where were the flying fish that used to shoot out of the water into the air . . . the water was no longer the herb-black draught that she liked to dip her hands into and wash her face with. It was light-green, greasy, and smelly. The large fish population had either been decimated by chemicals from oil industries or migrated downstream into the ocean. Where were the flock of storks, king-fishers, and many exotic types of birds that filled the airspace as one approached the ocean?

Thus, the concern with environmental issues is no longer limited to geographers, scientists, climatologists and environmentalists. Literary artists, especially poets are becoming meaningfully committed in portraying environmental problems in their works. An ecocritical critic, Glotfelty shows that literature liaises with the environment to show the splendour of nature. To him, 'literature endows us to feel a sense of guilt for abandoning the splendour of the natural environment. This guilt translates into a vigorous negligence of nature.' Thomas Hardy, in all his works focuses the attentions of his readers on the riches and pleasures in the natural environments. He shows that man is totally helpless when detached from his natural environment. Hardy centers his works on the rustic setting which has pristine values on the individuals in society. He is therefore identified as the rural conscious writer. Also, Niyi Osundare shows that man, through his harmful activities upon the environment have contributed to various natural disasters that ravage him today in his environment. He totally condemns the use of some modern mechanical implements which are detrimental to the natural environments, the soil fertility. He advocates for the use of crude farm implements in the cultivation and in the management of the soil surface.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

The natural environment has been degraded by the exploitative activities of man with the attendant negligence. Fatal consequences of earth warming, air and sea pollution and the destruction of aquatic lives, deforestations and desertifications; gas flaring and oil spillages are on farmlands in places like the Niger Delta regions of Nigeria. These problems in contrast to the beauty of the natural environment like seas, hills, mountains and forests which remain a source for literary creativity deserve critical attention. Although it is acknowledged that studies in recent times have given them this attention, none of such studies, however, seems to have paid proper attention to the varying modes of delineating environmental concerns by the nature poets of earlier (Romantic) periods and this contemporary times occasioned by the realities of time/space specifics.

Besides, many researchers have carried out series of research on ecocriticism but the majority has limited their works to the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. Such researchers as Chibuzo Asomugha has written on *Environmental Activism in Tanure Ojaide's The Activist*, Ire Ugboodo has written on *The Quest for Environmental Friendliness in Tanure Ojaide's 'Daydreams of Ants'* and *'Delta Blues and Homesongs'*, etc. The majority of the researches in this area, focused mainly on the Nigerian environment. However, in this research, the researcher added another dimension to consider the issue of environmental literature from two different backgrounds – the Nigerian background and the English background. And since this is a global issue, writers across the globe are also responding to this – Nigerian and English poets inclusive. As such, this work is undertaken to unearth the growing literary works on environmental issues not only in Africa but also in England. Also, many critics over the years focused on the human dimension of political and economic problems of society, just a few have bothered about the environment in

which we live. Worries about environmental destructions and dysfunction seem very modern. Seemingly, contemporary environmental problems have apparently existed in the past. As such, this research is premised on the following propositions that constitute the research problem.

Although literary criticism of ecological issues is viable, it is still strictly and not adequately addressed. African poetry and the criticism it has generated dwell more on socio-economic and political issues rather than on environmental issues. The focus of literary criticism on environmental issues dwell more on Nigerian landscape even though is a globalised issue.

There is a close relationship between environmental issues in Africa and that of Europe hence the issue of global warming and depletion of the ozone layers is a world affair. The relationship between literature and environment is not a recent phenomenon.

1.3 Aims and Objectives of the Study

Drawing from the words of Adogbo (2009:48), the objectives of any research undertaking is the acquisition and coalition of knowledge whether to aid in solving human problems or to satisfy intellectual or aesthetic objectives of the researcher. The objective of this study is to examine the environmental or ecocritical concerns of the selected African and English poets. In view of this, the following are the specific objectives of the study:

- to show the relationship between literature and environment and that literature can be used to interrogate environmental issues as portrayed in the selected poetry texts;
- to demonstrate that literature has been used to interrogate environmental issues right from the ancient times;

- to compare the Nigerian and English poetry of environmental concerns from the two backgrounds – Nigeria and England and
- to provide a literary reference material for the upcoming researchers since the issue of ecocriticism is also taking the centre stage in the literary–critical world.

1.4 Scope and Delimitation

Environmental issues are as important as economic and political issues. This is because every activity in which humans engage in for survival stem up from the human environment. The concern for the environment is not limited to environmentalists alone; poets from different backgrounds are also interested in issues pertaining to the environment. It is against this background that this research is based. Thus, Dobie (2009: 243) vociferously maintains:

The literary representation of environment means taking an earth-centered approach to literary study by looking at the role environment plays in a given work. The literary critics focus on the natural environment before it was impacted by technology: the land, its flora and fauna, its waterways, living creatures, and the ecosystem that nourishes them.

This research restricts itself to the poetic–environmental focus of the selected poets. Wordsworth, Keats, Okigbo and Okara have been chosen because they are environmentally conscious poets; thus, there are some unique environmental issues inherent in their poems. They seem to have what Bate (1991: 27) describes as ‘the Green thinking that is linked to deep ecology and animal liberation’. They see themselves as part of nature but alienated from nature and thus the need to return to mother nature.

The thematic focus of the selected poets is based on the fact that the ecocritical settings of their poems function simply as background; thus, playing active role in the poems. Moreover, the natural environment is held at high esteem in the poems, thereby affecting the thinking of the

persona as environmental entities. Their poems raise environmentally conscious questions about human interactions with nature. The poems direct the readers' interest to nature; thus, raising the readers' awareness of the natural world and their connections to it.

The poets have succeeded in their passionate call for environmental harmony and protections through their poems. Their call could be seen to be yielding results in the environmental consciousness seen in the positive actions of people towards their environment these days. The 'wheatfields raise their breadsome hands/... legumes clothe the naked bosom' Osundare (1986). Trees are being planted to protect the ozone layer; awareness is being created through various poetic modes. They represent the environment in their lives and poetry. Sympathies for animal liberation and deep ecology run deep in the poets through the selected poems: "The World is Too Much With Us", "The Solitary Reaper", "Ode to Nightingale", "Idoto", "Watermaid" and "The Call of the River Nun" etc. Nevertheless, certain aspects of these and other poems will be mentioned to illustrate one point or the other.

1.5 Significance of the Research

Environmental discourse is seemingly taking the literary centre stage. It has been engaged in several other ways in literary and non-literary studies; eco-critical theory because of its nature of contemporaneity. What it means is that current literature based on this line of enquiry is relatively scanty. This study, therefore, complemented available literature on the environment. In addition to this, the study reinforces reference materials for students on the poetry of William Wordsworth, John Keats, Christopher Okigbo and Gabriel Okara. This provides a shift from a whole human-focused perspective to an all-embracing nature-focused one. The natural environment is thus seen as both object-preserved and subject-preserver. This dual perspective of the natural environment is mutually beneficial and significant in understanding the gap that this

study intends to fill and to project. By this study, we have added a poetic voice to this universal challenge. Above all, the study shows the relationship between literature and environment; conducted in a spirit of commitment to poets' praxis.

This research therefore, shows the concerns of literature towards the physical environment. Considering all these factors, ecopoetics become very important. However, for some unknown reasons, not much attention is accorded to this new literary postulation by some modern researchers. This research will fill in the gaps in the scholarly literature in reawakening poetic consciousness of the environmental dwellers and poetry readers for an ecological appreciation of nature. Thus, we are all interconnected and what befalls one part of nature will influence the rest as lyrically captured by the selected poets, who are the subjects of study in this research.

The common ground on which our poets in question stood is thus, their love for the natural environment and poetry as the medium for poetic expression. This is also one of our determining factors in our choice of specific environmental poems common to these poets. The poems of Wordsworth, Keats, Okigbo and Okara chosen for this study are based on their relevance and uniqueness in their discourse, their themes and contents on the natural environment. The poets selected for the study do not just describe what they saw; they express their feelings and passion as a part of what they appreciate and describe.

1.6 Methodology

This study examines the ecocritical study of selected English and African poems. The methodology for this research is basically the use of library and other forms of pedagogical research. To achieve this effectively, four collections of poems therefore form the foundation upon which the analyses, findings and critical comments of the research is based.

The primary texts include four collections: two African collections and two English collections. The simplest strategy to be used in this research is a desk-work strategy which comprises: content analysis, interpretative, non-predictive and largely subjective type entirely within the usual domain of qualitative research and methodology.

Besides, this research will also make extensive use of secondary sources in the form of related literature in the internet, magazines, journals, articles and other relevant materials. All the data and other pieces of information collected from various sources must be painstakingly researched and critiqued to ensure non-violation of academic integrity. To achieve a well-articulated research, the research is presented five different chapters. Chapter One deals with the general introduction which embodies the contents, contexts, background and conceptual framework of the research. Chapter Two handles a review of existing related literature on the field of research and theoretical framework. Chapter Three dwells on the critical comparative analysis of selected poems of John Keats in the collection, *Ode* (1817) and Gabriel Okara's collections, *Fisherman's Invocation* (1978); in relation to their natural environment as the panacea for eternal tranquility, while the subsequent chapter, Chapter Three treats a comparative analysis of Christopher Okigbo's *Heavensgate* (1962) and William Wordsworth's collections, *Poems in Two Volumes* (1807); focusing on the eco-consciousness and eco-friendliness in their selected poems. The last chapter of this research is Chapter Five, summarises the study by weaving together, the main critical interpretations and findings of the research.

1.7 Literature and Environment

Literature has transcended the boundaries of both the political and the sociopolitical spheres. In this contemporary time, it can be said to have gone 'Green'.

We share in Ker's (2003:16) view that literature is:

A social phenomenon which has socio-economic, socio-political, psycho-social, meta-physical, philosophical and religious dimensions. It has influenced and has been influenced by other social institutions. Literature mirrors society by recreating aspects of its existential realities. Writers have done this in a number of ways, for example, by showing the interaction between literature and other arts, psychology, politics and the natural environment among others.

The interest of English literary artists in the natural environment dates back to the Romantic period (1798 – 1832), when England was transformed from an agricultural society into an industrial one. Ayinuola (2013:5) posits that:

The industrial revolution with the attendant mechanization of life at the period brought about the destruction of landscapes, general chaos, changes both in the landscape and in the social lives of the people. This accounts for environmental woes faced today.

The environment now occupies an important spot on the catalogue of global concerns. It has far outpaced such other grim issues as Ebola virus, AIDS, threats of nuclear war, stem cell research and terrorism. The environment has become the major control parameter for human operations in industry, scientific research, exploration, manufacturing, governance and daily living. Almost every human endeavour is assessed to the extent that it has “green” value. Car makers struggle to produce marketable environment-friendly hybrid models, industries are now obligated to cut down on operations and products which emit dangerous gases into the atmosphere. Governments create ministries of environment, and societies are socialized to live lives which do not threaten the environment.

The complexity of the environment is such that “even minute changes in any one factor in an ecosystem can influence whether or not a particular plant or animal specie will be successful in its environment” (Zimmerman 2006:12). Because earth's resources are limited, human efforts

should aim at conserving them or even devising means of refusing them. Ecocritics are of the opinion that radical and perhaps, far-reaching changes in human behaviour will be required to avert an ecological crisis.

Literature of the environment focuses on the natural environment as its central concern. It differs from nature writing in that it encompasses issues which go beyond evoking emotional responses about the natural world. Buell (2005:54) opines that literature of the environment is literature which is “environmentally oriented”, irrespective of what author’s initial intentions are. Buell goes further to supply the following criteria for determining if a work is environmentally oriented:

- The nonhuman environment is present not merely as a framing device but as a presence that begins to suggest that human history is implicated in natural history.
- The human interest is not understood to be the only legitimate interest.
- Human accountability to the environment is part of the text’s ethical orientation.
- Some sense the environment as a process rather than as a constant or at least implicit in the text.

Literature of the environment is therefore literature that engages ethical, political, cultural and social issues related to the environment. It not only engages through knowledge; it also engages through action. It seeks to guide personal and political initiatives.

On a similar note, Dobie (2012: 239) shows that literature of the environment takes a stand by its commitment to the natural world as an important thing rather than simply as an object of thematic study by its commitment to making connections; thus, everything is connected to everything else.

1.8 The Development of African Poetry

According to Egudu (1975:11), poetry is the creation of beauty, thought and emotion for most life experiences give rise to thinking and feeling. These are what poetry expresses. African poetry is one of the genres of African literature. African literature refers to the literature of the African peoples. The African concept includes oral literature. While the European views of literature often stressed a separation of art and content, African awareness is all inclusive. Literature can also imply an artistic use of words for the sake of art alone. Without denying the important role of aesthetics in Africa, it should be kept in mind that, traditionally, Africans do not radically separate art from morals. Rather than write or sing for beauty in itself, African writers, taking their cue from oral literature, use beauty to help communicate important truth and information to the society. Indeed, an object is considered beautiful because of the truths it reveals and the communities it helps to build.

African poetry began as performances in the form of songs, chants or recitations, in which the performer binds himself in advance to follow a certain regular rhythmic pattern. Under this, we have folk songs which are songs with choric refrains in a call-and-answer pattern in most cases, the song has alternating sole lines and verses that serve as the chorus or refrains. Some of them present coherent stories while some are just sang for entertainment.

Traditional African poetry not only entertains the audience, it raises the consciousness of both the community and individuals in it. A song like *Salute to the Elephant* contains some vocatives which are used to address creatures in an attitude of veneration or respect. The animals reflect human beings and their response to issues. The story also reveals the disaster which follows negative individualistic tendencies instead of the success that normally results from joint, mutually beneficial communal endeavours. It is a clear fact that much of the African traditional

poetry is a hybrid between oral African and modern written European poetry. Our traditional poetry was preserved and later translated (or transferred) into European languages (such as English) and written down. Early African poets largely drew from the rich stock of our culture to produce written African poems. Stories of wars, conquests, king and dynasties were passed on from generation to generation through oral means

a. Written African Poetry in Early Colonial Period

In Chinweizu (1980:17), the author argues that:

In any development from hybrid cultural strains, it is normal to expect differences between the new growth and any of its parent forms. It is therefore pernicious, and a manifestation of cultural imperialism, to try to constrain fresh developments by demanding strict an exclusive adherence to the characteristics of one of the parent strains.

Early written African poetry had the African background as its setting, but employed European literary tools (languages, writing etc) to realize its aims. Naturally, therefore, conflicts were bound to occur in such a situation. Where did the loyalty of the writers belong? Most of the early poets wrote in response to the problems and adverse conditions resulting from colonialism. As Chinweizu (1980:79) pointed out, “these early poets concerned themselves with righting the wrongs occasioned by colonialism in Africa”. They spoke against European colonialism in general, highlighted African culture and tried to preserve the African heritage through the written mode. These early poets consumed no written African literary tradition to draw from. They therefore drew heavily from the oral African literature (otherwise known as orature). They also based much of their writings on the western literary yardsticks.

The poets therefore, formed the nucleus of contemporary African literature. As pioneers in the field, they faced difficulties too. Since they were well-versed in African languages and culture,

they could not find suitable alternatives to terminologies non-existent in western vocabulary, so they had either to improvise or retain their African forms. This did not go down well with the colonialists. These African writers faced the ongoing task of transferring into European language, their African thought-processes. In spite of their having been trained with the aid of languages such as English and French, early African poets still felt greater allegiance to their African heritage and sought to reflect these accurately in their writings. But such languages were not equipped with sufficient vocabulary to aptly depict all African phenomena and experiences. Hence, writers resorted to transliteration among others, in order to provide a convincing and accurate picture of the situation.

The major focus of the early African poets like Sedar Senghor, Aime Cesaire and others was the task of informing accurately, sensitizing other Africans to the problems posed by European colonialism and correcting erroneous impressions created by white colonialists in their writings which were accomplished in the final analysis. Early written African poetry therefore set the trend for succeeding generations of contemporary African poets. From all angles, African poetry of the early colonial period will remain relevant for a very long time since it sought to portray Africa in credible perspective. Eurocentric critics argue that there was no African writing worth classifying as literature; there was nothing in Africa comparable to the poem out of which the African novel might evolve; that whatever there was in the African oral narrative tradition has had a negative influence on the African poetry because of the limitations of the oral medium. The literature written by Africans in the early colonial era proved that, indeed, our heritage has been of tremendous assistance to the African poetry.

Early colonial poets like Sedar Senghor, Aime Cesaire wrote within the era of early colonial period. Through their poems they aptly mirrored the era. Although these poets benefited from the

African and European heritages, they mainly sought to use their poems to highlight the evils of colonialism in Africa. By extension, they advocated independence or self-rule for Africans and Africa. Although the long term or ultimate aim of the early African writers was to end colonialism. They were also saddled with the task of reversing the negative depictions of the African people and activities in poems written by white colonial poets. Universally, people are becoming aware that intellectual realm or/wealth dictates the ethos and direction of affairs in any country. Thus, pioneer African poets in the colonial era felt compelled to put matters in their correct and proper perspectives to guide future generation of Africans.

The pioneer African poets made a great achievement in the poetry genre. This is because they had no previously written literary works of Africans to refer to. Only the European (written) and traditional African (oral) literature guided them in their creative endeavour. Often, oral accounts are not reliable since they exist in many varieties. Moreover, the literature about Africa written by Europeans was biased and thwarted because it regularly painted an awful one-sided picture of Africa and her peoples.

b.Phases in Nigerian Poetry in English

Nigerian poetry, like the Nigerian novel, evolved to its present form through successive phases. The socio-political climate in the nation has often influenced and determined the course of this evolution. These phases can be delimited into three. Ushie (2005:1) maintains:

If we exclude the oral renditions in various Nigerian languages and the early phase of Nigerian poetry in English (represented by the works of Epelle, Enitan Brown, Dennis Osadebey, Adeboye Babalola and Olumbe Bassir, etc; as recognized by critics to constitute the first generation, there would be two clearly defined phases in Nigerian poetry in English. Generally, we refer to the remaining two generations simply as the first and the second.

The First Generation Poets: The first generation is represented by such names as Wole Soyinka, Christopher Okigbo, Gabriel Okara and J.P. Clark – Bekederemo. These members of the first generation came into limelight in the days of Nigeria’s struggle for independence in the late 1950s, including the period of the country’s first attempt at civil rule. As such they “. . . Participated side by side with the politicians in the fight for independence” (Osofisan, 1996:15). In *Toward The Decolonization of African Literature* (Vol. 1, 1980:163), Chinweizu and others identify three categories common to these early poets. These are (1) the environmentalists, “who assiduously aped the practices of 20th century European poetry”, (2) “the traditionalists, who sought to model their English language poetry on elements from traditional African poetry, and (3) “a miscellany of individual voices of the middle ground who share no strongly distinguishing characteristics”. Chinua Achebe pointed out that the major preoccupation of these poets was the need “to teach (their) readers that their past – with all its imperfections was not one long night of savagery from which the first Europeans acting on God’s behalf delivered them” (*Morning Yet on Creation Day*:1966: 45).

It is shown that the first generation of Nigerian poets did adjust their scope to accommodate the crisis that led to the civil war and did, in fact, write poems on war. But the effect of the war on Nigerian poetry went beyond this. The war combined with two external influences to give birth to a new generation of Nigerian poets.

The Second Generation Poets: These poets are the major voices of the second generation poets – Odia Ofeimun, Niyi Osundare, Tanure Ojaide, Onuora Ossie Enekwe, Catherine Acholonu and Harry Garuba. These poets wrote extensively on the influence of war. According to Garuba (Okunoye 267), “The civil war is important as ‘historical context’ because it . . . Saw the beginning of a civil war in Nigerian literature in the ‘textual context’ of poems”. How the war

contributed to the emergence of the second generation is more vividly presented by Onuekwusi (2002:43):

The mangled limbs and dismembered bowels of the victims of crises and the frustrated hopes of the people have metamorphosed into images of death, aridity, decay, putrefaction, betrayal and hypocrisy. The mournful tone of the dirge has thus become the dominant mood of the poets by the post-Okigbo “Nsukka Poets”.

This mood of anger and despair was not restricted to the “Nsukka poets”. Onuekwusi added that:

Poets outside Nsukka also responded to the situation by resolving . . . to make poetry as relevant to the realities of their daily existence as possible: no more pursuit of the clever and esoteric lines of Soyinka, the Latinate phrases of Okigbo and Echeruo or the Hopkins syntax of Clark.

In addition to civil war, two external influences also contributed to the emergence of artistic characteristic of this second group. These influences were the exposure of the new voices to Marxism and the decolonization of African literature that had begun in East Africa. On the role of Marxism, for instance, a leading member of the generation, Niyi Osundare, states thus:

We read the works of Marx, the works of Lenin, and many of the speeches of Che Guevara and Fidel Castro and, of course, the works of Fomo, particularly Fanon . . . These were works that we read and we discovered that they were saying things that were true about our position, and of course, these things influence what we wrote eventually.

Femi Osofisan (who is more known as a playwright than as a poet) further expatiates on the mission of this generation as follows:

. . . our focus on the present state of our society, on unmasking the class forces at play within it, revealing the material sources of exploitation and injustices, demonstrating how the masses could liberate themselves (and) of greater pertinence now as the collective struggle, fought by the hero with a thousand faces, a thousand hands.

Since the poetry of this era was now focused on the condition of the ordinary people, the peasants and workers, what were the implications of this change in regard to the concerns for the language and style of the group? Would they, for instance, achieve this goal if their poetry remained as opaque as that of their predecessors? Or would it be necessary to make their work more accessible to the public through a radical departure from the style of the preceding group? These are questions which Osundare's definitional statement in *Songs of the Marketplace* seems to address when he sees poetry, not as "the esoteric whisper/of an excluding tongue". Elsewhere, he further explains:

The thematic preoccupation remains the desperate situation of Africa, the stylistic hallmarks are clarity and directness of expression, formal experimentation, and a deliberate incorporation of African oral literary mode.

One specific aspect in which this was put into practice in the language of this generation is the conscious introduction of the proverb because of its "capacity" . . . to drive home populist expressions" (Nwachukwu-Agbada, in Jones, eds, 168 – 169). Nwachukwu- Agbada also notes that the poets of this time returned . . . to the local speech pattern so that, whether the poet is Hausa, Igbo, Yoruba, Urhobo or Nupe, there are linguistic models in his poetic affiliation which every member of a Nigerian, if not African, audience can relate to. In sum, members of the second generation of Nigerian poets had their sensibility sharpened by the country's civil war as well as the exposure to Marxism, but they turned to their African roots in matters of style and language as a response to the trend to conform to the prescription by Chinweizu, et al, that "All that the poet has to do is open his ears, and listen to his contemporaries who have not lost touch with tradition and write the way they speak".

In concluding our examination of this second generation of Nigerian poets, it is necessary to note that some of them like Niyi Osundare expresses a serious concern on environmental issues. In his

collection *The Eye of the Earth*, Niyi expresses a deep concern on the persistent degradation of the earth and its natural resources. He cries aloud against the ongoing massive plunder of terrestrial wealth which is Nature's gift to man. Incidents such as deforestation and oil-spillage amount to a prodigious waste of natural resources meant for generations yet unborn. To make the problem worse, the growing increase in environmental pollution which is a by-product of the technological age threatens to destroy the human environment and expose mankind to all forms of hazards. Niyi's strident voice is raised within this universal context, but with specific rural and agrarian setting. In this collection, Niyi captures glimpses of the green forests and mountains within his environment. He shows passionately, that there is crying need for the preservation of the earth and its natural resources through kind and genial exploitation of the natural environment. Osundare unequivocally advocates for the celebration of the earth's fertility and hidden natural resources which are meant to be ploughed for the betterment of mankind, rather than being destroyed.

Third Generation Poets: This is the group of Nigerian poets who are situated between the 1980's to the modern times. It is worthy to note that this 'timing' is not rigid because a majority of those who wrote in the second generation are still writing and others who belong to this generation also wrote before 1980s. This group of poets are, however, united by their common treatment of the post-independence disillusionment. The civil war had ended, and the various difficulties and existential problems characterized the national experience began to shake the faith of Nigerians in their leaders. Many, in fact, lost faith in nationhood. The poets of this period were greatly influenced by the events in the national socio-sphere. Poetry became a tool for protest, as was the case in South Africa during apartheid regime. In terms of content, Osofisan (1996) observes that "as far as theme and tone of political commitment are concerned, there is

really not much distinction any longer between the younger or older writers, in the works produced from the early 80's onwards."

Tanure Ojaide presents more lucidly the phases in modern African – and hence Nigerian poetry thus," . . . the Soyinka – Clark – Awoonor – Peters older group, the middle group of Anyidoho – Chipasula – Ojaide – Osundare group, and the very young group represented in *Voices from the Fringe*" (88).

Niyi Osundare, however, offers a more comprehensive picture of these rising voices than any other observer of the literary trend. He introduces them as those “. . . born around Nigeria's independence (1960), Nigeria's midnight children, as it were, who have spent the first three decades of their lives confronting the nightmare that the country has become” . He further describes their poetic temperament as ranging “from angry through desperate to despondent”. Some of the new poets include Femi Oyebode, Olu Oguibe, Afam Akeh, Ogaga Ifowodo, Esiaba Irobi, Onookome Okome, Uche Nduka, Chiedu Ezeanah, Usman Shehu, Kemi Atanda – Ilori, Idzia Ahmad, Sesan Ajayi, Remi Raji, Sola Osofisan, Nnimmo Bassey, Toyin Adewale – Nduka, Obu Udeozo, Eddie Aderinokun, Kayode Aderinokun, Joy Ushie, Maik Nwosu, Epaphras Osondu, Obi Nwakamma, Asodionye Ejiofor, Tunde Olusunie, Isidore Diala and Ogechi Ironmatu.

Although this list appears long, it does not exhaust the names in this generation, hence Osundare's description of the group as “the poets' generation since close to three quarters of its publications beyond traditional literature to the poetic genre”. It is worthy to show here, that the tone of poetry at this period moved from the cautionary voice of Okigbo to the militant one of

young poets concerned with changing or altering the evil reign. Such protests were directed against government, public institutions and many other social ills plaguing the nation.

1.9 Emergence and Growth of English Poetry

The English poetry, like African poetry, has passed through many stages. As documented in O' Neill (ed) (2011: 1 - 25), the English poetry emerged as follows:

Old English Poetry

Old English poetry is a somewhat improbable recent success story, in an era when formal study of classical literature and even the study of modern languages have been in decline in England. The most prominent success was Seamus Heaney's verse translation of *Beowulf*, a volume which won prizes in competition not only with other poetry books but with books in all literary categories. Important as the positive reception of Heaney's marvellous translation was, it was not a sole cause of the new popularity of Old English poetry. His book was also a confirmation of the popularity of this poetry with English poets dating back to the Victorian period and strengthening amongst Modernist poets in the earlier twentieth century. Heaney's predecessors here include Longfellow, Hopkins, Auden, Pound and Edwin Morgan. Some Old English poems, such as *The Wanderer*, *The Seafarer* and *Wulf and Eadwacer* are amongst the most widely translated items in the twentieth century. There have been a number of attempts to identify what quality it was that commended these poems so much to the modern taste, in particular to that of the Modernists; a recurrent phrase is 'the power of the half-stated'. Auden's enthusiasm is much quoted: 'I was spellbound. This poetry, I knew, was going to be my dish ... Anglo-Saxon and Middle English poetry have been one of my strongest, most lasting influences.' In the main part of this essay I want to concentrate on what Auden might mean by 'influences', trying to describe

what qualities in Old English poetry were found useful and expressive for writers in English of later periods.

Late Fourteenth-Century English Poetry

O' Neill (ed) (2011: 1 - 25) further observes that Dryden's description of Chaucer as the 'Father of English Poetry' and Puttenham's demarcation of late fourteenth-century English poetry as a 'first age' have had varied fortunes in recent histories of poetry. Although Chaucer's sobriquet was roundly defended on the occasion of his sixcentenary, the 'age of Chaucer' and 'Ricardian poetry', key terms for the New Critics, have yielded to more varied and nuanced periodisations. However, there remain indisputable grounds for regarding the contribution of Chaucer and certain of his contemporaries as foundational in the history of English poetry, and for viewing the late fourteenth century as a distinctive and crucial literary period. Late fourteenth-century England produced the first English poetry that has continued to be read, and responded to, throughout all subsequent periods. We have incontrovertible evidence that the poetry of Geoffrey Chaucer, John Gower and the author of *Piers Plowman* (whom, following tradition, I shall call William Langland), all composed in the last three, perhaps four, decades of the fourteenth century, has never since fallen out of sight.

O' Neill (ed) (2011: 25) goes further to show that several models of composition were available to and valued in late fourteenth-century England. None of these models was English. The metres and figures of the classical poets were transmitted as part of education in grammar and rhetoric. Schoolboys were required to compose Latin verse on set themes in prescribed metres. Valorised models of vernacular composition were available in French and Italian. The nobility and their servants moved in a multilingual environment where French was the language of polite

intercourse, diplomacy and letters. War, diplomacy and marriage were among the circumstances that provided for the dissemination of French poetry in England.

Sixteenth-Century English Poetry

The early Tudor poets John Skelton (c.1460–1529), Sir Thomas Wyatt (c.1503–42) and Thomas Howard, Earl of Surrey (1517–47) span a period of dramatic historical, social and cultural change. Skelton began his career in the service of Henry VII just after the Battle of Bosworth Field in 1485 and Surrey lost his head for treason days before the death of Henry VIII. Under these two centralising Tudor monarchs, policy, prosperity and the increasing influence of humanism caused major social changes. England became a significant European power, and, after Skelton's death, broke away from the Roman Catholic Church. The work of all three poets is marked by a sense of significant cultural change and the need to develop new poetic forms and voices. Above all, each poet's work is shaped by his uneasy relationship to a dominant, often tyrannical royal court.

According to O' Neill (ed) (2011: 27), the careers of the three poets were very different. Skelton seems to have risen through his academic and rhetorical abilities, recognised in the academic title of laureate, to an early position as tutor to the infant Henry VIII. In 1503, however, he was pensioned off to the rectory of Diss in Norfolk, and spent much of the rest of his life trying, largely unsuccessfully, to regain an official post at court as poet and propagandist for the King. Without a ready-made courtly audience, he made use of the new technology of printing. Wyatt was a courtier and diplomat who eschewed print publication, circulating his verse among an elite readership in manuscript. Twice imprisoned by Henry VIII, he also served as the King's ambassador at foreign courts. Surrey was an aristocrat, the eldest son of the Duke of Norfolk,

fatally conscious of his ancestry and its traditional privileges, but open, after a year spent at the dazzling court of France, to new Renaissance forms and models.

English Poetry in Seventeenth Century

O' Neill (ed) (2011: 29) further pointed out that by calling the poetry in this age the 'Poetry in the age of Donne and Jonson' rather than Jacobean or Stuart poetry, which might seem an appropriate sequel to what is often referred to as Elizabethan poetry, I mean to underscore a simple set of related literary observations: that John Donne and Ben Jonson were the two most original and influential poets writing in the earlier seventeenth century; that they were recognised as such by many, although not all, of their peers, which included other important poets of 'the age'; and that, as a sign of their significance, at least some of these poets gathered together to help form the sizeable outpouring of elegies that appeared in the immediate aftermath of each man's death: Donne's in 1631, and Jonson's in 1637.

Their impact was thus quickly recognised, their poetry much imitated, adapted and occasionally resisted. But in both cases, too, their achievement in verse, while differing significantly from each other in subject and manner – Donne is one of the great love poets in English, Jonson is England's first important neo-classicist – was only a part of their larger cultural and artistic legacy. Donne would eventually become one of the most recognised preachers of his era once he rose to the eminent position of Dean of St Paul's Cathedral in 1621; and the notoriety of his early erotic verse, which circulated widely in manuscript, would combine with his later fame as a preacher to create a unique place for him in English poetry – a sort of poet's corner of his own in St Paul's, where his statue still stands.

Poetry of the Eighteenth Century

When Voltaire asked Pope why Milton had not written in rhyme, Pope replied, '*Because he could not*'. The arrogance seems striking, but Dryden, who, like Pope himself, revered *Paradise Lost*, also thought Milton 'plainly' wrote it in blank verse because 'Rhyme was not his Talent'. The official French assumption that the twelve-syllable alexandrine couplet was the appropriate measure for serious poems was mirrored by the status, for Dryden's or Pope's generation, of its English cultural analogue, the pentameter couplet. Pope 'translated' or 'versify'd' Chaucer or Donne, almost in the spirit in which Voltaire translated Shakespeare and Milton into rhymed alexandrines. Samuel Wesley wrote in 1700 that Chaucer's 'lines' were '*rough and unequal*' for 'our Augustan days'. Pope believed that he was bringing to these unpolished English writers (who themselves wrote in couplets) some of the structural symmetry and 'correctness' which he considered the achievement of a politer age, and to which Milton sourly attributed a possibly Frenchified trendiness. There were no French poets among those Milton praised for '*Heroic Verse without Rime*', who included '*some both Italian and Spanish Poets of prime note*', along with classical masters (O' Neill (ed) (2011: 37).

O' Neill (ed) (2011: 35) argue that both the alexandrine and the English heroic couplet are medieval forms, the former named after the twelfth-century *Roman d'Alexandre* (which it predates) and the latter much used by Chaucer. They were, however, seen as having been through an analogous process of refinement (which Boileau described as 'Just Weight and Measure', easy grace of diction, clarity, order and no enjambment), as the poetic currency of a 'polite' culture.

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Contemporary Poetry in English: 1980 to the Present

Anyone offering a single phrase to describe a specific period in the history of contemporary poetry risks delivering a hostage to fortune. But the 1982 Penguin anthology *Contemporary British Poetry*, edited by Blake Morrison and Andrew Motion, took that risk, and has frequently been criticised for declaring that in 'much of the 1960s and 70s ... very little – in England at any rate – seemed to be happening'. Among the loudest critics of the Morrison/ Motion verdict were the poets of what is known variously as the 'parallel' or 'alternative' or 'neo-Modernist' or 'experimental' or 'radical' tradition, on which the present chapter concentrates. For these poets, the decade of the 1970s had been the heroic age, the high period of what came to be called the British Poetry Revival, during which, for six years, the Revivalists had taken over the National Poetry Centre and its journal *Poetry Review*. By contrast, the 1980s and the early 1990s, I will risk saying, was for them a period of demoralised re-grouping, when their secure oppositional identity had been undermined, when a number of publishing ventures had foundered, and when the new electronic media which revitalised the scene in the later 1990s had not yet come into being. Thus, the traditionalists, in the 1980s, seemed to have triumphed – in 1994 a 'New Generation' of such poets was launched by the Poetry Society and a consortium of presses with much fanfare – poetry, the publicists claimed, had become the new rock-and-roll.

O' Neill (ed) (2011: 41) maintain that more than thirty years ago, in his lecture 'England of the Mind', Seamus Heaney broached the subject of specifically 'English' poetry in relation to Ted Hughes, Philip Larkin and Geoffrey Hill: 'All three are hoarders and shorers of what they take to be the real England.' In Heaney's reading these poets all brought to a head contrasting strains of a plural, contested, national identity. Since then, the entity of the United Kingdom has taken steps in the direction of increasing devolution, with regional parliaments in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. The poetry of these three regions has often alluded to its cultural, and sometimes asserted its linguistic, distinctiveness. Inevitably, what this difference defined itself against was England (and English), and a supposed cultural hegemony, and yet whatever characterised 'English' poetry remained undefined, certainly unanthologised. Within the so-called Scottish Renaissance, figures such as Hugh MacDiarmid, Iain Crichton Smith, Norman McCaig, Edwin Morgan, the Gaelic poet Sorley MacCclean and later Douglas Dunn, showed how vigorous and various this independence could be. The last forty or so years have seen the emergence of two remarkable generations of poets from Northern Ireland – the first including Seamus Heaney, Derek Mahon and Michael Longley, and the second, Paul Muldoon, Tom Paulin and Ciaran Carson. Whatever the forces that brought such a number of talented poets there to the fore, from the early 1970s onwards, the impact on British poetry has been momentous.

In the 1982 anthology, *The Penguin Book of Contemporary British Poetry*, the effect was startling— so much over there and so little here! Though had Heaney's triumvirate been included, comparison might have seemed more balanced. In speaking of an extended 'imaginative franchise' and 'the ludic' elements shared by their poets, the anthologists were bravely trying to

bridge a chasm. On the English side of this divide were, among others, the 'Martian' poets Craig Raine and Christopher Reid (so-called after Raine's poem 'A Martian Sends a Postcard Home').

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 The Origin of Ecocriticism

As documented in Dobie (2012:240 – 241), Ecocriticism had its nascence in the environmentalist movement of the late 1960s and 1970s, but the work of its early practitioners was slow to come together as a recognizable school of criticism. Instead, its welter of different labels suggested that it was splintered into numerous schools that might or might not share commonalities. Some of the titles, like “human ecology” or “science and literature”, were new and innovative; others carried traditional names, such as American Studies, and assumed new interests. Unlike the feminists and Marxists, who united behind a relatively solid front, the ecocritics were so scattered that they often did not even know each other’s work.

In the early stages of development, ecocriticism focused primarily on what was known as “nature writing”. In 1973, for example, British Marxist critic Raymond Williams wrote a critique of pastoral literature, *The Country and the City*, in which he argued that the pastoral had traditionally overlooked the work of rural labour. The scope broadened rapidly, however, to accommodate interest in the depiction of nature in romantic poetry, canonical literature, and later even in film, theater, animal stories, television, and scientific narratives.

In America, the concept of studying the relationship between literature and nature, surfaced in the late 1970s at meetings of the Western Literature Association (WLA). Twenty years later, its academic respectability was evident in the appointment of Cheryll Glotfelty as professor of Literature and the Environment at the University of Nevada in Reno. Acceptance by the large academic community was apparent when special sessions on nature writing or environmental

literature began to appear on programmes of annual literary conferences – for example, the 1991 MLA session “Ecocriticism: The Greening of Literary Studies.”

Interest in the intersection of literature and nature quickly spread to universities across the country, where it has been received with substantial student interest. Courses are often offered in English departments, but can also be found in environmental studies programmes. They are sometimes organised around specific writers or by regions, historical periods, or genres. Their popularity is attributed partly to the popularity of the readings that usually comprise such courses – for example, the writings of Rachel Carson, Annie Dillard, and Wendell Berry, as well as to their potential to bridge the gulf that often exists between the sciences and the humanities. The number of doctoral dissertations addressing concerns about nature and literature seems to be growing steadily; several university presses have brought out ecocritical monographs; and literary and academic journals are increasingly running articles that focus on the natural world.

Another indication of the interest in ecocriticism was the formation of a professional organisation dedicated to its development. The Association for the Study of Literature and Environment (ASLE) was established at the 1992 meeting of the Western Literature Association. By 1995, when it held its first conference in Ft. Collins, Colorado, it had 750 members. Composed of teachers, writers, students, artists, and environmentalists who are interested in the natural world and how it appears in language and culture, the organisation supports and encourages interdisciplinary and innovative approaches to the study of nature and culture. It holds biennial meetings and, since 1993, has issued a journal, *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment* (ISLE), that publishes current scholarship dealing with environmental matters in literature. It also issues *The American Nature Writing Newsletter* (renamed the ASLE news). Through all these venues it shares facts, ideas, and texts concerning

the study of literature and the environment. Its readership extends well beyond the United States to include Europe, the Far East, India and Taiwan.

Despite the growing interest in ecocriticism in academia and beyond, the field is not without its disagreements. One issue cited by Michael P. Cohen is that some ecocritics seem to be “nature endorsing” and some to be “nature skeptical.” The skeptics are concerned about the tendency to use nature to legitimize what are taken to be gender, sexual, and racial norms; they resist assumptions that a given need not, and perhaps cannot be redressed or amended. A less serious charge is that nature writers and ecocritics take themselves too seriously. Whether they do or not, they are certainly easy to satirize.

Nevertheless, the future of ecocriticism looks promising, though it is difficult to know what shape it will take as it continues to evolve. Nobody knows if ecocritics will fulfill their goals to reorder the canon and reform curricula so that the genre of nature writing is returned to a position of respect, or whether they will manage to forge new links between the humanities and natural sciences. It is probably safe to say at this point that in the future, ecocritical scholarship will be more interdisciplinary, multicultural, and international (Culled from Dobie 2012:240 – 241).

In the social contexts, all across the world, groups of people have come together outside the normal frameworks of politics to talk about local outrages or environmental threats. The Indigenous Environmental Network, for instance, is ‘A Network of Indigenous Peoples’ empowering indigenous nations and communities towards sustainable livelihoods, demanding social justice. The conception of literature and environment is seemingly modern especially in Africa. The natural environment is a recurrent image in the poems of Wordsworth, Keats, Okigbo and Okara. In these contemporary times, most of the literary critics focus on the

injustice of such things as locating a waste plant near people that are too poor to oppose it. This is the major focus of the selected poets. Aspects like the landscape, seascape and heavenly bodies are frequent images in their poems. We have also 'Metascape' and 'Lifescape.' Lifescape features are represented in degrees of consciousness in a living essence like man, flora and fauna. If in a human being, lifescape could express inner dispositions like character modified by mental stability, environment, parents, society and culture. Visible or outer dispositions could be carriage, taste, introvert or extrovert tendencies. Metascape on the other hand has an esoteric learning. Its abstractions are centered on the supernatural, mystical and thus these latter two types of 'scapes' fall outside the ambit of this study.

Beck (2005:98) in his book, *Literature and the Social Environment* shows the injustices of people toward the individual members of society. He unequivocally stated that to associate some people with filth or the unclean has been a recurrent feature of social bigotry: issues of communal hygiene may merge with notions of a more figurative purity that cast some people as supposedly polluting presences. According to him, this is called ecojustice. To work in the field of ecojustice is to question the boundaries between recognized environmental issues, matters of public health and social discrimination. On a similar note, Clark(1997:88) shows that environmental justice primarily names a social movement, plural and engaged in the urgency of local campaign work. In the relation to literary and cultural criticism, its effects have been a proliferation of thought on just how varied and culturally complex ideas of nature have been. What links the turn to issues of ecojustice is the effort to expand ecocriticism beyond nature writing. Finally on the issue of ecojustice, Gerrard (2008: 223) shows that ecojustice concerns with cultural differences which tend to align ecocritical argument with the kind of left-progressive political stance that now passes almost as the norm in the humanities. His argument

is that human violence against the natural world is ultimately a product of oppressive structures of hierarchy among human beings. Beck, Clark and Gerrard consider literature and the environment only from the social and the legal point of view. They only agitate against the human violence against the society and against the natural world and then advocate for justice towards the environment. This research goes beyond that. It discusses the issue of literature and the environment beyond mere legal and social boundaries. This research does not just discuss the effects of environmental activities on the environment but it sees the poets as the custodians of the environment-- ecopoets.

Review of Previous Works

Some literary researchers have made reasonable attempts in discussing the issue of literature and environment. However, most of them limit it to either the canonical works from African background or works from only European background. However, this research goes beyond African or European stereotype. It encompasses the ideas of both the African and European poets; hence the issues of environmental protection and preservation is a universal one.

Ogbeide (2014) in his research considers the issue of environmental literature from the South African background. In his thesis, he contends that the South African environment suffers degradation, neglect and destruction as much as the hapless non-white in the Republic courtesy of its policy of 'herding' people into little spaces leading to slums where the pervading perfume of bitter dereliction holds sway. The purpose of his research is located on the need for the Republic of South Africa, and indeed, many African countries to evolve environment-friendly policies which will ensure a relatively even distribution of their population. Thus, he maintains that 'nature or the environment is as much in need of justice as human beings in an apartheid teleguided regime'.

Ogbeide only considered the issue of literature and the environment in the social milieu. He sees ecocriticism in relationship with the South African apartheid regime and the attendant effects upon the people. This research goes beyond Ogbeide's own view of ecocriticism. This research encompasses both the social, economic and even therapeutic impacts of ecocriticism upon the lives of the people in their natural environment.

On a similar note, Asomugha (2009) sees literature and the environmental concerns from the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. In his thesis, he captures the fate of the environment as a physical, moral, social and cultural motif. The Niger Delta is the locale of the work, and the depletion of its physical and human resource is Ojaide's major concern thus:

Ojaide's approach is direct, urgent and fast-paced. This approach coheres with the urgency and passion of his message. The urgency and passion also determine the parameters for creating his protagonist. With passion to develop his country, the Activist returns and becomes the voice that speaks out against environmental injustice and racism.

It is seen in the research that Tanure Ojaide tackles headlong, the heart wrenching issues of environmental degradation, environmental racism and injustice, and savage dictatorship. He writes about nature but with the intent of rousing awareness against the threat or irreversible damage to the natural environment.

The natural environment has been exploited by some anti-environmental activities of man. The attendant fatal consequences of these degradations are earth warming, air and sea pollution and the destruction of aquatic lives, deforestation and desertification; gas flaring and oil spillages on farm lands in places like the Delta regions of Nigeria. These problems in contrast to the beauty of the natural environment like seas, hills, mountains and forest which remain a source for literary creativity deserves critical attention. Although it is acknowledged that studies in recent times

have given them this attention, none of such studies, however, seems to have paid a rapt attention to the varying modes of delineating environmental issues by the nature poets of earlier (Romantic) periods and our times occasioned by the realities of time/space specifics. This is the gap that this study fills.

Finch (2002: 33) in his book *Nature Writing* shows that prehistory, literature and arts have been drawn to portrayals of physical environment and human-environment interactions. He stated unequivocally that:

The modern environmentalist movement as it emerged first in the late-nineteenth century and, in its more recent incarnation, in the 1960s, gave rise to a rich array of fictional and nonfictional writings concerned with human's changing relationship to the natural world. Only since the early 1990s, however, has the long-standing interest of literature studies in these matters generated the initiative most commonly known as 'ecocriticism', an eclectic and loosely coordinated movement whose contributions thus far have been most visible within its home discipline of literature but whose interests and alliances extend across various art forms and media. In such areas as the study of narrative and image, ecocriticism converges with its sister disciplines in the humanities: environmental anthropology, environmental history, and environmental philosophy.

Clark (2005: 103) in his 'Literature and Environment' shows that the degrading environment of the planet is something that touches everyone. He maintains that:

Environmental thinking changes the priorities as to what issues are more significant than others: a small fungus necessary to the life of a tree may be more lastingly decisive than the sensational diaries of a leading politician... The intellectual pressure exerted by the scope of environmental questions differentiates ecocriticism from other branches of cultural or literary criticism... Nature writing continues to be used as a term to describe a kind of creative non-fiction associated with usually meditative accounts of natural landscapes and wildlife.

Similarly, Snyder (2004: 23) opines that in the limited sense of places unaffected by human activity there is no 'nature' as such left on the planet, but there are various 'environments', some

more pristine than others. Globally, ‘the dominant relation with nature has become that of scientific management and a moralizing mode of interpretation. He stated that:

Nature increasingly is no longer a vast realm of unknown, unmanageable, or uncontrollable wild nonhuman activity. After becoming completely ensnared within the megamachinic grids of global production and consumption... Nature is turning into ‘Denature’. Much of the earth is a ‘built environment’, a ‘planned habitat’, or ‘managed range’ as pollution modifies atmospheric chemistry, urbanization restructures weather events, architecture encloses whole biomes in sprawling megacities, and biotechnology reengineers the base codes of existing biomass.

Nature has long been a crucial and perhaps definitive term of western traditions of thought, perhaps the ‘most complex word in the English language’ (Raymond Williams). For an environmental critic, every account of a natural, semi-natural or urban landscape must represent an implicit re-engagement with what ‘nature’ means or could mean, with the complex power and inheritance of this term and with its various implicit projections. Ecocriticism usually reads literary and environmental texts with these competing cultural conceptions of nature to the fore. At the same time, a definitive feature of the most challenging work is that it does not take the human cultural sphere as its sole point of reference and context.

2.2 Theoretical Framework: Ecocriticism

a. Understanding Ecocriticism

The term ‘ecocriticism’ was first used by William Rueckert in his 1978 essay “Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism” in reference to “the application of ecological concepts to the study of literature.”Cheryll Glotfelty, one of the major exponents of ecocriticism defined the term as the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment. Similarly, Dobie (2012:239) sees ecocriticism as:

- The study of the relationship between literature and the natural environment.

- The study of literature and environment from an inter-disciplinary point of view where all sciences come together to analyze the environment and brainstorm possible solutions for the correction of the contemporary situation.
- A celebration of the pastoral and the sublime.

In the opinion of Buell (2005:68), ecocriticism is any study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment, conducted in the spirit of commitment to environmental praxis. Simon Estok extends Buell's comment by saying that ecocriticism "takes stand by its commitment to natural world as an important thing rather than simply as an object of thematic study and by its commitment to making connections". Barry (2002) sees ecocriticism as "any theory that is committed to effecting change by analysing the function – thematic artistic, social, historical, ideological, theoretical, or otherwise – of the natural environment, or aspects of it, represented in documents (literary or other) that contribute to material practices in material world".

In summary, the definitions of ecocriticism given above show ecocriticism as a systematic approach to literary criticism from an interdisciplinary perspective which focuses on the environment as its central concern. It shows its great concern on the major issue in the world now; hence the problems ravaging the present day world is an environmental one. The researcher is of the opinion that ecocritical issues should be considered a crucial one. The literary artists should focus much attention on this area since we cannot detach ourselves from the natural environment.

Ecocriticism found its way into the African literature through the contemporary African literary critics. Michael (2000:45) states that:

Because of the environmental hazards ravaging the globe, they joined in the struggle to enable social worlds find more equitable, sustainable, and healthy ways of inhabiting their place- as well as strengthen environmental self understanding.

In South Africa, Julia Martin began publishing her ecocritical work in 1987, but it is her 1994 essay, *The Regional Ecocriticism* that could be said to have brought the concept of ecocriticism to limelight in Africa. In her essay, she shows how ecocriticism might fit with postcolonial critique. It is the history of Africa's insertion into a globalizing modernity that indicates the need for an African ecocriticism to engage with one or other form of environmental critique, understood broadly to designate 'critical discourses which thematize issues emerging from ecological relations and their aftermath, covering a long historical span'.

In developing this environmental focus, an African ecocriticism would differentiate itself from ecocriticism in the West, which has, for whatever reasons, either not felt compelled to engage with the consequences of European ecocriticism or found the available forms of ecocritical criticism with its goals and strategies.

b. The Impetus for Ecocriticism: Ecocriticism as a Literary Theory

Ecocriticism is expressed with the following terms: literary criticism, the Green literature, ecopoetics, which some like Bate (2000:245) regard as a poetic expression which may affect an imaginative reunification of mind and nature linked to the language that goes beyond a pastoral or technological literary setting.

Ecocriticism is a systematic approach to literary criticism from an interdisciplinary perspective which focuses on the environment as its central concern. Ecocriticism as a theory shows that all

things are related within the environment. This conforms to the first law of ecology which states that everything is connected to everything else.

As stated by Dobie (2012: 240), the major focus of ecocriticism is as follows:

It is helpful to note some of the ways in which ecocriticism differs from other critical approaches. For example, its social purposes establish it as a direct contrast to formalists, who tried to separate text from the world. Instead, ecocritics want to use texts as a way to get to the world itself. They also differ from post-modernists by rejecting the idea that everything is socially and/or linguistically constructed. To them, nature really exists as a force that affects human beings and which human beings can affect.

Ecocriticism as a literary theory performs the following functions in literature according to Barry (2011:168):

- i. Re-read major literary works from an ecocentric perspective, with particular attention to the representation of the natural world.
- ii. Extends the applicability of a range of ecocentric concepts and using them of things other than the natural world – concepts such as growth and energy, balance and imbalance, symbiosis and mutuality, and sustainable or unsustainable uses of energy resources.
- iii. Gives special canonical emphasis to writers who foreground nature as a major part of their subject matter, such as the American transcendentalists, the British Romantics, the poetry of John Clare, the works of Thomas Hardy and the Georgian poets of the early twentieth century.
- iv. Extends the range of literary – critical practice by placing a new emphasis on relevant ‘factual’ writing, especially reflective topographical materials such as essays, travel writing, memoirs, and regional literature.

- v. Turns away from the ‘social constructivism’ and ‘linguistic determinism’ of dominant literary theories (with their emphasis on the linguistic and social constructedness of the external world) and instead emphasize ecocentric values of meticulous observation, collective ethical responsibility, and the claims of the world beyond ourselves.

2.3 Ecocritical Concepts: Zoocriticism, Ecomelancholia and Eco-Feminism

Zoocriticism is the environmental awareness on the harm done to the wild life. This harm is caused mainly by civilization. It calls for the preservation of the wild in order to prevent extinctions of some animals. Throughout western intellectual history, civilization has consistently been constructed by or against the wild, savage and animalistic world, and has consequently been haunted by it. In the words of Hagan and Tiffin (2010:148):

The wild man of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries lurked at the dangerously liminal fringe of consolidating European Enlightenment civilization; and, during the eighteenth and in the early nineteenth centuries, hatred against animal, and its accelerating extinctions, both necessitated and enabled animals to exile into Africa and the New world was formed bare in Europe.

From the words of Hagan and Tiffin (2010: 148), it is clear that man’s quest to develop his environment, in other words, civilization causes a lot of harm to the wide life. Civilization endangers the wild life and sends them to extinction. Hagan and Tiffin (2010) show that the eighteenth and nineteenth century industrial revolution in Europe necessitated the exile of some wild animals to Africa, a more serene and habitable environment for them. Zoocriticism calls for the environmental settlers to ‘go native’ especially those living in the tropics. This helps to curtail the impending disappearance of the wild. This is the opinion of the Enlightenment Humanists. They essentially call for urgent remedy for the prevention of harms and extinction of many nonhuman species. Hence, they coined the word, eco-catastrophe. Contemporary

humanity, having materially destroyed vast areas of wilderness – and many other animals – is now routinely configured as spiritually hollow, as lacking the essence of the human through the repression, withdrawal, destruction or absence, rather than latent threat, of the inner wild. This repression is expressed in both literal and spiritually refractive terms, as a result of the all too successful extermination of that earlier *Heart of Darkness*; and so it is that what had initially been banished by the Enlightenment in order to constitute human civility – the animal and animalistic – is now paradoxically being returned as its essence, its inner core. This brings about the point for a re-theorizing of the place of animals in relation to human societies. Hagan and Tiffin (2010:133) pointed out that:

The history of western racism and its imbrication with discourses of speciesism; the use of animals as a basis for human social division; and, above all perhaps, the metaphorisation and deployment of ‘animal’ as a derogatory term in genocidal and marginalizing discourses – all of these make it difficult even to discuss animals without generating a profound unease, even a rancorous antagonism, in many postcolonial contexts today.

In the sense of post colonisation, it is observed that serious consideration of the status of animal seems to be fundamentally compromised by the human, often western, deployment of animals and the animalistic to destroy or marginalize other human societies. Based on this fact, Hagan and Tiffin (2010:136) gave some reasons why such is done. They are as follows:

First, human individuals and cultures at various times have been and are treated ‘like animals’ by dominant groups, both human genocide and human slavery. We are thus almost inescapably colluding – albeit obliquely or implicitly – in the idea that it is acceptable to treat animals cruelly, but not to treat people as if they were animals. And in so doing, we are also colluding in

the fiction that the species boundary is a fixed one. This fiction of irreducibility is reproduced through the language we use in spite of our knowledge that some peoples considered 'human' by some have been dubbed 'animal' by others; and in spite of our awareness that the species boundary is not fixed at all, but always temporally and politically contingent, continually constructed and policed by the processes of representation itself.

Animal categorizations and the use of derogatory animal metaphors have been and are characteristic of human languages often in association with racism and sexism: 'you stupid cow'; politicians with their 'snouts in the through'; 'male chauvinist pig'. The history of human oppression of other humans is replete with instances of animal metaphors and animal categorizations frequently deployed to justify exploitation and objectification, slaughter and enslavement. It is thus not surprising that human individuals and societies reject animal similitude and analogies and insist instead on a separate subjectivity. To offer a particularly pertinent example: any direct or metaphorical connection between the treatment of African as slaves and the treatment of animals today is politically dangerous one to argue, whatever the obvious analogies. In her 1987 book *The Dreaded Comparison: Human and Animal Slavery*, Marjorie Spiegel confronts this difficult issue. That Spiegel was well aware of the minefield she was entering is evident in the title (*The Dreaded Comparison*), as well as in the inclusion of a preface by Alice Walker. Without whose endorsement Spiegel's comparison, by the usual terms of the racism/speciesism nexus, would probably have been dismissed as outrageous. But as Walker writes:

Marjorie Spiegel tellingly illustrates the similarities between the enslavement of black people (and by implication, enslaved people) and the enslavement of animals, past and present. It is a comparison that, even for those of us who recognize its validity, is a difficult one to face. Especially so if we are

responsible in some way for the present treatment of animals participating in the profits from animal research (medicine, lipstick, lotions) or animal raising (food, body parts). In short, we are complicit in their enslavement and destruction, which is to say, if we are, at this juncture in history, master (Spiegel 1988:9).

A second problem arises when, as in so many contemporary instances, humans are pitted against animals in a competition over decreasing resources. Peoples forced off their land to provide game parks for foreign tourists understandably resent not just the implicit ‘animal’ comparisons, but also the physical presence of animals themselves. They are also likely to be particularly unsympathetic to western conservationist attempts at protecting endangered species from destruction, particularly so where conservation initiatives are in conflict with traditional indigenous hunting practices. But western exploitation, both past and present, has resulted in the murder, displacement and impoverishment of people, animals and their environments; and it has also generated apparently ‘either/or’ situations in contexts of land and resource scarcity or degradation.

The third category of difficulty inherent in any attempts to interrogate the species boundary in past colonial contexts concerns the ways in which the treatment of animal that have special status in one human society is used to vilify, incriminate or marginalize other human groups – for example, immigrants in western societies – that regard those animals differently.

Ecomelancholia: According to Clewel (2004:45), “mourning is a necessary temporary process of grieving which spontaneously ends after an unspecified period of time.” In Freud’s essay “Mourning and Melancholia” (1917), he adopts a nearly identical position. He states that “in proper mourning, grieving occurs, then dissipates after the object is relinquished.” The

termination of mourning is, he says, the healthy restitution of the “normal”, individuated ego; the healthy ego can and will distinguish between itself and the lost love object.

Ecomelancholia is the inability or unwillingness to stop mourning ecological loss and losses associated with the land, a present where loss continues. According to LeManager, Shewry and Hiltner (2011:163), ecomelancholia disavows mourning’s “renewable” economy and the attendant theory that scarcity mitigates loss. They state further that, the recovery of lost love objects disappearing lands, species, finite natural resources, ways of life – would prove impossible in many instances. There will be no “fresh” objects to replace the natural world, and certainly none “more precious “. It is apparent how those anti-environmental theories of consumption which argue that the earth is replenishing recall Freud’s faith in bounty. Freud’s “On Transience” offers evidence that Freud borrowed capitalist theories of human consumption to structure his concept of mourning.

Ecomelancholia’s historical and memorial disposition defends against mourning’s call to prematurely forget about it. It responds to the cumulative losses of nature, land, resources and to traumas tied to those losses, such as death, deracination, and dispossession; it is activated by ongoing and interrelated social and political violence, including the catastrophes of war, genocide, and poverty. Ecomelancholia refuses to take consolation in fantasies of rectification while destruction occurs unabated. LeManager et al (2011:167) note that the ecomelancholic quest to be like the love object, to de-individuate, is the desire which undoes the self/other splitting created in violence.

Eco-feminism: Eco-feminism posits that the earth is left bare and barren just like a woman who is naked and barren. Eco-Feminism argues that the struggle for ecological survival is intrinsically

linked with the project of women's liberation. Eco-feminism in its various forms, looking back to the suffragettes, instrumental in the campaign against cruise missiles and nuclear power, is an activist movement committed to social justice. Many eco-feminists would see themselves as would-be revolutionaries in an anarchist or socialist tradition. Capitalism and hierarchy stem from a patriarchal system of male rule. In its more mystical form, eco-feminism celebrates Gaia (the hypothesis that the living and nonliving components of the earth function as a single system in such a way that the living component regulates and maintains conditions so as to be suitable for life) as a living force and looks back to a period variously situated in the early Bronze Age, the Neolithic or a Palaeolithic, a time when a supposedly matriarchal order existed in harmony with nature. Such an ancient society functioned without war or inequality.

Most controversially, it has been argued that women are intrinsically more ecological than men. This seems to explain the reason why most of the ecological terms always connote the female gender. Instances could be seen in both poems of Milton and Osundare. In Milton's *The Nativity Ode*, the poet equates fecundity of the earth in springtime with sexual licentiousness so that Nature, gendered female, must sheepishly cover herself with veil of snow to hide her "naked shame" and "foul deformities". In Osundare's *Ours to Plough not to Plunder*, the poet points out that:

The earth is ours to plough and plant
The hoe is her barber
The dibble her dimple

Here, the poet uses the female gender's voice in her cry for the need for the preservation of the earth and its resources through unkind and general exploitation of the physical environment by man.

2.4 Ecocritical Literary Discourse: An African Perspective

Ecocritical work on Africa has been scarce, even compared to other areas of postcolonial literary studies, and many of the articles that have been published have focused on very recent texts an/or a few authors – often white and/or South African. Such work is of course important, but it needs to be broadened in terms of range of texts, authors, issues and genres. Doing so will change perceptions of environmentalism and its history in Africa, even as it contributes to bringing into dialogue, different understanding of what constitutes a properly ecocritical practice or an environmental text.

Stephanie LeManeger

The literary ecological concern is not only focused on the European poets and environments. Some Africans are also in the vanguard of environmental protection through the literary means even though the literary environmental critics are scarce in African literary world as lamented by LeManeger. In 2005, the Nobel committee surprised the world by giving the peace prize to an African environmental Activist, Wangari Maathai. Wangari Maathai was a cofounder of the Green Belt Movement, a grassroots organisation mobilizing Kenyan women to develop tree nurseries and plant trees in order to combat deforestation. However, she and the Green Belt Movement were also key players in the fight against Daniel Arap Moi's Kleptocratic authoritarian regime, which destroyed Kenyan's national resources and risked its future for private gain. Increasingly, the work of the Green Belt Movement highlighted the intersection of environmental activism and issues of human and civil rights, democratic rule, and social justice. It also helped challenge the association of environmentalism in Africa with fortress – style wildlife conservation, driven by the priorities of affluent nations and African elite.

In her memoir *Unbowed*, Maathai draws on what Lawrence Buell refers to as an “indigene pastoral” in order to give narrative shape to her vision for social and environmental regeneration

in Kenya. She begins her story with a childhood memory of a beautiful, health-giving, and well-managed natural environment which sustains the human community physically and spiritually and which is itself sustained by that community's care, reverence, and sound ecological practice and knowledge. Maathai erases colonialism's presence from this initial description of her childhood home in the central highlands as a means to emphasize its catastrophic environmental impact resulting from unsustainable "methods of exploiting our rich natural resources" and cultural transformation: "Hallowed landscapes lost their sacredness and were exploited as the local people insensitive to the destruction, accepting it as a sign of progress" (LeMenager, Shewry and Hiltner 2011:149). Throughout the rest of her narrating, she repeats this theme, while insisting that redemption can be achieved through the rejuvenation of indigenous cultural values and the struggle against the legacies – especially psychological and ideological legacies – of colonialism.

In using pastoral discourse, Maathai is, of course, following in a long tradition of environmental writing and rhetoric. Despite its many problems, this discourse is "part of the unavoidable ground-condition" for those struggling against the environmental implications of modernity's narrative of development and positing alternatives (Buell 1995:32). Yet, the particular kind of indigenous pastoral Maathai uses also connects her narrative with a long tradition in African letters. The study of "natural", harmonious pre-colonial African cultures and of the corrupting impact of colonialism was a prominent aspect of Negritude, which began in the 1930s, and remains ubiquitous in African poetry, fiction and drama. Its purpose was to create stories challenging imperial representations in which Africa is defined by negation – the absence of history, development, civilization, and so forth- and which the coming of the European counterpart

represents the advent of a ordering of (wilds) nature. LeMenager, Shewry and Hiltner (2011:149 – 152) note that:

The connection between Maathai’s rhetoric and this tradition of African anticolonial pastoral writing raises an interesting question: Does Maathai’s environmental sensibility indicate pastoral or might the relation extend to environmental concerns?

In an attempt to answer this question, LeMenager et al (2011:152) examines older, canonical anticolonial literary pastorals also from East Africa, Okot P’ Bitek’s ‘Song of Lawino’ (1966) ‘Song of Ocol’ (1967) and Ngugi Wa Thiongo’s *A Grain of Wheat* (1967), in terms of their relationship with Maathai’s writing: ‘It may be that in many cases, the indigene pastoral has “more to do with reinvention of the non-European world as a mirror-opposite of certain European norms than with “actual environments”’.

As a follow-up to this assertion, Buell (1995:68) further stated:

Such narratives, even those from the nationalist period, cannot be lumped together. Ngugi and Okot may not be as focused on environmental degradation or on ecological relationships as Maathai, but like her (and unlike many poets of Negritude), they bring attention to actual environmental changes wrought by colonial ideology and policy and the benefits of (relatively) concretely defined indigenous environmental practice and epistemology. In this sense, their texts may point to a legacy of environmental writing from Africa that anticipates and gives a cultural context for the kind of environmental rhetoric and activism visible today in Africa.

The project of establishing a literary pedigree stretching back to the middle of the twentieth century for a form of environmentalism conceptualized and led by Africans challenges the often implicit assumption that (nonsettler) African environmental writing is both belated and scarce, coming well after the rise of popular environmentalism in the West and remaining confined to a

very few authors. LeMenager et al (2011:152) added that:

Such a project also contributes to the larger, ongoing effort to widen the scope of ecocriticism not only through the diversification of ecocritical canons but also through the use of critical frameworks informed by environmentalism developed by activists working within marginalized communities in the west and majorities in the Global South – activists like Wangari Maathai.

From certain perspective, *Song of Lawino* and *A Grain of Wheat* would hardly be considered “environmental.” These texts prioritize the task of decolonizing culture and psyches in newly independent African nations; they remain focused on social justice, on lived environments and livelihoods, as well as on the relationship among constructions of nature, environmental practice, and structures of power and ownership. Buell (1995:92) observes that:

They pay little attention to nature and its protection apart from such concerns. As a result, they would probably be considered inadequately focused on nature “in and for itself” for an ecocriticism shaped by mainstream environmental discourse, originating and centered in the West, which separates nature and its defence from systemic inequality among humans. Such discourse often implies that the closer one gets to the truths of ecology and to appreciation and care for “nature”, the more one escapes the influence of socio-economic interest and the more one becomes a true environmentalist. This perspective cannot be separated from notions of objective representation and forms of desire (for the “freedom” of the “wild”) associated with relatively privileged positions shaped by four hundred years of European imperialism.

In contrast, viewed from the perspective of a discourse stemming from the environmentalism of the poor, the notion that *Song of Lawino/Song of Ocol* and *A Grain of Wheat* might be “environmental” texts becomes substantially less outlandish. LeMenager (2011:150) et al’s argument is that:

Such a discourse is not focused on a “nature” that is separate from shaping effects of historical social relationships but

precisely on the intersection of the “natural” environment and socio-economic interest. Concern with environmental change is couched in terms of how it impacts the lives – the homes, livelihoods, and health of the impoverished and disenfranchised.

This type of discourse of environmental policy can never be separated from issues of social justice and political rights, and understandings of “nature” and “conservation” must be understood as always mediated by socioeconomic relationships. Ultimately, a discourse deriving from the environmentalism of the poor ties ecological concerns with issues of oppression and liberation – issues which are closely related to colonial legacies and anticolonial resistance.

Huggan and Tiffin (2010:82):

Through the lens of such a discourse, texts which do not prioritize the observation of nature and which only reference environmental change fleetingly or indirectly but which point to the relationship between the struggle for decolonization and the efforts to turn back the environmental legacies of colonialism – texts like *Song of Lawino/Song of Ocol* and *A Grain of Wheat* – could still be considered “environmental” and might even be more important rhetorically in the struggle against socially and ecologically destructive processes than texts which pay close attention to “nature” or to “natural” ways of dwelling but which suppress the significance of colonial histories.

The effort to articulate an African environmental literary tradition, and in the process to use an ecocritical framework shaped by those working at the intersection of environmentalism and social justice, is necessarily part of the ongoing project to develop a postcolonial ecocriticism (Huggan and Tiffin 2010). Lawrence Buell has claimed that the accommodation of perspectives offered by the environmental justice and environmentalism of the poor “may indeed be ecocriticism’s greatest challenge during the first part of the twenty-first century” if it is not “fission and wane” (Buell 2005:113). Postcolonial ecocritics facilitate this accommodation as they bring a much needed attention to imperialism and to parts of the world often eluded by a

still predominantly Anglo-American ecocriticism. Like post colonials more generally, the postcolonial ecocritic seeks to challenge forms of situated knowledge and representation which are assumed to be objective and universal and which have been crucial components of imperialism as it has sought to establish consent. Thus, for example, the postcolonial ecocritic might bring attention both the differing environmentalist discourses and, therefore, different conceptions of what constitute an environmentalist text – and to the historical relationships between these discourses and imperialism (Huggan and Tiffin 2010:15).

Ogbeide (2014) in his paper ‘Beyond complexion, class and race: An Ecocritical Study of Alex La Guma’s *A Walk in the Night* and *A Threefold Cord* focuses his discourse on the human dimension of apartheid in South African and its environment. His paper contends that the South African environment suffers degradation, neglect and destruction as much as the hapless non-white in the Republic courtesy of its policy of ‘herding’ people into little spaces leading to slums where the pervading perfume of bitter dereliction holds sway. He maintains that:

Social and environmental justice is an essential aspect of ecocritical studies. Writing about justice in South Africa, therefore, which apartheid negates should not be seen only from the human angle. Nature or the environment is as much in need of justice as human beings in an apartheid regime. **A Walk in the Night** is set in the crime and disease-ridden infamous District six in Cape Town, South Africa, where spivs, whores, gangsters, poverty-stricken families and countless societal derelicts are doomed by the apartheid system for a certain term to walk in the night like Shakespeare’s ghost.

In this work, Ogbeide expresses that LaGuma shows us, in his usual evocative style, an environment that has been rendered completely bankrupt and sanitarily unfriendly by the apartheid system:

In the dark corners and the unseen corners, in the fetid heat and slippery dampness, the insects and vermin maggots and

shags, roaches in shiny armour, spiders like tiny grey monsters carrying death under the minute feet or in the sockets, or rats with dirty and dusty black eyes with disease under the claws or in the fur moved mysteriously.

With the above environmental injustice, one is hardly surprised at the condition of the rooms of the poor and neglected blacks and coloured. La Guma's penchant for naturalism comes out vividly in his evocative description of the atmosphere, the shanty town, the physical environment of the people and their impoverished condition. 'The tradition of portraying a nature that has been ravaged by human beings,' says Paul Goring et al (2010:194), 'is not just a recent one'.

2.5 William Wordsworth and John Keats: Critical Responses

Wordsworth was born in Lake District of northern England, the second of five children. He attended St. John's College, Cambridge. During a summer vacation in 1790 he took a long walking tour through revolutionary France. There, he was caught up in the passionate enthusiasm that followed the fall of Bastille and became an ardent republican sympathizer. After a second journey to France, he spent three or four of the darkest of his life. Unprepared for any profession, rootless, virtually penniless, bitterly hostile to his own country's opposition to the French, he knocked about London. Eventually, in 1795, a friend's legacy made possible Wordsworth's reunion with his beloved sister Dorothy; the two were never again to live apart.

About this time Wordsworth became friends with Coleridge, and they formed a partnership that would alter the course of English poetry. Stimulated by Coleridge and under the healing influences of nature and his sister, Wordsworth began in 1797 – 98 to compose the short lyrical and dramatic poems for which he is best remembered. Many were written to a daringly original programme aimed at breaking the decorum of neoclassical verse. These poems appeared in 1798

in a slim, anonymously authored volume entitled *Lyrical Ballads*, which opened with Coleridge's long poem 'The Rime of Ancient Mariner' and closed with Wordsworth 'Tintern Abbey'. In 1805 the drowning of Wordsworth's brother, John gave Wordsworth a deep shock and brought about a new sobriety, a new restraint and a lofty, almost Miltonic elevation of tone and diction, as can be seen in Ode: Intimations of Immortality; but little of Wordsworth's later verse matches the best of his earlier years.

The most memorable poems of Wordsworth's middle and late years were often cast in elegiac mode. Only in 1820, with the publication of the *River Duddon*, was Wordsworth appreciated by the critics. In 1843, he succeeded Robert Southey as poet laureate. According to S.T. Coleridge:

Wordsworth's poetry takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquility: the emotion is contemplated till...the tranquility gradually disappears, and an emotion, kindered to that which was before the subject of contemplation, is gradually produced, and does itself actually exist in the mind. In this mood, successful composition generally begins....

Immediacy and contemplation, emotion and tranquility, spontaneity and composition, the reconciliation of this doubleness, as Coleridge recognized, made Wordsworth 'the poet of the age'.

In Dere Fatima Wuruola's thesis (2003) on 'The Romantic Philosophy in the poetry of William Wordsworth and John Keats', Wuruola bases his research on the landscape because of its natural essence and its spiritual composition. He states that: 'Romantics aim at fighting for the masses and educating the public on how nature can be treated and appreciated. They present the beauty and enjoyment of life in which they find themselves as imaginary and visionary'.

His work examined the theory of romanticism in romantic poetry using William Wordsworth's and John Keats' poems as the reference texts. He shows that Wordsworth and Keats own most of

their poetic resources and characters to nature as they both strongly believe in the power of nature that brings all that is good to life. This research goes beyond seeing Wordsworth and Keats as just the lovers of nature but as the parts and parcels of nature.

Foyzal Hoque in his work “Nature in selected poems of William Wordsworth (2012)”, pointed out that William Wordsworth is a nature poet. But his outlook is certainly different from the outlook of others. He shows that Wordsworth’s view of nature is coloured by his hipper individualism. To him, nature is a living being. Wordsworth’s nature is not merely a physical phenomenon, but a living entity. That is, nature has not only life but feelings also. Nature is endowed not only with life and feeling but also with a will purpose. He ascribes to it all the attributes of humanity, life feeling, thinking and willing. Wordsworth’s conception of Nature can be studied into three stages. In the first stage, nature served only a background to the poet’s boyish sports. Foyzal Hoque considers Wordsworth as only the lover of Nature. He focuses the poems of Wordsworth as extensions of nature. Foyzal detaches Wordsworth from their natural environment and presents them as mere watchers and appreciators of nature. This research portrays Wordsworth not just as a nature poet but as an environmentalist. This is the gap this work fills.

In the thesis of Ayo Ogunsiji, ‘Wordsworth As a Universal Musician: An In-depth Study of ‘The Solitary Reaper’ shows that:

Wordsworth is a renowned musician; not just a poet. The poet-speaker in the ‘Solitary Reaper’ does not understand the Gaelic language of the Scots in which the reaper sings her song. Yet his imagination and interest are captured by it. It seems that he chooses to ‘Stop here’ first before passing gently. He chooses to do so because of the powerful evocativeness of the song whose wordings are unfamiliar to him. However, he is not discouraged by his ignorance of what she sings. He goes ahead to guess at the meaning of

her song: probably some 'old, far off things, /And battles long ago' (lines 19 – 20). Something tells him, that the song must be about 'some natural sorrow, loss or pain'. The music is captivating. It is because music is a universal language that in spite of his ignorance of the Gaelic language 'the music in my heart I bore/long after it was heard no more' (lines 31 – 32).

Ogunsiji sees Wordsworth only in the musical perspectives. In other words, Wordsworth is seen as more of a musician than a poet. However, this research considers Wordsworth as more than a mere musician who plays to the tunes of the environment; he is an environmentalist himself.

In the words of Onuekwusi (2002:83), Wordsworth is only interested in deifying nature. He opines:

Nature to Wordsworth is a supernatural essence from which man derives pleasure, stability and satisfaction. Thus, in all Wordsworth's poems, the position that he takes is that ignoring nature is detrimental to the interest of man. He always refers to nature which he believes possesses the mystical ability to grant his heart's desires.

From this observation, Wordsworth is a mere-chief priest who deifies nature and offers different forms of sacrifices to nature. This research goes beyond the views of Onuekwusi (2002) and portrays Wordsworth as one who does not just offer sacrifices to nature but as an oracle of the natural environment himself.

Having rummaged over the critical responses on William Wordsworth, we shall now move over to the critical responses on John Keats.

John Keats was born February 23, 1821 in Rome. He is an English Romantic poet who devoted his short life to the perfection of a poetry marked by vivid imagery, great sensuous appeal, and an attempt to express a philosophy through classical legend.

The son of a livery-stable manager, Keats received relatively little formal education. Throughout his short life he had close emotional ties to his sister, Fanny and his two brothers, George and Tom. After the breakup of their mother's second marriage, the Keats children lived with their widowed grandmother. John attended a school run by John Clarke, whose son Charles Cowden Clarke did much to encourage Keats' literary aspirations. Keats was apprenticed to a surgeon in 1811, but he broke off the apprenticeship in 1814 and went to live in London, where he worked as a dresser, or junior house surgeon. After 1817, he devoted himself entirely to poetry.

Keats' first poem was the sonnet on first looking into Chapman's Homer (1816), which was inspired by his excited reading of George Chapman's classic translation of the *Illiad* and *Odyssey*.

In the summer of 1818, Keats went on a walking tour in the Lake District with his friend Charles Brown, and the trip brought on the symptoms of the tuberculosis of which he was to die. In 1820, the evidence of tuberculosis was clear. His friends Brown and Hunt and Brawne and her mother nursed him assiduously throughout the year. When he was ordered south for the winter, his friend Joseph Severn undertook to accompany him to Rome, where, faithfully tended by Severn to the last, he died.

Onuekwusi (2002:66) describes Keats as 'a poet of sense impressions, tactile and sculptural imagery'. Keats was opposed to strict observance of rules and subjects in poetry. He wrote in a wide range of forms and on a wide range of subjects. He made ample use of his fertile imagination and intuition. Onuekwusi (2002) narrowed Keats as just an imagist. Keats is more than a mere imagist. He is more of the environmentalist poet than an imagist. That is what this research shows.

Wilson Knight in Onuekwusi (2002:60) describes the poetry of John Keats thus:

Keats' poetry is brimful of sensuous richness in tactile and sculptural yet exquisitely living attraction; in rich tones and smooth surfaces in earthly fecund nature; in warmth and perfume and taste until the mind is all but drowned, fumed, intoxicated by a pleasure just stopping short of cloying sweetness.

Kerridge (2001:25) expresses Keats as just a poet who only strictly adheres to all the poetry conventions without any other inclinations and without observing him from any other angle.

Keats was the youngest of the romantics. He died very young of Tuberculosis. Clearly one of the best romantic poets, he is still read not only for his poetry but also his letters which embody his philosophy of life and his view on literature especially, Greek mythology and renaissance literature in his literary creativity.

Keats is more concerned in his environment than being a mere strict adherent of poetry rules and conventions. This research depicts him as an environmentalist, who identifies himself as a part of his natural environment.

Onuekwusi (2002:53) observes that Keats himself refers to immortal works of beauty as 'souls of poets', that serve as the means by which they 'hold lofty converse with after times. Nevertheless, the notion of beauty in Keats' works is un-platonic in some other respects. He does not regard personal beauty as an imperfect shadow of 'the beauty absolute' but as 'particles' that are integral parts of the essential beauty in all things. 'The concept of an abstract beauty that exists apart from particulars is alien to the Keats' system. His abstract 'idea of beauty' is conterminous with the mass of beauty formed from the various particles. Keats does not believe in the platonic progression from particular beauty to the absolute or ideal beauty, that platonic steps or stages leading to the absolute beauty' . For Keats, a passionate concentration on anything, irrespective

of whatever platonic stage the object is classed, leads the poet to the discovery of the essential beauty in all things.

Ayinuola (2013) in her thesis 'The Natural Environment in the selected poems of John Keats' pointed out that there is a steady decline in the romantic appreciation of the natural environment among nature poets: there is a shift of focus from its addition to a seemingly more serious concern about its wanton exploitation and destruction. He shows that Keats only celebrates beauty; relating the past with the present. This research transcends the view of Keats as one who just celebrates nature. Keats is a part and parcel of nature – an environmentalist.

Omobowale (2009:257) opines that Keats only focuses his poems on the quest for eternal peace.

Thus:

Keats portrays that man is constantly pursuing the ever-elusive eternal peace. The activities of man whether directly or indirectly are targeted towards achieving eternal peace. Keats portrays the fact that man wants to run away from the frustrating events happening around him. This quest often motivates him to adopt an escapist attitude to things. Keats seeks this peace and solace in Bacchus (wine), in arts - through poetry and by appreciating nature. Keats derives so much joy, in his appreciation of nature, although for a while, in listening to the song of the nightingale.

One major area in which Keats' poems have received critical responses at the expense of ecological dimension is in the area of beauty and transience. Criticisms of Keats' works do not focus on the fact that there is a huge relationship between man and his natural environment. Kwami (2009) in an analysis of 'Ode to the Nightingale' sees the natural creatures like birds which Keats talks to as a bad omen. He does not see Keats as the lover of environmental creatures but as a mere idol worshipper. These calls of Keats to the nightingale, to Kwami, constitute paganism. Keats' adoration of the environmental creatures is seen in this research, as

the debt that man owe to his environment in order to work in tune with it. Okore (2014) similarly argues that Keats is a mere hedonist, who is only interested in living a blissful life just as the nightingale without realizing that life is a mixture of bliss and chaos. According to him:

Keats' poems express only the theme of bliss as opposed to the ugliness and unattractiveness of the world within which man operates. The world of the nightingale and its immortal song are presented as blissful; worthy of being celebrated. Blissful nature epitomizes joy, laughter, happiness and orderliness.

Obviously, Keats' critics are more concerned with the sense of impressions. Undeniably, Keats employs tactile and sculptural imagery in the presentation of his poems. In his poems he refers to immortal works of beauty as un-platonic. Thus, while most critics have explored virtually all areas in the criticisms of his works, they have ignored the ecological dimension. Most of the critics only restrict Keats' poems to nature; claiming that Keats only appreciates Nature. This research shows that Keats does not only appreciate Nature; he identifies himself as being parts and parcel of his environment. He is an environmentalist himself.

2.6 Gabriel Okara and Christopher Okigbo: Critical Responses

Gabriel Imomotimi Gbaingbain Okara was born in April 24, 1921 at Bumodi, Nigeria. He is a poet and a novelist with an acute perception of Africa's problems whose verse was translated into several languages in 1960s.

A largely self-educated man, Okara became a bookbinder after leaving school and soon began writing plays and features for radio. In 1953 his poem 'The Call of the River Nun' won an award at the Nigerian Festival of Arts. Some of his poems were published in the influential periodical *Black Orpheus*, and by 1960 he was recognized as an accomplished literary craftsman. Okara incorporated African thought, religion, folklore and imagery into both his verse and prose. His

first novel, *The Voice* (1964), is a remarkable linguistic experiment in which Okara translated directly from the Ijaw language, imposing Ijaw syntax onto the English, in order to give literal expression to a space in which the forces of traditional African culture and western materialism contend. A collection of his poems, *The Fisherman's Invocation*, was published in 1978, and another small collection of poems in 1983.

Most of the African poems are located in colonialism, post colonialism and contemporary issues like political tussle and mass exploitation. As a result of this, most of the African literary critics base their criticisms on sociopolitical and socio-economic perspectives. The perspective of the African poems in this thesis is ecological perspective. This continues to reveal newer or other forms of reassessment concerning the totality of African socio-political experience and ecocritical dimension. According to Dadie (2000), critics of the African poetry started to dwell fully on socio-political and socio-economic concerns; particularizing the critical discourse of poetry. The result has been a growing number of volumes of works and thesis on socio-political and socio-economic issues; devoid of environmental issues. Moreover, environmental problems are the major problems rocking the whole world in this twenty-first century.

Abubakar (2002:202) identifies the concerns of the poets in these words: 'African literature is basically a signification of the transformation of the continent by such epochal historical experiences as colonialism, neocolonialism and its integration into and subordination to the capital system and the attendant schism that these entail'. This 'schism' is reflected in the political and socio-economic problems that characterized the developmental stages of the African poems. These points are well illustrated in the work of Chukwuma Azuonye (2011):

A large body of the poetry of Gabriel Okara is focused on nostalgia and economic exploitations. Okara was deeply moved by the exploitations going on in his country and initiates a vigorous

grassroots campaign that enable him to weather the storm of initial skepticism over his transformation and sincerity.

Azuonye (2011) goes further to show that readers of Okara's poems will recall that, in 'Leave Us Alone' (December, 1967), he accurately prophesied that Nigeria would pay a heavy price of self-destruction for its 'unholy war' against Biafrans – the victims of the ethnic cleansing of July through October 1966 in northern and western Nigeria, at the behest of western neocolonialist interests that led to the war:

So stop this war, this unholy war which serves naught but vanity. Your consuming vanity, vanity that battens on fresh blood of youth you send to death by our reluctant hands; youth we knew by name and loved as kins. Each such youth that dies is a bloody shroud you are winding round your bewildered self you will be your own assassin.

One major area in which Okara's poems have received critical responses at the expense of the ecocritical dimension is in the socio-political area. Critics of Okara's poems are blindfolded with Okara's love for his environment. In Abiola Irele's commentary on Okara's 'Piano and Drums', he pointed out that Okara's poetry is rooted in colonialism, cultural clash and social issues.

There is no doubt about the fact of having Okara's poems rooted in colonialism and socio-political issues. Okara devotes a significant amount of attention to socio-political issues but in the same vein, he shows a great deal of concern over the environment in which he lives in. Thus, while most critics have explored virtually all areas in the criticisms of his poems, they have ignored his ecocritical dimension. Thus, Okara's poems must be viewed beyond the socio-political. Interestingly, to Okara also identifies himself as an environmentalist. Thus, in his poem

‘The Snow Flakes Sail Gently Down’ he affirms that:

I dreamed a dream
In my dead sleep. But I dreamed
Not of earth dying and elms vigil
Keeping. I dreamed of birds, black
Birds flying in my side, nestling
And hatching on oil palms bearing suns
For fruits and with roots denting the
Uprooter’s spades. And I dreamed the
Uprooters tired and limp, learning on my roots –
Their abandoned roots –
And the oil palms gave them each a sun.

To wholly accept the criticisms that Okara is only a socio-political and socio-economic poet is to miss another dimension of Okara’s poetry and conclude that his poems are not relevant in addressing the environmental issues. What the criticisms of Azuonye and Irele above call to mind is the absence of works which focus on the ecocritical significance of Okara’s identification with his natural environment. Most critics fail to realize that Okara, as an African poet demonstrates that there is a relationship between literary creativity and ecocriticism especially in the portrayal of ecomelancholy and zoocriticism. Okara pays significant attention to his physical environment – its creatures and landscapes. Okara’s poem ‘The call of the River Nun’ reveals a beauty and the inclination of the poet with his physical environment. These are the issues which most critics fail to address in Okara’s poems which are the subjects of this work.

Indeed, the theme of environmental concern is central to Okara’s poems. He draws a relative line between the physical, landscapes and beauty of nature. Though political and economic issues dominate the criticism of the poems of Okara, this study is of the view that other areas of interest can be explored in his works. Absent in his work therefore, is the possibility of ecocritical

representation of his physical or natural environment especially ‘The Call of the River Nun’ a poem that has drawn more critical attention.

Christopher Okigbo is another notable African poet whose poems were written during the colonial era. And because of the controversy which colonialism has drawn in Nigeria to be precise, his novels have attracted numerous critical attentions. Born in 1932, Christopher Okigbo is one of the best and most widely anthologized Nigerian poets.

After graduating from the University of Ibadan, Okigbo held positions as a teacher, librarian at the university of Nigeria, and West African editor of *Transition*, and African literary magazine. He was awarded but declined first prize for poetry at the 1966 Festival of the Negro Arts in Dakar, Senegal. Okigbo’s efforts to launch a publishing company in Enugu with a renowned novelist, Chinua Achebe came to an abrupt end when he was killed while fighting in the war for Biafran independence from Nigeria.

Okigbo published three volumes of poetry during his short life: *Heavensgate* (1962), *Limits* (1964) and *Silences* (1965). His collected poems appeared post-humously in 1971 under the title *Labyrinths, With Path of Thunder*. His poems are highly personal, richly symbolic renderings of his experiences. He weaves images of his native Igbo landscape into works that are often obscured or allusive but intensely evocative. Okigbo became one of the most widely translated of all Nigerian poets. His *collected poems* was published in 1986.

In *The Poet as a Town-Crier in a Nation in Conflict: Okigbo’s Poetry* (2014), Ofure Aito was principally interested in Okigbo’s concern with issues of difference in ideology, personality, sexuality, ethnicity, economy, socialization, identity, culture, religion and many more. Aito sums

up Okigbo's concern when he stated as follows:

Okigbo is a religious and socially concerned poet, who is deeply burdened with societal issues. These issues often result into intolerance, terrorism and conflicts. The roots of these issues of difference are in resistance to cultural, ethnic superiority, political domination, and economic control to religious party. These issues of conflict are replete in Okigbo's poetry. Okigbo hybridizes Christian religious expressions and African traditional mythology to raise awareness about looming crises and responds to these issues of cultural/social conflicts. The poet plays the role of a mediator or the traditional watchdog or alarmist ("town-crier") and reconciles man to God.

Credible as this comment is, Ofure Aito fails to identify Okigbo's deep concern about his natural environment; how he is in need to align with his natural environment which he has already identified with. Ali Mazrui (2007)'s seminal paper, entitled 'Between Heroic Universalism and Parochial Martyrdom: The Life and Death of Christopher Okigbo', also talks about Christopher Okigbo's poetry in his presentations. The study concentrates principally on the underlying themes about the life, art and significance of Christopher Okigbo. Thus, universalism in Okigbo's works was the focus of his paper. He states that 'the most obvious aspect of his universalism was his refusal to be categorized as either an African poet or a Black one'. However, he ignored the vital role of ecocriticism in understanding the universalism which he was expressing in Okigbo's poems, especially in the poet's African environment, which were the subjects of his paper. Notably, Okigbo's themes are universal because of his minutest details of the environmental elements in his poems. In his poem 'Idoto' he expresses the role of environmental elements in his life. The environmental elements like the 'watery presence' (line 3) and 'oil bean' (line 5) lend some rigid supports to him. That's why he has to lean on them. Thus, many of his poetic imaginations are subjects of ecocritical discourse which the paper did not examine.

Interestingly too, Hezzy Obiajuru Maduakor (1977) doctoral dissertation, entitled 'Landscape as a symbol in the poetry of Christopher Okigbo' focuses mainly on the imagery which the African landscapes in Okigbo's poems create in the minds. The study examines the symbolic content of the landscapes in the poems including the tactile effects on the readers. The usage of the landscapes as mere symbols is not the major concern of Okigbo. Okigbo did not use the natural environments like the landscapes as mere symbols. Rather, he identified with the natural environment. In other words, he 'leaned' on nature and stands upon the nature's 'watery presence'. In the criticisms of Christopher Okigbo's poems, the ecocritical elements of the poems are either ignored and where references are made, they are sketchy and veiled. Yet, his poems reveal much about ecocritical leanings in both the form and content in creating environmental awareness. Besides, critics have also tended to explain the social and religious dimension of Christopher Okigbo's poems while ignoring their ecocritical concerns. Oluwakayode Adegbe (2010) in an article 'The Prophet, The Pirate and the Witch' identified the socio-political importance of Okigbo's 'The Stars Have Departed' and the prophetic significance of the poem to the Nigerian nation. Thus, the criticisms of Okigbo's poems focus mainly on the social and political imperatives especially on how to find a solution to the lingering social instability engendered by the bad leadership especially in the Nigerian society. However, his poem 'The Stars have Departed' encapsulates not only socio-political issues but importantly, too, the ecocritical. This neglect creates a gap in the appreciation of Christopher Okigbo's poems.

Above all, recent criticisms of the African poetry are not markedly different from the earlier ones. The focus has remained largely on socio-political issues. One of such critics of the African poetry is Edward Brathwaites. In an article 'The Arrivants and the Trope of Cultural Searching', Ayo Kehinde (2007:3) shows that Brathwaites toed the same lane of most African critics of the

African poems. He emphatically maintains that African poems can only be analysed through the economic, social and political dimensions. According to him, Africa is saddled by bad leadership. Therefore, poetry becomes the veritable tools to correct these ills. He further stressed that African poetry provides identity search in the citizens and then attempts reconciliations with their original culture, the African culture. It is revealed that Africa in the view of Brathwaites, is an enduring trope.

There is no gain-saying the fact that African poetry is fully consecrated in socio-political issues. However, elements of ecocriticism especially in the representation of environmental features can be drawn from the criticism of African poetry. A lot has been written about the African poetry in relation to other notable issues earlier mentioned, but these works are either silent about the ecocritical issues or not present at all. Moreover, environmental issues are the major issues that should be given the priority stage because most of the problems the whole world is facing today are environmental problems.

Although it is acknowledged that studies in recent times have given attentions to other social issues; none of such studies, however, seems to have paid proper attention to the clarion calls to identify, preserve and protect the environment against mishaps, by the environmental poets of earlier (Romantic) periods and our times especially in comparison with both Africa and European poets; occasioned by the realities of time/space specifics. This is the gap this study fills.

CHAPTER THREE

THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT AS THE PANACEA FOR ETERNAL TRANQUILITY: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF SELECTED POEMS IN JOHN KEATS' COLLECTION: *ODE* (1817) AND GABRIEL OKARA'S *THE FISHERMAN'S INVOCATION* (1978)

There are many more beautiful landscapes in the world, but none, I think, that can shape man's spirit in so sovereign a way... The desert is bare and clean and knows no compromise. It sweeps out of the heart of man all the lovely fantasies that could be used as a masquerade for wishful thinking, and thus makes him free to surrender himself to an Absolute that has no image: the farthest of all that is far and yet the nearest of all that is near.

- Muhammad Asad.

3.1 Introduction

The praxis of environmental concerns has expanded beyond the conundrum of the geographers. Literary icons and artists have also taken a path in the appreciation and the call for the preservation of the natural environment. To this end, they strongly prove that the preservation and interpretation of the natural environment is the major solution to the myriads of problems which man encounter on daily basis. These problems are compounded year in year out by the technological advancements as man invents different gadgets in order to ease himself off the burdens in his environment. These practices are, to a large extent, banes of his natural environment. Environmental harm which man does to his environment with impunity is considered in the Freudian dictum as 'displacement' or 'condensation'. That is, the workings of the unconscious; a process of moving emotions that are related to an idea or person to a less important object. This shows that man has abandoned the riches inherent in nature and clings to worthless activities which are capable of posing dangers to his natural environment. This study investigates the nature poetry in relation to environmental tranquility as evidenced in the works of John Keats' in *Ode* (1817) and Gabriel Okara's *The Fisherman's Invocation* (1978). The

selected poetry collections have some remarkable similarities and differences; they are self-evident of the poetic-pathetic state of the environment and fear that the current state of event is precarious to the chaos on the natural environmental tranquility.

According to Robert Anderson, ‘tranquility’ can be defined as a state of being pleasantly calm, quiet and peaceful while ‘environment’ refers to the surrounding landscape. Thus, environmental tranquility can be broadly delineated as the interaction between man and his environment in relation to absolute peacefulness and calmness. The human-environment relationship includes both the natural environment and the objects that occupy it as well as the psychological process of human perception and cognition. This is the insights of the environmentalists termed ‘Light Greens’ and ‘Dark Greens’. The Dark Greens are the environmentalists who support conservation and limits. They differ from Dark Greens, the deeply committed ecologists who advocate a complete return to nature. This chapter foregrounds environmental tranquility in John Keats’ *Ode* (1817) and Gabriel Okara’s *The Fisherman’s Invocation* (1978) in order to foster the relevance of ecocriticism as a viable tool for literary analysis of poems that deal with the nature and human divides.

The study underscores how tranquility plays an influential role in the ‘being’ and ‘condition of being’ in the natural environment. A sense of understanding and appreciation of natural environment plays a pivotal role in the lives of the individuals in a given environment. Thus, human beings are oblivious of this fact. That is why they go on neglecting and harming their natural environment. In the words of Freud, it is called ‘collective unconsciousness’. That is, the inherited experience of the human race that resides at a deep level of the psyche. Its contents come from recurrent life situations that are common to all humans. The undertaking explores how mankind’s exploitation of the natural environment has set into motion, dreadful

consequences for the environmental dwellers, thus placing a great demand on the poet to examine the prevailing environmental issues. In the ecocritical perspective, Keats and Okara offer a transformative discourse to examine the manifold ills against the natural environment especially in this technologically advanced age, thus demonstrating that the remedy for these environmental degradations lies in the unification, appreciation and demonstration of high regards for the natural environment for it is the source for inner peace.

3.2 The Environment as the Source of Tranquility in Keats' and Okara's Poetry Collections, *Ode* (1817) and *The Fisherman's Invocation* (1978): A Thematic and Stylistic Comparisons and Contrasts

With regards to the maintenance of environmental tranquility, Onuekwusi (2002:66) maintains that 'Keats is a poet of sense impressions, tactile and sculptural imagery. Keats was opposed to strict observance of rules and subjects in poetry. He detaches himself from the chaotic world to experience the impulse of the natural world.' Onuekwusi goes further to show that Keats wrote in a wide range of forms and a wide range of subjects and made ample use of his fertile imaginations and intuition. On this note, Wilson Knight in Onuekwusi (2002: 60) describes the poetry of Keats as follows:

Keats' Poetry is brimful of sensuous richness in tactile and sculptural yet exquisitely living attraction, in rich tones and smooth surface in earthly fecund nature; in warmth and perfume and taste until the mind is all but drowned, fumed, intoxicated by a pleasure just stopping short of cloying sweetness; depicting absolute calmness of mind.

On a similar note, Nachukwu-Agbada et al (2015) vociferously maintain:

Okara's poems are full of rustic imageries that depict the natural life . vociferously maintains that Okara's poetry dwell a lot on cultural identity. Influences of Ijo folklore are also noticeable in his works. The natural environment has a great fascination for the poet. Thus, the poet uses a series of visual and concrete images and metaphors associated with nature to explore his themes.

Keats' and Okara's entire aesthetic philosophy were totally different from that of their contemporaries like Wordsworth, Blake, Coleridge, Okigbo, Brew, Clark etc, in political leanings. While their contemporaries usually did not have any problem applying their works to political or social contexts, Keats and Okara always seemed distant from doing so. On Keats, Kanan (2014:1) states that Keats was more animated about the aesthetic of the work and pursuing an ability to dwell into the calm capability of his own thoughts. Similarly, Senanu and Vincent (1999: 103) show that Okara's native experiences form the material for his rustic lyrics.

Consequently, the titles of the collections *Ode* (1817) and *The Fisherman's Invocations* are symbolic. An ode is a meditative poem which addresses itself to a person or thing in which the good qualities of such a person or object are highlighted and commended. *Ode* can be described as a meditation and lyrical poetry since it vividly captures the poet's memories and experiences. On the other hand, an invocation is the act of mentioning or referring to someone or something in support of your ideas. In this regard, Kanan (2014:3) submits that such 'collections were recollected in tranquility as the poets were subsumed in the natural world for several hours' composing (as in Keats') or invoking (as in Okara's) the poems. These show their ideological inclinations that the songs represent natural perfection. That is to show that the mode of Okara's poetic expression (invocation) is in the form of ode. Thus, both express their deep emotions about the environment they live in through deep emotions.

Keats and Okara demonstrate great sense of ecocriticism in these collections. They reaffirm to the fact that most of the human problems and chaos come as a result of not having affinity with the natural environment. Both voices echo the feelings about their natural environment. Thus, Keats and Okara are bothered by the seemingly insurmountable obstacles to man's progress that he witnesses every day, escape to the serene and tranquil natural world. In 'Ode to Nightingale'

Keats is enthused and enthralled by the peace and satisfaction that the nightingale enjoys. In 'Piano and Drum', Okara is enthused and captured by the natural atmosphere in which the Africans play their 'raw drum'. The environments of the nightingale and that of the rustic Africans are considered ideal environments which the human beings have not discovered as a remedy to various chaos they experience. The world that captures their attentions is, no doubt, an ideal world. However, the happiness they derive from listening to the nature in its unadulterated form is transient. After a while, they return to the commotion that is the reality of life. Keats returns to the real chaotic world where fever 'frets its lustful eyes' while Okara returns to the world of the westerners full of 'complex ways' coupled with their 'wailing piano'. Keats' and Okara's underlying message is that man cannot escape from the exhausting or declining reality around him in shaping his attitude to events, situations and occurrences unless he gains strong companionship with nature. Man is full of troubles; it is only through a close adherence to his environment that he gets consolations. This fact is well captured in Keats' 'Ode to Nightingale' as follows:

My heart aches, and a drowsy numbness pains.
My sense, as though of hemlock I had drunk,
Or emptied some dull opiate to the drains.

lines 1 – 3

Keats shows in these lines, that he is definitely not in a very happy mood and his psychological disorientation makes him compare pain that he is experiencing to the mental and physical devastation that occurs when a person drinks poison (hemlock). The word 'hemlock' which is used in line 2 is a reference to the poison given to the renowned Greek Scholar, Socrates, when he was forced to commit suicide; symbolically, this shows that the aches and pains he is undergoing are life threatening. He continues this morbid imagery of death in 'Ode to Melancholy' where he refers to the river Lethe, which among the ancient Greeks is the river,

which the dead crossed to reach the underworld. He does not see this river in a negative sense; he sees it in the sense of tranquility. Thus:

Tis not through envy of thy happy lot
But being too happy in thine happiness -

Keats creates the imagery of an ideal environment; a natural environment where everything appears in its pure and unadulterated state. Keats is simply saying that within the nature, humans will be able to forget the harsh and tortuous realities of life. Plato called the river Lethe, referred to in the poem, the 'river of unmindfulness', which when it is drunk by the souls of people about to be reincarnated, helps them to forget their past. Here, Keats shows empathically, that the embrace with the natural environment brings eternal Peace. He shows this in the depiction and portrayal of the river Lethe as a place where all the worries of man are drowned. This river Lethe is similar to the 'river side' (line 27) where Okara is said to have lost 'in the morning mist' (line 26: Piano and Drum). A strict observance to the lines of Keats' 'Ode to Nightingale' and Okara's 'Piano and Drums' shows that both Keats and Okara are ardent observers of other natural creatures which enhance the natural environment and make it more blissful. According to Damrosch (2000:1770), 'Keats wrote to show that nothing can bring back the hour of splendour in the grass and glory in humans except the holding on to the grass and glory in the flower'. In his preface to the poem, he stated 'I once thought this a melancholic dream'. On a similar note, Nwachukwu-Agbada (2015: 253) shows that 'the two musical instruments depicted in Okara's 'Piano and Drum' are used symbolically to represent two different geographical entities. One is simple and natural while the other is sophisticated but complicated'. Following these assertions, Damrosch (2000) shows that 'Keats prizes melancholy as a sensibility that accepts, even relishes, the evanescence of joy, pleasure, and beauty – their imminent flux into their opposites rendering such sensations all the more exquisite'.

At the metaphorical level of interpretation, the idea that is being propounded here is that within the ambits of the natural environment, symbolized by the soothing and alluring beauty of the 'grape of Proserpine' (line 4: Keats' 'Ode to Nightingale') and 'jungle drums/bleeding flesh' (lines 4 and 5: Okara's 'Piano and Drums'), the poetic persona are able to forget the harsh and uninviting realities of life. The aroma and the splendour of the tree/ rustic drums (the elements of the natural environment) are the sources of relief to their accumulated sorrows in the world of man.

In 'Bright Star, Would I Were Steadfast as Thou Art' Keats shows that he is an ardent ecocritic. Through the tone and images of the poem, Keats maintains that environmental bliss and tranquility is the replica of the world of the star, the beautiful creature around the poet. The poet is envious of the happiness and splendour that is part and parcel of the Bright Star's existence in its natural environment. The Star is described as being in its 'lone splendour'. The poet is jealous of the fact that the star is 'Of pure ablution round earth's human shores' (line 6). The way the light beams from it in its calm state is a source of attraction to the poet. The star is free and its freedom is manifested in the fact that it is not restricted or prohibited from expressing its happiness and joy. Thus:

Bright star, would I were steadfast as thou art
Not in lone splendor hung aloft the night,
And watching, with eternal lids apart,
Like nature's patient, sleepless eremite,
The moving waters at their priestlike task
Of pure ablution round earth's human shores,
Or gazing on the new soft-fallen mask
Of snow upon the mountains and moors;
No – yet still unchangeable

In 'Piano and Drums', Okara showcases his great ecocritical concerns and inclinations; like his counterpart, Keats. These are seen in his depiction of the rich African rustic environment. The rustic and the natural lives of Africans in their ideal natural setting seem too enriching and splendid to be abandoned. This was the experience of many of the early educated elite in Africa, and it provided the context for Okara's poetic imagination in those days. Okara presents a typical African ecocritical countryside. Ideally, it appears to be Okara's rustic village as he informs the readers that he is at a riverside; probably surrounded by bush. The readers get the insight of these facts in Okara's portrayals of the wild animals who are 'snarling' and 'leaping' in their natural world. Thus:

When at break of day at a riverside
I hear jungle drums telegraphing
the mystic rhythm, urgent, raw...
I see the panther ready to pounce
the leopard snarling about to leap
and the hunters crouched with
spears poised;...at once I'm walking
in simple paths with no innovations,
rugged, fashioned with the naked
warmth of hurrying feet and groping
hearts in green leaves and wild
flowers pulsing (lines - 15)

The poet recalls his pure childhood days when he walked naturally barefooted on the natural paths of his village, not the asphalt roads of the present times. Like the Romanticists, Okara showcases the flora and the fauna of his natural environment, which usually creates great splendour in the people and prompt them to positively embrace their natural environment.

As a matter of style, Okara and Keats make extensive use of rustic imagery to depict their poems' spatial settings. The idea of inhabited jungle and ideal world of the nightingale connote a natural environment like that of the village where people go to the

stream in the morning to get the clean water; as portrayed by Okara and a fallowed bush where hunters go to hunt for animals; as portrayed by Keats. This is shown in line 1 of 'Piano and Drums' where the poet persona talks about 'break of day at a riverside'. The idea of 'simple paths' in lines 12 and 13, which is rugged from the regular treading of bare foot, also clears the fact that the poem has a great concern in ecocriticism. Similarly, there is a portrayal of fauna (animals) and flora (plants) imagery with references to panther and leopard in the wild as well as 'wild flowers' and 'green leaves'. All these imagery show the abundant ecocritical riches of the natural environment from where the sounds of the drum come. Auditory imagery is also replete in the poem as different musical instruments are shown. Such words include 'concerto', 'diminuendo', 'counterpoint' and 'crescendo'.

Structurally and thematically, the poet employs contrast. The main idea in the poem is focused between the two contrasting musical instruments – piano and drums. In other words, the instruments portrays two different environments – the Western (Keats' environment) and the African (Okara's environment). They are used symbolically to represent the different cultures of people from these environments. The one is a simple and natural environment while the other is a sophisticated but complicated environment. In this case, the dwellers (Keats and Okara) of these environments are admirers and custodians of their environments. On the contrast, one induces memories and images of natural beauty; the other speaks of 'complex ways' and 'far away lands'. Structurally, stanza one contrasts with stanza three, as the first focuses upon drums while the third stanza dwells on the piano. Also, two different stanzas, one and two, are dedicated to the drums while only the stanza three is devoted to the piano. This clearly shows the poet's

disappointments with the piano (the environmental destroyers). Suffice it to say that as an environmentally conscious poet, Okara frowns at those who neglect nature and treat it with contempt.

Like Keats, Okara employs symbolism to make his message clearer. The sources of the conflict shown in the poem are depicted symbolically by piano and drums. Drums symbolize Africa while piano represents Europe. According to Nwachukwu-Agbada et al (2015:254):

With this symbolic implication, the depiction of the piano as ‘solo-speaking’, ‘tear-furrowed’ and full of ‘complexities’ are intended to show that European culture and environment are individualistic, melancholic and difficult. On the other hand, African culture and environment are presented as simple, innocent and natural through phrases such as ‘mystic rhythm’, ‘raw’, ‘simple paths with no innovations’, ‘naked warmth’, ‘green leaves’, ‘groping hearts’, etc.

Keats’ similar emotional feelings on his natural environment are replete in Okara’s ‘One Night at the Beach.’ In contrast to Keats,’ Okara portrays the beach as one which is symbolic of life itself; the river is polluted. Keats shows that the bright star sustains lives while Okara shows that the beach cannot sustain lives because of its pollution by man. There is an indication of its dwindling capacity to sustain life. Now, here lies the problem: that which supports life is literally in the throes of death; therefore, the continued dependence of life forms hangs in the balance. This is a tragedy. But that is not all. Thus, the poet asserts:

The wind come rushing from the sea,
The waves curling like mambas strike,
The sands and recoiling hiss in rage
Washing the Aladura’s feet pressing hard
On the sand and with eyes fixed hard (lines 1 - 5)

The poet, being very sensitive to the survival of the environmental creatures, is disturbed by the polluting presence of ‘passing washer-words’, which adds to the problems of the environment. By calling attention to the environmental problems, Okara invariably plays the role of an environmental lover keen on embracing the environment while Keats plays the role of an environmental observer; keen in appreciating the environmental creatures, the stars. In lines 33 of Okara’s ‘One Night at the Beach’, the imagery of a decimated ecology assumes a profoundly frightening dimension. It is obvious that man’s quest for material advancement through the application of technology has created more problems than solutions for nature and its capacity to sustain life. Industrial wastes and other forms of contaminants have saturated the environment, forcing human, animal, fishes and other creatures to literally gasp for breath. Their life-support system – the environment is made increasingly uninhabitable, and with its life-giving substances fast depleting. That is the scenario we witness in Okara’s ‘One Night at Victoria Beach’. Thus:

Still they pray, the Aladuras pray
With hands pressed against their hearts...
...while dead fishermen long dead with bones rolling
...following four dead cowries

In the lines above, we notice fishes and the fishermen in a life-and-death struggle to survive. As we survey the ‘deep sea where fishes sit in judgement’ (line 23) in the polluted sea, one notices the ‘subduing unanimity of the sky’ and ‘their white bones beneath the sand’ (lines 31 - 32).

In contrast to this hue and cry expressed by Okara on how human beings constitute ruins on the environment, Keats greatly shows how he admires the calmness of the ‘nature’s patient, sleepless eremite’ in the star that he desires dearly to live in its world. What the poet is trying to pass across to the reader is that he wants to see the natural beautiful world with ‘eternal lid’, enjoy a round of good dancing in the midst of unpolluted, unparalleled and unequalled happiness free of

all corruption or decay. Here, we see Keats' passionate love and inclination to the natural environment. Flora symbolizes the natural environment capable of bringing about an atmosphere of 'its soft swell and fall' (line 11); thus, Keats passionately desires to be translated into the world of the stars. He also pursues this natural environmental imagery further by desiring 'to hear her tender-taken breath' (lines 13). Essentially, the poet wants to enjoy the tranquility in the star 'and so live ever – or else swoon to death' (line 14).

From the above lines, we discover that the poet shows why he wants to 'watch with eternal lids' and dissolve with the star. One of the major reasons as presented in the poem, is that the star does not experience the problems which man experiences on a very consistent and continuous basis. Such human problems include weariness, fever, fretting, groaning, palsy, transience of love, and ultimately death. The poet shows the problems that confront man as he undergoes the ageing process. Man becomes a symbol of debilitating diseases, which limit his horizon and aspirations. Apart from this, the poet laments the fact that young people do not reach their prime into significance before the awesome onslaught of life's numerous problems. Even before dying, the younger members of society become emaciated or 'swoon' (line 14). Consequently, the art of reasoning and creativity are seriously affected. Keats has used this poem to ruminate over the untimely death of his brother, Tom, as well as lament his inability to have a stable romantic relationship with a woman because of his ill health. He was unable to get married, though he had fallen in love, because he was tormented by tuberculosis. He shows through lines 12 and 13, that 'to feel forever its soft well and fall' is to behold beauty which does not last beyond a fleeting moment.

In Okara's 'Suddenly the air cracks', we witness a similar preoccupation with the natural environment but with a slight contrast. Keats focuses on the chaos inherent in man's

environment and thus wishes to be transmogrified into the world of the fauna. On the other hand, Okara takes his own concern to humans in their environment and thus calls for habitableness. He highlights the problem of environmental pollution, not only from industries but also from everyday human activities. In the poem, a close examination will show that the persona is haunted by the environmental mess around him. In this particular instance, although the poetic experience is inspired by the symbolism of names, the persona cannot but turn his attention to the pollution from 'a thick black smoke/ rises sadly into the sky (lines 8 - 9). The persona figures out the reason; 'the smoke rises sadly into the sky as the jets/ fly away in gruesome glee – (lines 10 - 11) is to cause 'a babel of emotions' (lines 12). Interestingly, apart from 'the smoke' the persona also speaks of 'bunkers'- a metaphor for oil companies who 'gaze in groups without sadness'. Now, it should be realized that the exploration operations of industries like the airport and the oil companies involve the explosion of dynamites metonymically referred to as the 'cracking striking' and this normally results in the death of animals and fishes and other forms of aquatic lives. This, to the poet, constitutes a huge environmental hazard and is therefore, unacceptable. The aircraft not only pose environmental dangers in the form of air pollution but it is coupled with noise pollution 'above rooftops'. Thus:

Again, suddenly the air cracks
Above rooftops cracking striking
Rockets guffawing before stuttering LMGs
Ack-ck flacks driving jets
Diving men women dragging children
Seeking shelter not there breathless
Hugging gutters walls houses
Crumbling rumbling thunder
Bombs hearts thumping heads low
Under beds moving wordless lips

Furthermore, Keats maintains this contrast in 'When I Have Fears that I May Cease to Be'. Here, Keats restates the power of poetry to transport a person beyond this physical, ephemeral environment, despite the fact that the uncoordinated nature of man's brain slows down the thinking process. Thus:

... before my pen has gleaned my teeming brain
Before high-piled books, in charact'ry
... when I behold, upon the night's starred face,
Huge cloudy symbols of a high romance
And think that I may never live to trace
Their shadows, with the magic hand of chance;
And when I feel, fair creature of an hour,
That I shall never look upon thee more,
Never have relish in the faery power

The poet is confident of the potency of poetry to reawaken him in his quest for ideal natural environment; the environment characterized by peace and tranquility. This is the natural environment where humans are oblivious of seeing because of their exploitative nature. This is where the poet yearns to live in and where he craves to be as well. Thus, Anderson (1993:710) states:

The facts that Keats' life lend poignancy to the 'fears' expressed here, since his death at the age of twenty-five confirmed them. His aspirations to 'love', as well as to 'fame' (which here should be regarded not as hunger for celebrity but as a hope of fulfilment) would both be frustrated. John Keats would 'cease to be' within three years of writing this poem.

By addressing the natural world 'Huge cloudy symbols of a high romance' in this manner, he is trying to tell it that it should get ready to receive him and give him eternal peace as soon as he leaves this confused environment and retreats into the ideal natural environment to enjoy untainted peace, joy and tranquility. He makes it emphatically clear to the natural environmental elements, of his own desire to come to her own natural environment for he has 'never have relish in the faery power'. With the aid of his poetry, 'high-piled books, in charact'ry', he yearns

quickly for the transience. However, he makes it known that his fantasies would not be induced or be changed even as he 'stand alone, and think'. This shows that poetry is capable of empowering the limited ability of the poet's brain to take him to the realm of imagination, a tranquil environment where he is bound to forget the problems of this chaotic environment. The poet goes further in describing the all pervading serenity and beauty that exists in the natural plane where he 'feel fair creature of an hour'. He says with certainty that the night will be a tender one and that even the 'unreflecting love', will give him bliss.

Suffice it to say that Keats advocates for escaping from this physical environment because human beings have made it both non-habitable and uncondusive while Okara on his own, advocates for making the environment both habitable and conducive rather than running away to the world of the animals as advocated by Keats.

In his usual manner, Keats shows in 'On the Grasshopper and the Cricket', his passionate love for the natural environment, the fauna and the fact that the happy state and the indomitable nature of these tiny natural creatures has a profound effect on both human and non-human entities. In these lines '*That is the Grasshopper's – he takes the lead/In summer luxury, he has never done*', the poet contrasts the happy state of the natural creature, the Grasshopper with the pathetic condition of the physical world where man finds himself. Thus, he reinstates that the Grasshopper '*rests at ease beneath some pleasant weed*'. While the night is tender with the Grasshopper and the Cricket, man's world is characterized by the absence of light 'save what from heaven is with the breezes blown'. The reference to light here is symbolic. Light brings enlightenment, awareness and development. Its absence brings 'verdurous glooms'. With these images, the poet shows his dissatisfaction with the human world. He strongly longs for the world of the grasshopper and the cricket, a natural environment with flawlessness and purity. He opines

that even if all the ever singing birds of air become tired of singing and decide to hide away from the heat of the sun under cooling trees, it is at this time that the sweet song of the grasshopper will be heard as it jumps from trees to shrubs. It can also be heard singing in the grassland 'meadow'. The insect particularly ceases the opportunity offered by the bright weather of summer to enjoy itself to the fullest. However, when the grasshopper becomes tired of enjoyment, it will now take a rest under the grass. It does not pass through worries and chaos characterized by the human world. It leads a full life of tranquility and absolute peace of mind. The poet shows emphatically, that songs can never fade away in that ideal natural environment which he yearns for. In such an ideal environment, all the creatures are light-hearted to sing because they enjoy absolute tranquility; nothing bothers them. This, according to him, is because even in a cold lonely environment filled with powdered ice, when people are forced into their houses to obtain warmth, then the Cricket will begin to give warmth, loud and louder pleasant song as that makes humans crave for the ideal natural environment:

And Cricket's song, in warmth increasing ever,
And seems to one in drowsiness half lost,
The Grasshopper's among some grassy hills.

The poet uses the two insects to show the beauty and tranquility of nature on human life. Unfortunately, these effects are not appreciated by humans in their environment. That is what propels him to crave for the world of these creatures. Thus, he is fed up with the human environment while in the case of his counterpart, Okara, human environment can still be rebuilt even though he frowns at man's negligence towards his environment. Keats vividly uses the visual and perceptive images like 'earth', 'birds', 'hot sun', 'trees', 'Grasshopper', 'Cricket' 'weed' 'mown mead', etc. to portray the restorative effect of nature on human life while in the case of Okara, auditory and tactile images like 'crouched', 'crescendo' 'diminuendo', 'wailing',

‘embrace’, ‘lapping’, ‘elms’ etc are replete. However, an appreciation of the beauty and tranquility in the natural environment is the preoccupation of both Keats and Okara.

Furthermore, in ‘Moon in the bucket’, the poet takes on the problem of human violence and its impact on the environment. In the poem, there is a connection between the persona’s disillusionment about life during the war and the environmental hazards that impinge on his consciousness. In all these problems, Nature has not waned. The natural environmental elements ‘The moon, dancing to the gentle night wind’ (line 8). The human beings go about shedding blood and putting his environment in ruins ‘with a million hates’ while the moon, an environmental element is ‘peace unsoiled by the murk’. It is easy to fathom how this litany of problems affects the environment. One only needs to take a trip to war scene to experience the nauseating stench of human beings littered in the environment. They are what put the environment (this bucket) into pollution of ‘dirt’. Put together, these human activities are anti-environmental practices, and this is the message Okara drives home.

In ‘Ode on a Grecian Urn’, unlike other poems of Keats, he toe a different lane. Like Okara, Keats takes time to appreciate the world of man; hence transcending to the world of the fauna poses difficulty. Every other poem in the collection, *Ode* above is devoted to the description of the gloom and darkness, which are the hall-marks of human existence because man has ceased from seeing the beauty and everlasting calmness inherent in the natural environment but here, Keats’ own eyes are open to see and appreciate nature like Okara . In line 19, the poet paints a picture of man’s inability to sense the natural beauty in the natural environment and partake fully in the eternal bliss of the urn because of series of problems they encounter on daily basis.

Though winning near the goal – yet, do not grieve;
She cannot fade, though thou hast not thy bliss,
Forever wilt thou love, and she be fair!

Man's inability to have the bliss of the urn is not due to lack of interest but due to lack of freedom from the various challenges life brings in the environment. This is a terrible pitiable state, in that the gratifying feeling and pleasure derivable from such a sight of the 'still unravished bride of quietness', that, is the 'urn' are deprived the poet. What he does to ease his sadness is stated in lines 21 - 27, where he reveals that he only tries to guess what nature looks like by resorting into singing and chanting for the natural element of the environment. He expresses the jollity of the urn, thus:

Ah, happy, happy boughs! That cannot shed
Your leaves, nor ever bid the spring adieu;
And, happy melodist, unwearied,
Forever piping songs forever new;
More happy love! More happy, happy love!
Forever warm and still to be enjoyed,
Forever panting, and forever young.

However, his conjecture cannot be compared with an actual observation of nature. Another thing that is striking in this poem is how the poetic persona qualifies the urn that surrounds him in the physical realm as 'all breathing human passion far above' . It is only the Supreme Being that can be attributed to that and this shows that the poet is saying that whatever intelligence or wisdom that man lays claim to is actually given by the urn. It is 'forever warm and still to be enjoyed' . Therefore, there is a lot of hopes for revival within the environment.

Just like Keats, Okara engages in similar praises and admiration to the natural environment in his 'The snow-flakes sail gently down' and 'The Call of the River Nun' . In 'Snow flakes sail gently down', Okara gives attribute to the power and potential of the snow to preserve and regenerate the natural environment. The poem was written after the poet's first experience of snow during his visit to America. In this poem, the poet eulogizes the snow as a natural environmental element which creates peace and absolute tranquility in human beings and in the generality of the

human environment. The first stanza conjures up the atmosphere of winter in which the poet is lulled to sleep by soothing warmth of the heater:

The snow-flakes sail gently
Down from misty eye of the sky
And fall lightly on the
Winter-weary elms. And the branches;
Winter-stripped and nude, slowly
With the weight of the weightless snow...(lines 1 - 6)

Thus, the snow influences natural life at all levels and in all climes; the dream which the poet has expressed - a dream which takes him back to his native and peaceful African environment:

Then I dreamed a dream
In my dead sleep. But I dreamed
Not of earth dying and elms a vigil
Keeping. I dreamed of birds, black
Birds flying in my inside, nesting
and hatching an oil palms bearing suns

On this particular issue, Okara affirms to the words of Glotfelty that ‘phenomenon ... is well known to the ecocritics’. The vegetations at the bottom of the sea, of rivers and of lakes team up with that of the land in the change of seasons, and is consequently influenced by the snow which announces it. Senanu and Vincent’s reading of the poem indicate that the poem portrays the calm and peaceful environment as the poet ‘wakes; it is still winter, but a change has occurred in the weather’ (Senanu and Vincent, 1999:109).

Moreover, Keats follows the same line of eulogy to nature just as Okara, as he goes on to deify those wonderful elements of the ideal natural environments, in the expressions: ‘O mysterious priest’, ‘peaceful citadel’, ‘dost tease us out of thought’ etc. These wonderful elements of the natural environment were deprived of him earlier in life so he has come to pour out all of his appreciations to him. He lacks the opportunity of seeing them earlier because of the ailments that

confronted him early in life. The poem was written during the season of summer when nature blossoms with irresistible, breathtaking splendour, grace and glamour. The gifts of the natural environment that the poet cannot fully appreciate because of unavailability of illumination include the urn's 'Tempe', 'ecstasy' 'melodist' 'Attic shape' etc. With these pictures, the poet wants us to sympathize with him in particular and man in general. Nothing can be more disheartening than a situation where man is not endowed with the required wisdom and knowledge that he needs to understand the world of natural endowments.

Owing to the various afflictions Keats has gone through in this hostile environment, he had wanted death to 'take in to the air my quiet breath' in another poem of his, 'Ode to Nightingale' but while he wants to die, the bird is singing joyfully, because it is an embodiment of life of virility and vibrancy and therefore it feels compelled 'to pour out her soul abroad in such ecstasy' (line 58). The poet laments that though the bird will continue to sing, he would not be able to hear because her song is a high requiem that brings a longing for death in him. In 'Ode on a Grecian Urn', the poet declares unequivocally, that the urn is a symbol of natural environmental creation. The poet is fascinated by the ageless beauty and inspiration ever supplied by the urn that he deifies it and endows its song, which would be sung by 'the mysterious priest' and by the 'heart high-sorrowful' in perpetuity with immortality. This hyperbole is employed to draw a contrast between two environments – human environment in general, full of crisis and the ideal environment, full of calmness and peacefulness; the type of the environment which the poet looks forward to. While man's environment, symbolized by the poet is a mortal, the urn's own environment is immortal for 'she cannot fade'.

The urn is not a victim of man's cruelty towards his environment. To establish the urn's fascinating quality as being delightful to the eyes of all human beings, Keats makes allusion to

the 'dales of Arcady', the valleys in ancient Greece; ideal types of rural beauty. The poet calls the attention of men to embrace the beauty of the urn if they want eternal bliss:

O Attic shape! Fair attitude! With brede
Of marble men and maidens overwrought
With forest branches and the trodden weed;
Thou, silent form, dost tease us out of thought
As doth eternity: Cold Pastoral!
When old age shall this generation waste,
Thou shalt remain, in midst of other woe
Than ours, a friend to man, to whom thou say'st,
'Beauty is truth, truth beauty' – that is all

In 'The Call of the River Nun', Okara reflects the images shown by Keats; but in pastoral African environment. Like Keats, he shows clearly, that the environment is a thing of beauty and joy forever. The impression that the river nun creates in him with 'its ceaseless flow' is similar with that created in Keats by the urn. Thus, it makes the Okara's mind remember some environmental beauty he has beheld in the past just as the urn makes Keats to affirm that the urn 'must remain in the midst of woe'. The beautiful scenery of the river nun include:

...the crouching hills
...the trees, to watch
...mirrored self unfold
...song from the lips of dawn
...inborn stars

As the urn in Keats' 'Ode to the Grecian Urn,' river makes scenery of impactful beauty. The hills are crouching. Both Keats and Okara are in solitude and are in need of relieving event, sight or warmth or affection. The urn and the river serve as emotional relieving agents. Thus, Okara's mind flashes back to the environmental elements, 'the crouching hills' and 'the inborn stars', the source of beauty drives him to hearken to 'My river's calling too!' The poem is reflective and the poet dwells on life and its inevitable end in death. The ceaseless flow of the river is compared to the continuous passage of time. In the insight of Senanu and Vincent (1999:105):

The recalled river is presented as a concrete environmental reality through sensory images. There is unity of nature... The most significant quality of this poem is not the romantic reference to the River Nun which has a great fascination for the poet, but a subtle poetic exploitation of the idea of call which is used euphemistically to refer to the ideal world.

'This living hand', one of the latter poems in the Keats' collection, *Ode* resonates the images of nature evidence in the word 'grasping'. It is what makes the poet realize that he cannot escape from the realities of his physical environment. This human world of chaos 'grasps' and takes him away from the natural environment back to his 'dry of blood' (line 5) which implies that man is alone as he tries to understand and come to terms with the precarious state of his existence. He returns to his unhappy physical environment and painfully bids the chaotic world 'This living hand' goodbye to his long-awaited natural environment. It is as if Keats is aware of his imminent death because it was not too long after writing the poem that death 'grasps' him and he died. He describes the living hand as a deceiver and his fury is predicted on the realization that he has been fantasizing all the while. In lines 7, he continues his parting speech. The expression, 'be conscience-calm'd' is emphatically stated to foreground the extent of the poet's feeling of despair and sense of loss. He describes all the activities done by man as a chaotic and fading anthem, an anthem that he could not hear again in this natural environment, because he is no longer operating in the world of man full of troubles. The interest of the poet continues to fade until it is no longer functioning in the physical world of man. Thus:

...and in the icy silence of the tomb,
So hunt thy days and chill thy dreaming nights
That thou would wish thine own heart dry of blood
So in my veins red life might stream again,
And thou be conscience- calm'd – see here it is –
I hold it towards you -

The voice of the persona continues to fade until it is no longer heard and it is 'now buried deep/ in the next valley glades'. It should be noted that the way the 'anthem' fades from up the hillside to the valley glades represents a fall, a fall from high to low. This represents the fall of the poet from the world of man (a world of chaos; full of sorrow and anguish) to the ideal natural environment. The poet finally asks whether he has been dreaming or not. This music that fascinated him has disappeared and he is now catapulted back to the world of reality, an environment characterized by pain.

Finally, on this note is Keats' 'To Autumn'. Composed 19 – 21 September 1819 in Winchester, a tranquil village in Southern England, from which Keats wrote to a friend: 'How beautiful the season is now – How fine the air. A temperate sharpness about it... I never lik'd stubble fields so much as now Aye better than the chilly green of the spring. Somehow a stubble plain looks warm – in the same way that some pictures look warm – this struck me so much in my Sunday's walk that I composed upon it. According to Damrosch (2000:1770), 'the ode evokes two competing but related senses of autumn: the social context of harvest bounty; and the symbolic association with death – the reaper as grim reaper, autumn as the presage of winter.'

The most salient literary device in the poem is personification; calling the season of Autumn 'thee' and 'close bosom friend of maturing sun'. Summer too is personified in the final line of the first stanza, 'For summer has o'er brimmed their clammy cells.' And both Summer and Autumn 'conspire'.

The poet calls upon something that is not human 'Autumn' and directly addresses it: 'Who hath not seen thee oft amid thy store?' 'Where are the songs of spring?' are all examples of apostrophe, as in a sense the poet evokes these melodies.

Keats and Okara deploy language that appeals to all the senses. For instance, there is visual imagery in both the first stanzas of Okara's 'One Night at Victoria Beach' and Keats' 'To Autumn' with such words as 'thatched-eyed', 'mossed cottage trees', 'plump the hazel shells', 'rushing from the sea', 'waves curling', 'forces ear' 'flower for the bees', 'the granary floor'. Further, there is olfactory imagery with the smells of 'sweet kernel' 'haggling sellers' and the 'fume of poppies'. Tactile imagery appears with 'clammy cells,' 'fixed hard' 'winnowing wine'; aural imagery with 'music', 'wailful choir' 'treble soft' and 'twitter'. Metaphors are found in the following expressions 'To Autumn', 'the wind comes rushing' 'the sands and recoiling hiss in rage' , 'the air is misty' and 'fruits are ripe', 'season of mists and mellow fruitfulness,' 'close bosom-friend of the maturing sun' etc.

On praising Keats' 'To Autumn' Anderson (1993:723) pointed out that Keats' 'To Autumn' is strikingly different from other odes in the collection because it suggests a new, serene manner in Keats' poetry which seems to predict the kind of poetry he might have explored more fully had he lived longer. 'To Autumn' is remarkable among all the lyric poems written by the Romantics in its air of detachment. It looks backward to the techniques of personification common in eighteenth century poetry. But it looks forward, beyond the Romantic absorption in the self and its emotional turbulence, to a very modern attitude toward nature as something independent of human beings' longings and fantasies. On a similar vein, Senanu and Vincent (1999: 112) pointed out that Okara captures vividly, natural spell, observing the scene very closely and

remembering to include the reactions of the people, whose ability to make a joke of tragedy underlies the resilience of the human spirit.

On a similar note, Kanan (2014) noted that Keats was more animated about the aesthetic of his natural environment; an ability to delve into the positive capability of his own thoughts.

The opening stanza of the poem 'To Autumn' reflects an acceptance of the condition of tranquility in the natural world. For the poet-speaker, presumably Keats, speaking to the season itself is a way in which he is able to communicate this acceptance of consciousness and its limitations. This can be seen in the language of the stanza as follows:

Season of mists and mellow fruitfulness
Close-bosom friend of the maturing sun;
Conspiring with him how to load and bless
With fruit the vines that round the thatch-eves run;
To bend with apples the mossed cottage-trees
And fill all fruit with ripeness to the core;
To swell the gourd, and plump the hazel shells,
With a sweet kernel; to set budding more,
And still more, later flowers for the bees,
Until they think warm days will never cease,
For summer has o'er brimmed their clammy cells

The lines above reflect Keats' view of the human condition. It is an understanding that is only accomplished through the natural environment. Keats opens his work by striking a relationship with the natural environment as more than an object. He suggests that the natural environment can reflect conditions about what it means to be human. Keats demands a reevaluation of the individual's relationship with the natural world. The natural environment is the participant in a dialogue about the condition of consciousness and enables the capacity for negative capability regarding the human predicament. Keats' 'To Autumn' is thus demanding the Ecocritical tenet

that 'moral questions about human interactions with nature' be raised. Individuals cannot simply discard the natural world given the primacy Keats places upon it.

Keats sees the natural environment as a vibrant being. It is not an object or something passive in Keats' construction. The Ode reveals it to be endowed with vitality and facilitates an understanding about the position of human beings in a larger cosmic and order. This can be exemplified thus:

Who hath not seen thee oft amid thy store?
Thou watchest the last oozing hours by hours

In the above lines, Keats personifies Autumn, the natural world, as a figure of divinity. The idea of 'Who hath not seen thee oft amid thy store' and 'Thou watchest the last oozing hours by hours' reveal a condition of the natural world that enables the individuals to better understand their own mortal predicament. The Ecocritical approach would view Keats' placement of Autumn as a divine force as deliberate, reflecting a type of restoration associated with the reverence of nature. For Keats, that is the only way for individuals to better understand their own place in the world. Through this conceptualization, the poem can be seen in Ecocritical light.

The final stanza's call to songs can be seen as a metaphor for the mourning of the natural world:

Where are the songs of Spring? Aye, where are they?
Think not of them, thou hast thy music too,
While barred clouds bloom the soft-dying day,
And touch the stubble plains with rosy hue
Then in a wailful choir the small gnats mourn
Among the river shallows, borne aloft
Or sinkin as the light wind lives or dies;
And full-grown lambs loud bleat from highly mourn;
Hedge-crickets sing; and now with treble soft
The red-breast whistles from a garden-croft;
And gathering swallows twitter in the skies.

Keats wishes to link the pleas he offers to the natural world as one that seeks to clarify the condition of human beings. However, Ecocritical approach would see the closing stanza of the poem as one that asserts that individuals must reconstruct their own notions of the natural world. The Ecocritical approach sees the imagery used in the last stanza as reflective of ‘analysing the function of the natural environment’. The calling out to the songs of Spring, the ‘wailful choir’, and the songs sung by the different creatures at the end of the poem are all conditions in which the poem demands reflection about the relationship that humans have towards the natural world. In the observations of Kanan (2014:1), Keats might not necessarily embrace this socio-political reading of his work as it tends to blur the aesthetic that he clearly sought to achieve. However, the essence of ecocriticism is to establish the grounds to examine a relationship between a work sample and the natural world. This can be clearly exemplified in ‘To Autumn’.

One of the remarkable styles in both poets, Keats and Okara is their double progression through the day and the season. This points to a theme that recurs in many Keats’ and Okara’s poems, the theme of transience. In ‘Ode to a Grecian Urn’ and ‘Ode to a nightingale’, this theme is treated with anguish and rebellion; in ‘To Autumn’, the theme is treated with serenity and acceptance to the natural environment. The first stanza tries to prolong summer, yet the sun is qualified by the adjective ‘maturing’; hinting that he matures the harvest as well as grows himself. The second stanza pictures autumn as a reaper, harvester of the now-ripened crops; the image of the reaper also calls up death itself. Death, however, is momentarily suspended, found sleeping in a ‘half-reaped furrow’.

In Okara’s first stanza of ‘The Call of the River Nun’, the notion of death, the natural completion of the process begun in the first stanza, gathers strength as gnats are mourning, the sun is setting, and the swallows gather to escape these ‘crouching hills’. The idea of death and

transience is subsumed in the exclamatory statement, 'My river's calling too'. Yet the declining in age and death is near; passing through life like sailing through the river. Death is not to be shunned or feared but accepted as the natural end of life. In the words of Onuekwusi (2002), a characteristic of Okara is his amazing ability to develop an idea to its extreme with great intellectual flexibility, and his 'The Call of the River Nun' informs this and content is evidence of this ability. The poem is a long, formal lyric poem with a serious theme and the traditional stanza structure of four lines without the rhyme scheme.

In conclusion, Okara, a notable Nigerian poet and novelist incorporated all the environmental feelings expressed by Keats above in his own poems. Like Keats, much of his poetry is garnished with personal experiences and his vast knowledge of his rustic environment, especially the serene and aquatic Ijaw region where he was born and bred. However, from the range of subjects he deals with, it seems Okara is at his best when he writes about the riverside environment of the Niger Delta from where he came just as Keats is very much at home when he writes on the rustic English environment. In this regard, Okara's and Keats' poetry belong to a corpus of works with the natural environments as the centerpiece. The common denominator in the recent writings from the both regions is the interrogation of the socioeconomic, political and environmental problems. The problems which, in broad terms, include ecological destruction, pollution, loss of farming and fishing grounds, the disappearance of migratory birds in the sky and extinction of animal and plant species. There is evidence in Okara's and Keats' poetry to suggest that they take these issues seriously. It is no wonder then that environment-related issues, in terms of the survival of human and nonhuman life in the environmental ecosphere, feature prominently in Okara's and Keats' poems. This is what makes the examination of Okara's and Keats' poetry from an ecocritical perspective relevant. Besides, the much that has been written

on Okara's poetry remains disturbingly skewed in favour of political concerns; we are yet to fully come to terms with this poet's environmental responsibility. Therefore, there is the need to appraise Okara's ecofriendly poems to espouse what they say about transformations that have occurred in the natural environmental biosphere as a result of human activities. This is also Keats' stance. Thus, a reading of Okara's and Keats' poems, *The Fisherman's Invocations* and *Ode* is premised on their ecopoetics. One cardinal distinguishing feature of imaginative composition on their poetry is the dramatization of the environmental crisis in the environment. Often, the depiction is deeply political in calling attention to the environmental crisis. It is, therefore, difficult for the poets to turn away from such a pervasive problem, which clearly puts human and nonhuman problem, which may result in the decimation of countless animals and fish species. Second, the natural 'greens' is dying because of the harmful substances discharged into it. These are the points which Okara and Keats are making. Okara specifically and vividly portrays this in the poem, 'One Night at Victoria Beach'. The entire poem is replete with what may be described as bioimagery; imagery drawn from the natural ecological world. This is a conscious attempt by the poet to relate to the environment, and it further emphasizes the poet's worries about man's relationship to nonhuman life in the environment. In fact, Okara even questions the mindless hewers of the trees which constitute protective covers to the earth's ecology: 'for fruits and roots denting the/ uprooter's spades. And I dreamed the / uprooters tired and limp, leaning on my roots' (lines 19 - 21). Here, plants are figured as victims of man's unrestrained consumption; part of man's onslaught on virtually everything in the environment.

CHAPTER FOUR

ECO-CONSCIOUSNESS AND ECO-FRIENDLINESS IN CHRISTOPHER OKIGBO'S COLLECTIONS - *HEAVENSGATE* (1962) AND WORDSWORTH'S COLLECTIONS - *POEMS IN TWO VOLUMES* (1807): A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

4.1 Introduction

Studies have shown that literary analysis from the perspective of ecological considerations is taking the lead in literary establishment. The various natural disasters happening in various parts of the world have attracted the huge attentions of, especially, the literary critics. To delve into the evolutionary trend of ecocriticism would do a little to address the kernel of the present study.

According to Glotfelty (1966:198) eco-consciousness is an attempt to examine nature as something that is real, something that is having life of its own, different from the life seen from an anthropocentric perspective. This walks hand in hand with eco-friendliness. In this regard, nature is privileged, brought to the forefront of human consciousness so that nature transcends the idea of a mere concept. In the new thinking, the shift in consciousness regarding the relationship between man and nature, Elder suggests that what is required is 'to decentre human' and give nature 'back its subjectivity' (Elder 1996:669). This approach is necessitated by what has been considered man's self-centered attitude to matters of the environment. According to Snyder, there is the notion, albeit an erroneous one, 'that human beings are so special that the earth exists for our comfort and disposal alone'. The problem is that humans conduct their affairs to the detriment of the environment, and therefore have failed to recognize the need for the common survival of human and nonhuman elements alike. Fromm (2011:263) articulates this idea quite clearly in the essay 'From Transcendence to Obsolescence: A Road Map'. Thus he states:

The roots of his (man's) being are in the earth; and he has failed to see this because Nature, whose effects on man were formerly immediate, is now

mediated by technology so that it appears that technology and not Nature is actually responsible for everything.

Fromm's argument is that, driven by technology and industrialization, man has failed to fully appreciate the place of nature in his natural environment – together with his insatiable, self-centered and destructive appropriation of nonhuman life in the environment is driving man's natural environment to stop nurturing and start killing. For this reason, it is expedient to reexamine the reciprocal relationship between man and the environment. Thus, part of the motivation for an eco-centered literature, Elder has said, is to extend 'human morality to the non-human world...' (229). This would make it possible for the eco-consciousness of the whole earth'. Clearly, then the ecocritical literature is one which responds to the problem of the environment. In the insight of Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm, an earth –centered literary work depicts how 'human culture is connected to the physical world, affecting it and affected by it' (XIX).

In synthesis of various ecocritical perspectives, Hubert Zapf, among others, identifies the sociopolitical, cultural and anthropological and ethical perspectives as common orientations. Of these, the sociopolitical dimensions seem relatively more connected to a broad range of concerns at the heart of the literature of the environment. According to Zapf, from the perspectives of the sociopolitical, literary texts are deemed eco-friendly if they pay 'attention to natural phenomena with regard to their degree of environmental awareness, their recognition of diversity, their attitude to nonhuman forms of life, or their awareness of the interconnectedness between local and global ecological issues'. A critical study of selected Okigbo and Wordsworth would show the fact that both poets are eco-conscious and eco-friendly. Given the world'speculiar history, Zapf conceptualization – the sociopolitical paradigm bears more relevance to both African and English literature of the environment, going by William Slaymaker's study of the poets' response

to the subject. That notable poets like Okigbo and Wordsworth have been engaged with the environment in similar ways is not in doubt. However, because of the paucity of criticism on African eco-literature, we are yet to fully reckon with the treatment of the environment in our literatures. Available literature suggests that as noted by Slaymaker, making the connection between the sociopolitical and the ecological in the criticism of African and English eco-centered literature will yield better insights. Okigbo and Wordsworth's eco-centered poems belong to a body of works in which ecological concerns are bound up with sociopolitical themes. Both are affected by the feeling that humans have 'given their hearts away/ a sordid boom'. In each of their published volumes of poetry, there are poems that speak to environmental issues. Okara and Wordsworth vivify the natural world so that the poems foreground nature; the privilege ecocentric values and call attention to the myriad of human-induced environmental problems bedeviling humans in their environments.

4.2 Eco-Consciousness and Ecopoetics in Okigbo's *Heavensgate* (1962) and Wordsworth's *Poems in Two Volumes* (1807): A Thematic and Stylistic Comparisons and Contrasts

Okigbo, though short lived, made a great impact in the Nigerian poetry. He would not just be remembered as the socioeconomic and sociopolitical poet but greatly as the ecopoet or eco-conscious poet. Okigbo's poetry career came to a great limelight when he was awarded but declined the first prize for poetry at the 1966 Festival of the Negro Arts in Dakar, Senegal. Okigbo's efforts to launch a publishing company with the novelist, Chinua Achebe came to an abrupt end when he was killed while fighting in the war for Biafran independence from Nigeria.

Okigbo published three volumes of poetry during his short life. *Heavensgate* (1962), *Limits* (1964) and *Silences* (1965). His collected poems appeared posthumously in

1971 under the title, *Labyrinths*, with *Path of Thunder*. His poems are highly personal, richly symbolic renderings of his experiences. Kuper, (1995:831) observes that Okigbo weaves images of his native Igbo landscape into works that are often obscure or allusive but intensely evocative. Okigbo became the widely translated of many Nigerian poets.

On the other hand, Wordsworth was a major Romantic poet who has been considered as a forerunner of English Romanticism. His view towards Nature and treatment of Nature have supported his position as an important icon of ecocritical studies. Wordsworth's fame lies in the general belief that he has been viewed as a Nature poet who saw Nature superior to humans. In other words, his views about Nature and his poems seek to heal the long-forgotten wounds of Nature. Therefore, this chapter is an attempt to highlight the Wordsworth's selected poems in the light of ecocriticism in order to shed light on the poet's cautious views about the interdependence of man and his natural environment and then compare him with his Nigerian counterpart; thus, purging them of the unjust labels tagged to them as sociopolitical and self-centered poets. Accordingly, this chapter also takes into account the importance of the reciprocal relationship between man and his natural environment as the major constituents of a vast ecosystem and helps the readers grow ecologically and achieve tranquility in an era, suffocated by technological pollution as posited by Okigbo and Wordsworth. On this note, Hazarika (2012:31) pointed us to the stance of Wordsworth as follows:

The contribution of Wordsworth's poetry towards ecological consciousness is advocated by ecocriticism today. He rejects the human domination over nature and listens to nature's voice. What distinguishes Wordsworth from other poets is his belief that Nature is not merely a living phenomenon, but a living entity. He ascribes to it the attributes of humanity; life, feeling, thinking and willing.

Okigbo and Wordsworth consider Nature as the best teacher for mankind. One endearing quality of their poetry is their great concern in the scapes – landscapes and seascapes. The poets, being environmentally conscious show the sensitivity to the survival of the environmental creatures. By calling attention to the environmental creatures like animals and trees, the poets invariably play the roles of environmental companions; keen on protecting and appreciating the environment. Okigbo and Wordsworth hold nature at high esteem and idolize it.

In 'Idoto', Okigbo is subsumed by the mysterious power of the natural environment which creates a positive effect on his discerning and appreciative mind, just in the same manner Wordsworth is engrossed in the sight of daffodils. Wordsworth is said to have 'wandered lonely as a cloud' before he is confronted by the sight of beautiful flowers called daffodils. One thing is spectacular between Okigbo and Wordsworth. Both poets are in solitude and are in need of relieving events, sight or warmth or affection. When the poets' eyes confront 'a crowd/ A host of golden daffodils' (as in the case of Wordsworth) and 'watery presence' (as in Okigbo), these are the sources of beauty that hold them in captivity, more or less. The impressions for a long time remain buried in their consciousness such that whenever they are in 'pensive mood' (as in Wordsworth) or 'out of the depths', in deep thought these natural environmental beauties flash upon their 'inward eye' which according to Wordsworth, is the 'bliss of solitude'. The natural environment is found in its pristine quality which makes it paramount for the poets to identify and unite with it. They see nature as a beautiful companion who has been abandoned by her own children to wander about. This is an attitude of man in general towards his natural environment. Man's recklessness towards his natural environment is fully captured in 'Idoto' and 'Daffodils'. As the people who represent

the interest of man in general, the poets are returning to accord to nature, its rightful honour. The return of the poets to their natural environment recalls the return of the prodigal son in the Bible. In each case, the outcome of their trips is fruitless. That is to show that reckless abandonment and total negligence towards the natural environment yields no result to man. Thus, in 'Idoto' the poet pleads:

Before you mother Idoto,
Naked I stand,
Before your watery presence,
A prodigal

Nevertheless, we are not informed by the poet whether like the prodigal son, he left his natural environment with any share of the environmental wealth. What easily comes to mind upon reading the poem is that the dwellers in the natural environment, represented by the poet; disappointed and remorseful, has decided to return to the natural environment. It needs to be pointed out that the poet is not just returning to nature; he is returning to 'lean' and to 'lost in your legend'. In other words, he is returning to deify the natural environment and then cleave to it. The same feeling is replete in Wordsworth's 'The Prelude' where he gives an account of the best part of his education from the Nature. He therefore stated:

One impulse of vernal word
May teach you more of man
Of moral evil and good,
Then all the sages can.

One thing is spectacular in these two poets: they all have learnt that humans cannot survive by detaching themselves from the natural environment. Thus, Okigbo decides to go 'under your power' and then wait 'on bare foot' for reconciliation and directives while Wordsworth has to feel 'One impulse of vernal word' from nature. This is the poet's clarion call to man in general. Man needs to turn away from causing harm to the environment and then maintain a good relationship with his

natural environment. This is the tenet of ecocriticism. The setting of the poems, the riverside captures a pure ecological landscape which is characterized by serenity and tranquility. The persona in Okigbo 'leans on an oil bean' while that of Wordsworth attaches himself to 'Triton', the god of the wind. This is the call of ecocritics to maintain interdependence with the natural world. From the tone of the poets, it is clear that they realize themselves in good time and attach themselves to the natural environment.

In Okigbo's 'Watermaid II', the natural environmental element 'the goddess' whom the poet has reunited with, appears. There is white light all over her and her appearance dazzles the eye. Her presence is as the time it takes for wind to put off the light on a match stick. She returns to the serene environment, the water; leaving the persona with a feeling of tranquility. With these illustrations, it is clear that Okigbo's eco-centered poems belong to a body of works in which ecological concerns are bound up with sociopolitical themes. In each of his published volumes of poetry, there are poems that speak to environmental issues. In 'Watermaid', the environmental elements mentioned, lioness, the waves and the moonlight, dazzling appearance of the watermaid all conjure a strange and fascinating experience of the poet persona towards his natural environment. This experience has a link with Wordsworth's 'The World Is Too Much With Us' where Wordsworth does not just scold humans to cleave to nature but he criticizes them for adopting a lackadaisical attitude towards the natural environment. From the perspective of the poet, mankind is too preoccupied with a host of ephemeral things and has failed to unite and to appreciate the permanent and natural beauty that is inherent in the natural environment. The prevalent poetic mood is lamentative as the poet regrets the fact that man has lost his focus, sense of purpose and direction. Man's eyes are closed that they suppress the natural environment instead of appreciating it. Thus:

The world is too much with us; late and soon,
Getting and spending, we lay waste our powers (lines 1- 2)

From the illustrations given above, the poet castigates man for being engaged in sundry activities, which are diverse and mundane and which have sapped or denied him of his energy as well as his creative and intellectual abilities. Man has become a pawn in the hands of the world, as he engages in different kinds of fruitless endeavours, which make him age quickly, as he trudges on the tortuous and tasking road of life. Subsumed within these lines is the idea that whatever benefits that man gets from the world or life in general is not only artificial but transient.

The poet regrets greatly, that man does not appreciate his natural environment and that man believes that there is no affinity between him and his natural environment by concerning himself with a host of other debilitating issues that have stifled his growth. Thus:

Little we see in nature that is our;
We have given our hearts away, a sordid boon!

There is a description of specific aspects of the natural environment by Okigbo and Wordsworth: the sea and the winds. The poets highlight their vibrancy and vitality as integral units of the natural environment. From the point of view of the poets, the restiveness that foregrounds the vitality and the vibrancy of the natural environmental elements 'the winds....howling at all hours'(line 6 of Wordsworth's 'The World Is Too Much With Us') is also synonymous with gentility, bliss and tranquility. He greatly laments the fact that man is out of tune with the natural environmental elements: 'For this, for everything we are out of tune' (line 8). This is a pathetic situation that limits man intellectually, socially, politically and economically. The thrust of this idea is that any individual who has in-depth knowledge of the natural environment is a complete person.

Okigbo and Wordsworth show a great remorse that man has separated himself from the natural environment to the extent that he is not inspired by the beauty of the environment. The poets do

not mince their words by saying that the serene natural environment does not elicit any pleasurable response from man whereas in the case of the poets, the natural environment is a thing of cleaving and celebration. Thus, in 'Idoto', the poet is 'leaning on oilbean;/ lost in your legends' (lines 6 and 7). Nature uplifts their spirits when they are downcast. In Wordsworth's 'Daffodils', he laments the poor attitude towards nature as follows:

It moves us not. Great God! I'd rather be
A pagan suckled in a creed outworn;
So might I, standing on this pleasant lea,
Have glimpse that would make me less forlorn;
Have sight of Proteus rising from the sea;
Or hear old Triton blow his wreathed horn (lines 9 - 14)

Here, the poet reaffirms in a very emphatic mood that he would not mind being a 'pagan' or an uncivilized, illiterate, heathen without any access to Western education and civilization as long as he is able to have glimpses of the natural environmental elements, which include observing Proteus, the sea-god as he rises from the sea or Triton, the wind god blowing his 'wreathed horn' to summon the wind. Ideally, what the poet is saying is that any time the sea is raging and the wind howling, the environmental elements are manipulating the natural environment in the most beautiful manner that is delightful to a perceptive lover of the natural environment. The poet showcases the beauty of the natural environment, which has a positive effect on the discerning and appreciative mind. In the natural environment, there is a sense of serenity that epitomizes purity. The natural environment is not artificial and its undefiled quality makes it a haven of peace that is indispensable to the existence of man.

From the analysis given above, it is clear that the poets – Okigbo and Wordsworth detest the nonchalant attitudes of mankind towards the natural environment. Undoubtedly, they believe that man does not have a good relationship with his natural environment. They blame and bemoan man

for expending his energy on things, which are not beneficial to his own interests. Apart from this, it is obvious that the poets cannot understand why man is not moved by the awesomeness of his natural environment. Thus, Okigbo realizes his negligence towards nature and returns to it 'to lean' on it while Wordsworth resorts to being an outright pagan hence this will afford him of the opportunity to 'have sight of Proteus rising from the sea'.

Furthermore, the poets do not only focus upon the beauty of the natural environment; they also talk about idolizing it. The natural environment becomes a supernatural essence from which man derives emotional pleasure, stability and satisfaction. Thus, the position of the poets is that outrightly ignoring the natural environment is detrimental to the interest of man. Okigbo and Wordsworth condemn in its entirety, the exploitative tendencies of man towards his environment. They have discovered that man has consistently and consciously expended himself psychologically, intellectually, physically and spiritually to the detriment of the natural environment. They regret the fact that the whole essence of man is so much subsumed within the ambits of the world and the different spheres of human activity to the extent that man does not see any relationship between himself and the natural environment. The prevailing idea that is projected is that man has found it extremely difficult to extricate himself from the lures of the world that he continues to lust after.

There is an easy and accessible language employed by the poets – Okigbo and Wordsworth to pass their messages across to the reader. The recurrent moods found in the poets are lamentative, eco-melancholic and repentant. These reflect the poets' disenchantment with man and the demoralizing effect of man's carefree attitude towards his natural environment. The following lines from Wordsworth's 'The World Is Too Much With Us' portray these facts:

Little we see in nature that is ours;

We have given our hearts away, a sordid boon!...
For this, for everything, we are out of tune;
It moves us not. Great God! I'd rather be
A pagan suckled in a creed outworn;

Stylistically, Wordsworth and Okigbo employ a great deal of synecdoche, personification, apostrophe, classical allusion, alliteration and enjambment. In line 3 of 'The World Is Too Much With Us', the poet-persona asserts: 'We have given our hearts away'. The word 'hearts', represents humans, whose whole worldview or essence has become ensnared in different aspects of human activity to the detriment of his natural environment. Throughout the poem, the poet makes use of personification, which is when the attributes of a human being are given to an abstract concept, inanimate object or animal. In line 1, the world is personified to show its pervasive presence and influence on man. In lines 5, the sea is again personified. It supposedly has a bosom that it bares to the moon. In lines 6, 'The winds' are 'howling at all hours' with the word 'howling' representing the sound made by the wind. The poet also uses apostrophe to reveal his intense and deeply felt emotions. In line 9, the poetic persona exclaims, 'Great God!' He is addressing nature directly in this part of the poem to show his great bewilderment and surprise at the different attitude of people towards the natural environment. In the last two lines of the poem, the poetic persona makes reference to two Greek gods, Proteus and Triton. Thus because Proteus and Triton are gods found in ancient Greek mythology, it is possible for us to postulate that Wordsworth has used classical allusion to describe how supernatural beings influence the course of nature. The poetic device of alliteration, which is the repetition of the same consonant sounds in two or more words on the same line, is used in at least one of the lines, line 5: 'This Sea that bares her bosom to the moon'. Enjambment, which entails a situation whereby an idea that the poet begins in one line runs on into the next line are seen in lines 9 and 10. For instance, an idea that begins in line 9, 'I'd rather be' runs into line 10 'A pagan suckled in a creed outworn.' These are similar to Okigbo's

rich uses of apostrophe and personification. Instances are seen in these expressions: ‘Before you, mother Idoto,/ naked I stand’, ‘the armpit dazzle’, ‘the stars have departed,/ and I – where am I?’ etc.

Okigbo and Wordsworth deliver to us, the visions of possible disharmonies between humanity and his natural environment. Unlike Romantic philosophers like Fichte or Hegel, who argued that the world is entirely a creation of the mind, Wordsworth usually wrote of the natural environment as something with an independent reality of its own. The poets reject the exploitative domination promoted by their respective patriarchal societies; they listen to the natural environmental needs and its ‘voice’. They also propose that their culture’s relationship within its own community and with the natural world be one of spiritual reciprocity and nurturing, physical interconnectivity. In the words of McKuick (2000:128):

Wordsworth struggles to break from patriarchal and imperial attitudes in an attempt to promote a symbiotic relationship with the natural world. These patriarchal and imperial attitudes, widely accepted by Wordsworth’s social and artistic contemporaries, often legitimated exploitative ecological utilitarianism.

As expressed in Wordsworth, environmental affinity is portrayed in Okigbo’s ‘For He Was a Shrub among the Poplars’. Here, the poet calls the attention of the environmental dwellers to make the ecological environment ‘green’. The poet through the expressions ‘And out of the solitude...A green cloud above the forest’ (lines 11 and 18) frowns at the mindless act of deforestation without a complementary programme of reforestation. The poet not only express the intensity of the grievous harm done to nature but also suggests that it is human beings who ultimately bear the brunt of the slash-and-burn onslaught. Thus, human beings become the ‘Horsemen of the apocalypse’ (line 14). His green world having been ruined communes with the mysterious beings ‘Straining thin among the echoes’ (line 10). If nature that supplies the materials that sustain us is

destroyed, it is humanity that will face the great problems especially the problems arising from depletion of earth's resources and terrible adverse effects of climatic change and global warming. In the insight of Okigbo, if the water is polluted, it is people that will drink poison. Whatever violence is visited on the earth, like a boomerang, bounces back to attack the pride-propelled human aggressors who unleashed it, for the earth needs 'more roots' and 'more sap to grow to sunlight/ Thirsting for sunlight' (lines 3 - 5).

Thus, there is a contrast in Wordsworth's 'Lines Written in Early Springs'. Here, Wordsworth, unlike his counterpart. Okigbo sees himself as one having offended all around him by abandoning nature; Wordsworth rather sees it that all around him offends him. Thus he expressed using the 'fair works' of the natural environment while sitting in a grove hearing the songs of many birds. The sanctity of the natural environment is presented undeniably to the poet; the birds sing, the flowers grow, and both appear to take a joy in living. The poet reiterates his belief in the universe as alive and in a state of continuous pleasure. The natural environment is so much alive that he finds the natural objects in possession of human senses. And 'tis my faith that every flower/Enjoys the air its breathes'. The budding trigs are animated, spreading the healthy, fresh, breezy air. The sense of the natural delight is so overwhelming that it throws into something, which the poet has been concerned. He is troubled because humanity has alienated himself from the natural environmental bliss, 'nature's holy play'. For this change in the balance between man and his natural environment, man alone is to blame.

'Lines Written In Early Spring' exposes us to the sense of alienation. We find the poet mindful of the marring effects of human cognition and action upon the environment. We also find that community is repeatedly represented as a product of such life. To Wordsworth, human beings' relationships with the natural environment needs to re-forge a broken bond. He rejects the

assumptions that humans should dominate natural environment and selfishly exploit the natural world for personal profit. Human beings should not alienate themselves from the natural world but should identify with it by being socially and environmentally progressive.

Just as Wordsworth rejects the assumptions that humans should dominate natural environment and selfishly exploit it, but rather, they should show some level of consciousness, Okigbo showcases this great sense of ecocritical consciousness in the latter part of 'The Passage'. These are seen in his depiction of the natural creatures. The orange grove or an orchard so captures his rapt attention that he now pictures himself as a solitary bird, 'a wagtail' who has a difficult story to tell, 'tangle-wood-tale' and has to lament his abandonment to nature. Thus:

Me to the orangery
solitude invites
a wagtail, to tell
the tangled-wood-tale;
a sunbird, to mourn...
Rain and sun in single combat;
on one leg standing,
in silence at the passage,
the young bird at the passage (lines 18 - 23)

The lines above describe Okigbo as a lover of fauna; his encounter with the natural creature, the bird, depicts this. The poetic persona must have a very powerful inclination with nature to have been able to capture the sunbird in its euphoria. Through this, we have a graphic picture of how tranquil the bird is. It is 'standing in silence'. It does not behave hastily, but sits calmly with some measure of grace and gentility. The same calm and lack of anxiety in other natural creature as the bird is also captured by both Wordsworth and Keats. This is an ideal environment the poet persona looks forward to. The bird is perched on a spray which is a slender branch such as most orange tree branches are. The poetic persona devotes so much attention to the appreciation of the sunbird in its natural environment. At this

point, the bird becomes the symbol of nature just as Triton is a symbol of nature in Wordsworth's 'The World Is Too Much With Us'. He portrays the bird as a gentle creature, whose dignity is best seen in its natural environment. Senanu et al (eds) (1999:176) states that:

The image or symbol of the bird as the young poet who is struggling to acquire his own style and achieve his own distinctive voice is one of the most significant in this sequence of the poem that makes the reader see the poet as the part of nature.

The euphoria enjoyed by the bird in its natural environment captures the attention and captivated the poet-persona that he stands still to appreciate the bird. He shows this using enjambments especially in lines 22 – 23.

Similarly, in 'The Solitary Reaper', Wordsworth expresses that man has totally alienated himself from his natural environment. He vividly shows that the natural environment is solitary but yet impactful. In 1803, William Wordsworth in the company of his sister, Dorothy and Samuel Coleridge – his life-long friend and fellow writer went on a tour of Scotland. He was said to have been thrilled hearing one of the Scottish languages called Gaelic which he could not understand. Earlier, his friend Thomas Wilkinson, had also visited the Scottish Highlands and had recorded an account of his travels entitled *Tours to the British Mountains*. It was the beauty and solitary nature of the highlands that inspired Wordsworth in writing the poem.

The poem centers on the solitary nature or the absolute tranquility and calmness found in the natural environment. Wordsworth shows that the natural environment creates the impression of life– time experience. Wordsworth captures this in the following lines:

Behold her, single in the field
Yon solitary Highland Lass!
Reaping and singing by herself;
Stop here or gently pass!

Alone she cuts and binds the grin,
And sings a melancholy strain,
O listen! For the vale profound
Is overflowing with sound.

In the lines above, the poet invites us to observe a lone female farm-hand in a highland area of Scotland. This female, whom he describes as a 'Highland Lass', while cutting corn or wheat is heard singing in the quiet environment of a mountainous 'Highland setting'. It is either one stops to listen to it or one is compelled to pass gently because of the expression of sorrow in her voice. The poet-speaker urges us to listen to this song whose sound overflows the valley. The poet believes and identifies with the rustic natural environment which is tranquil; thus, he is captured and enraptured by the serenity of the mountainous environment. Whatever may have been the theme of the female farm-hand's song, she sings it as if it 'could have no ending' (line 26). There is so much passion in her voice; so much concentration of feeling in it. The poet-speaker can only listen to the song 'motionless and still'. When he decides to leave by mounting 'up the hill'. He goes with the music of this song and it remained unforgettable.

Wordsworth in this poem, proves that he is a constituent part of his environment though he laments that it has been recklessly abandoned by humans. He paints the picture of the natural environment in action. The act of farm-reaping in an upland area, bordered by valleys, evokes the clear image of the natural environment. The 'welcome notes' of the highland lass, only comparable to those of the nightingale or the spring-time warbling notes of the cuckoo-bird on the lonely scattered islands, 'among the farthest Hebrides' bespeak of the natural environment. In spite of the fact that the poet-speaker does not understand the Gaelic language in which the lass sings, the environmental elements enables him to be enraptured by her voice. The environment in which he is prepares him to guess at the meaning of the 'plaintive numbers flow'. The experience of the environment is

usually long lasting. Thus, the music in my heart I bore/ long after it was heard no more. On the whole, Wordsworth shows that human beings alienate or detach themselves from the serenity of the natural environment. Thus, he presents the natural environment as a virgin woman; not explored. Thus, the Highland lass is left alone in the highland. That is why her song is said to be 'melancholy strain' which fills 'the vale profound' to the brim and even overflows it. This demonstrates that she is singing about something sorrowful. This spontaneous overflow of powerful emotions captured or recollected in tranquility is the major concern of Wordsworth in this poem. We were told in the poem that 'alone she cuts and binds the grain' (line 5). The poet-speaker merely steals on her as she does not notice his presence or that of any object.

Like in Okigbo's 'Idoto', Wordsworth employs the use of the dramatic lyric. A dramatic lyric is a poem in which a lyric speaker addresses another person as if it were the personal utterance of the poet. A dramatic lyric is different from a dramatic monologue because in the latter there is a listener who has decided not to say anything in return. Secondly, the lyric speaker reveals his temperament and character as he/she speaks. In dramatic lyric there is really no designated listeners; and the speaker does not reveal himself or herself. Thus, in Wordsworth's 'The Solitary Reaper', the speaker urges us to 'behold her'. In Okigbo's 'Idoto', the speaker says 'Before you, mother Idoto,/ naked I stand'. This presupposes that there is an auditor(hearer) in both poems but he/she is not identified in each case. The 'Highland Lass' is not aware that anybody is observing her which is perhaps why she sings with such reckless abandonment. We are told that 'the vale profound/ is overflowing' (line 8) with the sound of her 'melancholy strain' (line 6). The rhetorical question, 'will no one tell me what she sings?' presupposes that the audience may be more than one. Perhaps, they the 'weary bands/ of travelers in some shady haunt' (lines 10 - 11), whom the poet had earlier referred to. The maiden singer is not even aware of the lyric speaker's presence: he

only saw her singing at her work. When the lyric speaker says, 'I listened, motionless and still', he is addressing a certain audience not too far from him. In 'Idoto' the being addressed does not make any response to show that a voice is really pleading to her even though the poet-speaker says to have 'lost in your legend' (line 6).

Consequently, in 'I Wandered Lonely As a Cloud', Wordsworth takes a quality time to appraise and appreciate the natural environment which man has neglected in general. He starts by appreciating the natural setting where the daffodils are lined up. The entire natural setting of the lake where the daffodils are arranged in their millions captures his rapt attention. The lake flows in waves for 'the waves beside them danced'. This is, no doubt, naturally serene environment for the poet feels happy and greatly fulfilled whenever he lies in his couch in 'a pensive mood' and the sight of those beautiful flowers appears once again 'upon the inward eye/ Which is the bliss of solitude'. As he is faced with the remembrance of a moment of his sight confronting the beautiful splendor of the natural environment, his heart fills with pleasure and he 'dances with the daffodils'. He wishes that man in general should view his natural environment with the same lenses he views it. Thus, apart from the natural environment painted by the poet, there is also the disappearance of sadness and loneliness and their replacement with joy, animation, cheeriness and pleasure. He shows that the natural environment is a source of healing, gaiety, cheerfulness and sprightliness.

Thus:

For oft, when on my couch I lie
In vacant or in pensive mood,
They flash upon that inward eye
Which is the bliss of solitude;
And then my heart with pleasure fills,
And dances with the daffodils (lines 19 - 24).

The motif of liveliness ensured by the sighting of the daffodils re-echoes forever in the mind of the poet. The natural environmental element –the daffodils is ever lively and serves as the source of liveliness to the poet. Thus, the ‘host of the golden daffodils’ is said to be ‘fluttering and dancing in the breeze’. The flowers are said to ‘toss their heads in sprightly dance’. The waves beside the flowers danced ‘but they (flowers)/Out-did the sparkling waves in glee’. All these have implications for the liveliness of the poet because the poet himself greatly admires that ‘ A poet could not be gay/in such jocund company’. To him, the natural environment is the source for eternal peace and liveliness. This claim is captured in all the lines of the poem.

Furthermore, Wordsworth presents the natural environment as a healer. The poet-persona is presented as one who may have been sick within; sick of solitude. This can be exemplified in his statement that he is just wandering like ‘a lonely crowd’. In his cleaving with his natural environment as is found in Stanza IV, he is much better, much cheerful and healthy. He is now in a better position to share to us, an experience of his sick state and testify how nature has cured him. The sickness of wandering takes him to a lake where he comes in contact with his healer, ‘a host of golden daffodils’. No other thing can cure his loneliness until he bursts into the horde of daffodils. As one with a burden, the burden of loneliness, he could only look and absorb the beauty of the daffodils which have just sprout ‘beside the lake, beneath the trees’. (line 5). The same feeling of having been healed by inclining to nature is seen in Okigbo’s ‘Watermaid II’. The poet persona states that the Watermaid is ‘match-flare in wind’s breath’ (line 9) after her encounter with nature.

One spectacular feature that endears the poems of Okigbo and Wordsworth as ecocritical poems is their balance style; replete with natural imagery. Okigbo and Wordsworth carefully employ the use of balance with the environmental elements in their poems. Here, the poets are very much concerned with balancing their words and thoughts to create the imagery of nature as they progress

with the poems. Some of these words and phrases serve as parallels to each other. Examples are seen as follows:

1. Wordsworth:

vales/ hills line 2

a crowd/ A host line 3 and 4

Beside the lake/beneath the trees line 5

The waves/ sparkling waves lines 13 and 14

2. Okigbo:

armpit/dazzle line 2

brief/breath line 8

sinking/ungathered line 14

Furthermore, Wordsworth shows his great sense of ecocritical concern in his 'Lines Composed upon Westminster Bridge' while Okigbo shows his in 'The Stars Have Departed'. The poems portray deep ecocritical love and inclination towards the natural environment. The poets passionately appreciate the great splendour of the natural world found in the tranquil Westminster Bridge and in rich Enugu 'crouching hills'. These ecocritical beauty endowed in the natural environment is soul enriching but the major constraints of the poet-speakers lie in the fact that humans have neglected these striking splendour found in the natural environment. As parts and parcel of the natural environment, the poets wonder if these pleasurable responses which they experience also affect other people living in the environment. Thus, 'Earth has not anything to show more fair' (line 1). Just as Wordsworth laments in 'The World Is Too Much With Us', the fact that humans are out of tune with his natural environment, makes them pawns in the hands of the Nature. Without mincing their words, the poets maintain that any individual who fails to appreciate

the splendour of the natural environment and then unite with it is not a wise person. These points are made explicit by Wordsworth as follows:

Dull would he be of soul who could pass by
A sight so touching in its majesty:
This city now doth, like a garment, wear
The beauty of the morning; silent, bare

The poets frown greatly at humans' negative attitudes. Humans have ill-treated their natural environment thus distancing themselves from Nature to the extent that they are not moved by the great natural endowments found in the environment. As far as Wordsworth and Okigbo are concerned, humans are nonchalant towards the natural environment. That is why they fail to maintain good relationship with the environment. It amazes the poets that they cannot understand why humans are not moved by the awesomeness of the natural environment. Unequivocally, Wordsworth and Okigbo are saying that the natural environment does not elicit any positive emotional responses from humans whereas in the case of the poets, the beauty inherent in the natural environment uplifts and reawakens their spirits especially when they gaze at them.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

Literature has relationship between both the natural and the social environment. This study examined the eco-consciousness in selected poems of Wordsworths, Keats, Okigbo and Okara . The poems examined include: “The World Is too much with us”, “Solitary Reaper”, “Ode to the Nightingale”, “Idoto”, “Watermaid” and “The Call of the River Nun”. One spectacular feature that cuts across the selected poems is the passionate love and appreciation of the natural environment. Their unflinching love for the natural environment is seen in their calls for environmental love and affinity thus advocating for nature; using poetry as the major instrument. Their eco-consciousness is premised on the fact that ecological or environmental problems are some of the major problems facing the world in these contemporary times. These problems come as a result of environmental negligence, prejudice and hazards. These literary artists, through their poems, portray how they are meaningfully committed in proffering solutions to environmental problems. They show vividly, that literature liaises with the environment to elicit the splendour and some pleasurable responses from the natural environment. Through their poems, they subject our attentions to see literature as an instrument which endows us to feel a sense of guilt for abandoning the splendour of the natural environment and to come to appreciate nature in the real sense of the word.

In the authorial voice, they show that humans, through their harmful activities upon the environment have contributed to various natural disasters that ravage them today in their environment. They totally condemn some modern activities which sap and deny humans of their love and entanglements with their natural environment. These are not just harmful to human

beings themselves but are detrimental to the natural environments. Thus, there is an advocacy for the recognition of nature as friend, companion and healer.

In this contemporary time, most of the literary critics focus on the injustice of such things as locating a waste plant near people who are too poor to oppose it. These are the major focus of the selected poets. Aspects like the landscape, seascape and heavenly bodies are frequent images in their poems. We have also 'Metascape' and 'Lifescape.' Lifescape features are represented in degrees of consciousness in a living essence like man, flora and fauna. If in a human being, lifescape could express inner dispositions like character modified by mental stability, environment, parents, society and culture. Visible or outer dispositions could be carriage, taste, introvert or extrovert tendencies. Metascape on the other hand has an esoteric learning. Its abstractions are centered on the supernatural and mystical. In this respect, environmental concern has, no doubt, walked its ways into the mainstream of the literary discourse.

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