

Environmental Education for Empowerment in Michael Anthony's the Year in San Fernando: an Ecocritical Perspective

¹, Ismaila Oricha Azeez, ², T.A.N. Abubakar, E.S. Akuso, ³, E.O. Abah

¹: Department of English, Federal College of Education, Okene, Nigeria.

^{2,3}: Department of English and Literary Studies, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, Nigeria.

-----ABSTRACT-----

This paper focuses on environmental education for empowerment in Michael Anthony's The Year in San Fernando (1965). It examines the interactions between man and environment that have increasingly become complex such that the duo are now in serious danger of survival. Environmental issues such as flood, earthquake, deforestation, global warming and volcanic eruption as challenges abound that demand interdisciplinary and intelligent articulation of awareness education for long lasting solutions. The study sets out to create ecological consciousness making use of ecocriticism to interpret the primary text of this study. It is premised on the belief that to empower readers with adequate education to resolve the nature-culture conflict, the exploitation of ecocriticism, a multidisciplinary field is imperative. This paper, by way of conclusion, observes that man's perception of nature only for economic value is one good cause of environmental problems. It is therefore, recommended that literary writers adjust their literature aperture to capture the environmental implication of human activities in their creative works as a way of engineering the soul of man towards environmentalism.

KEYWORDS: *Environment, Ecocriticism, Nature, Education, Culture.*

Date of Submission: 26 December 2013



Date of Publication: 15 April 2014

I. INTRODUCTION

Interactions between man and his environment are as old as human existence. The problem of how to manage those relationships has today been transformed by the increasing level, rate and complexity of the interactions. The world's earth system has suffered rapid and serious environmental devastations as a result of man and nature interactions. Literature is a reflection of the prevailing circumstance at a particular period in the history of the society where it is written and also concerns itself with issues of its contemporary disciplines like Environmental science, philosophy, Anthropology, Ethics, etc. Apart from describing issues, it offers thoughts that are provoking, thereby inspiring action-based articulations. Nature-oriented literature, in line with that, allies its thought process in relation to the natural world and built environment. This type of writing that deals with man's relation to the environment is a stable category of literary inquiry called ecocriticism. The global environmental challenge is a product of the increasing dependence of human development on nature. It portends therefore, that self-conscious, intelligent environmental education, no doubt, is the crux challenge confronting humanity of which literature should play a decisive role using ecotheory.

Environmental Issues

According to Baballo (2012),

Environmental studies are (sic) the academic field which systematically studies human interaction with the environment. It is a broad interdisciplinary field of study that includes the natural environmental and built environment and the set of relationships between them... and the interactions between human beings and nature. Environmental education provides an integrated, qualitative and interdisciplinary approach to the study of the environmental system (130).

The importance of environmental studies is to educate and enlighten us about the conservation and protection of the natural environment from pollution and destruction. The increasing quantity and complexity of pollution and degradation threaten not just the survival of the earth, but the entire ecosystem. Baballo goes ahead to identify the motive that, in the 1980s and 1990s, made environmental education to be given active attention:

- (i) the need for a multi-disciplinary approach to analyze complex environmental problems;
- (ii) the arrival of substantive environmental laws requiring specific environmental protocols of investigation;
- (iii) the growing public awareness of a need for action in addressing environmental problems;
- (iv) environmental issues being of international importance;
- (v) problems crop in the wake of development;
- (vi) explosive increase in population and
- (vii) need for an alternative solution, to save humanity from extinction and need for wise planning of development strategies (131)

To corroborate Baballo (2012), Enger and Smith (2006) lend their voice: “environmental issues involve concerns about science, nature, health, employment, profit, politics, ethics and economics” (5). The story of man’s struggle with nature is as old as the time man was expelled from the Garden of Eden into the wilderness where only “their labour and pain could redeem”(Cronnon,1995,70). There is a natural endowment of personal space between man and nature. The individual’s personal space mediates in the relationship that exists between the individual members of the ecosystem, and also in their relationship to the whole. Acholonu (1995) quotes Al Gore’s description of the Chaos theory to give credence and elucidate the stated reality: Certain critical boundaries define the overall pattern (of dynamic equilibrium of nature) and cannot be exceeded without threatening the loss of its equilibrium. When large changes force it beyond these boundaries, the system suddenly shifts into an entirely new equilibrium: it adopts a new pattern with new boundaries (11)

The critical boundaries are natural; not the traditional, conventional physical boundaries demarcating one individual from another in the ecosystem. Since it is not the man built boundary that regulates the interactions of the members of the ecosystem, it means there is something ethical or moral about it. When man crosses the critical personal space in his interactions with the environment, he transgresses the law, and there is bound to be man-environment conflict. Modern man’s disrespect for the critical boundaries emanated from the predatory notions of “survival of the fittest” and that “the end justifies the means. Man is least aware that a contrary perception of the notions in principle and practice would keep man in harmony with the natural environment. Man’s self-deceit hinged on the, Newtonian and Darwinian theories of physics and evolution which have influenced modern civilization, philosophy, politics and economics gave man the enormous impression that nature is there to be conquered and subdued by man, and that natural resources are for man’s comfort and are limitless (Acholonu, 1995;15).

The 20th century civilization was premised on those notions to establish the culture of exploitation of the weak by the strong which found nature as easy prey. It involves the exploitation of the natural resources by man for his greed to oppress other human beings and degrade the environment. This reminds us once more of the pithy remark by Mahatma Ghandi (cited in Enger. and Smith 2006): “the earth provides enough to satisfy every person’s need, but not every person’s greed” (24). The greedy quest that has made man to tamper with nature has resulted in the fast disappearance of forests because of logging and bush burning, for example, the forest fires that raged Mexico in 1998, polluting the air quality in Texas. River are polluted with chemicals from industrial waste. Heavy amount of liquefied gas, natural by-products from petroleum refineries by man pollute the environment. The by-products are not recycled to benefit man, but burnt off, thus contributing to global warming and polluting the biosphere. There is concentration of carbondioxide in the atmosphere because of over population, lack of proper sanitation strategy, exploding landfills, industrial dumping of waste, etc.

Recent example that Itua (2013) uncovered was a hazardous waste of used electronic\ electrical equipment that found an entry into the Tin Can Island Container Terminal, Lagos, from Europe in a ship, MV Marivia. This is not, from a global perspective, short of environmental racism/injustice. Western countries must, in the interest of humanity desist forthwith from using African as landfill for hazardous waste (electronic and the likes): e-scrap, e-surplus, e-junk and e-discard. To desist from the exportation of hazardous waste is a decisive step towards enhancing a global green economy. The pertinent rhetorical question is, can man escape the consequences of his actions that have caused disequilibrium? The resultant effect may cause such unfriendly attitude towards nature conflicts with the natural order of things. The earth tends to fights back through volcanic eruptions, flood, epidemics, landslide, global warming, etc. It is discernable from the thrust of the Chaos Theory that in the relationship between man and nature, man has intruded into nature’s personal space. The chaos go beyond natural disasters to social malaise, political uneasiness, racial discriminations, etc. Acholonu (1995), in her immortal words gives a synopsis of the cause of environmental problems:

Our present modern civilization is founded on the ideology of non-conformity with nature. Our civilization has placed more emphasis on fighting wars thus producing a preponderance of technologies that “subdue” “conquer” and “destroy”, rather than those that cooperate with nature’s primary rule of “live and let live” (29).

Ecocriticism

To interpret environmental issues implicated in the novel, Enger and Smith (2006) identify three primary theories of moral responsibility to the environment: The Anthropocentric theory which is human-centred sees the environmental responsibility to be derived from human interest only; the Biocentric theory being the broadest form of life-centred theory claims “all forms of life have an inherent right to exist”; and Ecocriticism:

Maintains that the environment deserves direct moral consideration and not one that is merely derived from human (and animal) interest. In ecocriticism, it is suggested that the environment has direct rights, that it qualifies for moral personhood, that it is deserving of a direct duty, and that it has inherent worth. The environment, by itself, is considered to be on a moral par with humans” (2).

Based on the demand of this work, ecocriticism would be the adopted theory of moral responsibility desirable to educate, thus empowering the people to combat environmental issues. Lawrence Buell’s (2005) venture into the pairing of literature and environment in the recent past was timely, considering the increasing rate of environmental challenges. His books, *The Environmental Imagination and Writing for an Endangered World*, offer critical engagement into the growing literary field of ecocriticism. Ecocriticism, the field that concerns its study with the intersection of literature and environment has been described by many scholars. According to Glotfelty (cited in Alam 2011), it is “the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment” (42). Sharing the same intent with Glotfelty, Tosic (2006) posits; “ecocriticism is concerned with the relationship between literature and environment or how man’s relationships with his physical environment are reflected in literature” (44). Heise (1999) tends to be elaborate:

Ecocriticism analyses the ways in which literature represents the human relations to nature at particular moments of history, what values are assigned to nature and why, and how perceptions of the natural shape literary tropes and genres (1089).

Ecocritics argue that priority attention, based on the definitions of the concept, be placed on environmental factors in literature. They claim that in literature, the representation of the environment in the formation of culture should not be seen as a framing device. In the pursuance of this, ecocritics seek to take the environment as a consideration for analysis. Put differently, ecocriticism focuses on the way in which cultures and textual constructs are themselves conditioned by the environment.

Current interest in environmental challenges began with philosophers such as Henry David Thoreau and Emerson; and scientists like Raphael Carson. It later received emphasis from the organization of the first Earth Day on April 22, 1970. Earth Days afterwards were reiterations and affirmations of the continued commitment to environmental issues (Enger. and Smith, 2006, 5).

The Conceptualization of Nature and Environment in Ecocriticism

The constricted perception of nature to the first wave ecocritics started losing steam when the second wave began to assign meaning broader than that of the first wave which sees nature to consist of the non-human where the interference of man was undesired. It sees place as having only a natural character, having distant relation to populated areas, thus excluding all the inhabitants of such place. The emergence of ecocriticism in the United States of America(USA) was necessitated by the need to study environmental non-fiction referred to as “nature writing”, produced largely in the Western states.

Therefore, first wave ecocriticism was a product of the revived interest in the late twentieth century on natural history. The wave rooted in deep ecology sees human beings and nature as opposed to each other. It advocates environmental criticism that would help protect and preserve the natural environment from the exploitation of human culture. As a result of its rapid growth, ecocriticism is now a complex interdisciplinary field. It therefore becomes problematic to apply the USA type of criticism to other literature that are non-fictional and other environments, and ecological theory, thus preparing another chance for the second wave ecocriticism. The lacuna that first wave glossed over or the new discovery of second wave is to attempt to identify nature as present, though silent in literary texts. Hence, construe environmental representation as a relevant and significant category of literary aesthetics and political analysis. This is done taking cognizance of class, gender, race, as crucial variables in literary texts. This expands the boundaries of the field to include works not necessarily interested in the natural world.

Put differently, with the advent of technological advancement followed by rapid urbanization, the meaning of environment began to get a more sophisticated perception. In the words of Enger and Smith (2006) , “environment is everything that affects an organism during its lifetime” (5). Natural environment could now extend its meaning to human constructed (built) environment which in the first wave had no conceptual realm. This paved the way for a redefinition of the environment by the second wave ecocritics in line with urban areas complexity. The shift of focus ecocriticism has experienced might appear as so substantial that first wave loses an ability to contribute to the discourse on environmental issues, whose scope is no longer solely on nature but has incorporated fields of study such as feminism and environmental justice (Kovacik, 2011, 5). The nature-

culture conflict prevalent in the first wave is resolved by the shift in the perception of the environment by the second wave. This is true in that: "Second-wave literary critics no longer saw human beings and the environment as opposed to one another (sic) but instead focused on the ways in which they were interdependent and mutually constitutive" (Buell, 2005, 2).

Environmental Education in *The Year in San Fernando* (1965)

The Year in San Fernando (1965) is partly a graphic autobiographical representation of the author's experiences at the age of twelve years while working for a family. The author, fictionalized as Francis, is sent to San Fernando as a house-help (servant) to Mrs. Chandles. In return, he is to, apart from being fed and clothed, secure the opportunity to attend school. Francis is treated like a slave. The changes in the mood and behaviour of the characters, especially Chandles, Ma, Francis are reflections of the seasons and the natural environment.

The critique of the novel would be well appreciated, if the environmental context or issues of the pre-plantation and post encounter Caribbean is known. The temporal setting of the novel is based on the Caribbean history of colonization, slavery and environmental destruction. The African slaves and the dispossessed West Indians, after the plantation period are left to grope in the harsh and unfavourable socio-economic grid to keep their heads above the water.

Environmental issues are now household knowledge. The earth is dying, and man that is instrumental is ironically dying with it. Ajibade (2012) makes reference to the UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon's warning on the urgent need for environmental educator during the 2012 Rio Earth Summit: "Nature does not wait; nature does not negotiate with human beings" (16). In the light of this admonition, it is obvious that modern civilization, science and technology have not the right disposition to solve environmental crisis. We have no alternative choice but to take refuge in the potency of literature to educate humanity about environmental challenges. Acholonu (1995) identifies three broad categories of pollution afflicting nature: air, water and land pollution. Each of these categories, according to her, is a manifestation of mind pollution. That is, the disposition of the mind when polluted based on "institutionalization of ignorance, mental ineptitude, miseducation and misinformation" (29). In a situation where a man's mind is afflicted, he finds himself at loggerhead with his environment, and even other human beings. Literature should therefore be made to appeal to the intellect and emotions of human beings to empower them to be decisive in revamping the health of the earth. Man should, through the depiction of the unfriendliness between nature and human beings, know that all forms of life have an inherent right to exist. This function of literature in relation to resuscitating the environment is possible because it is capable of inducing the desired emotions in human beings. It is the jolting of people's consciousness to environmental issues that makes Mrs. Chandles to mandate Francis to water the flower plants regularly. Francis, in his own words acknowledges that,

Mainly, she would ask me if I had watered the plants yet, and I would hurry down the steps for the watering can ... The heat of the crop season took such a toll on the flower plants that I had to water them every day. The crispy earth seemed to drink up the water around them(*The Year in San Fernando*,1965,38).

Since literature is to partake actively in environmental education, writers should have some knowledge of environmental science, philosophy, ethics and other related fields so that his foresights and interpretations of environmental issues would guide him\her in resolving the man-nature dualism. Writers are to be aware of man's inordinate quest and the destruction of the environment for economic gains. This is contrary to the aboriginal cultures whose belief systems were in agreement with nature. The modern man, unlike the pre-colonial man,

Sees the environment as an instrument for satisfying his ever increasing lust for possessions.... In the competition to partition nature and ecosystem among these insatiable humans, humanity quickly lost sight of the basic truth that should inspire his relationship with environment, with man and other members of the ecosystem (Acholonu, 1995, 33).

In line with this, Francis narrates his experience of sugar cane harvesting and its subsequent processing for economic motive and the implication of the gas released in polluting the air as he goes to school.

One morning as I walked to school the sugar-cane field would be white with the mist, and in the near parts you could see the workers already chopping down the canes. The Usine Ste Madeleine was only a few miles away, across Navet. Its three giant chimneys were always puffing smoke now, and at nights we could see the lights of the many houses, and if it was quiet, we could hear how the machines crushed the canes (*San Fernando*,40).

The smoke from the chimneys, containing toxins also affects human health. Ecocriticism, the literary field that concerns its examination with the interaction between nature and culture maintains that the environment deserves direct moral consideration and not the one that is got from anthropocentrism, or (that of) animal interest. It is apparent that no industry or company has adopted pollution of the environment as corporate policy, world over. However, literature unwaveringly advocates for the philosophical valuing of the earth, not economic one. The interactions between man and the environment should be based on love, admiration and

respect. This is because, as posited by Gras (2001), "The catastrophe that awaits us is due to anthropocentrism. We ignore nature except as a material resource to serve human ends and, as we continue to exploit nature—arguably our most basic relationship—we take on a bogus position with it, harming both nature and ourselves" (65). This portends a radical shift from the perception of man as a conqueror of nature. Man should see himself as part of nature so that nature should not be seen as economy yielding machine; but a companion in an ecosystem. Philosophers, such as Thoreau and Emerson, according to Enger and Smith (2006), thought of nature as a refuge from economic activity, not as a resource for it" (24).

Moreso, the didactic function of literature with regards to environmental issues is also depicted in the characterization of Mrs. Chandles as she leaves the incandescent bulb switched on, thus affecting Francis' eyes and contributing to global warming. This takes place as Mr. Chandles just arrived Fernando with Francis and Mrs. Chandles welcomes them into her luxurious sitting room, amidst brightness. To take the words from the horses mouth, Francis says: "the light inside the room was dazzlingly bright—my eyes were burning a little from being suddenly in such bright light" (*San Fernando*,13).

With this, Anthony tells us the effect of incandescent bulbs to the human eyes and the heat from it contributing to global warming. The consciousness of the developing countries unlike the West to the quantum of energy they consume is not necessitated by environmental distress awareness. It is to stop them from running the bills. Energy efficiency is now a crucial part of the emerging green economy and lifestyle. That is what Francis' reaction to the bright light signifies and, also the heat from the bulb on climate change. The prospect of energy efficiency lies not just in solving our environmental challenges, but also has pecuniary advantage to humanity. While citing a specific instance, Odogwu (2012) claims that, Energy star, a joint programme of the United States Environmental Protection Agency and the US Department of Energy which helps the citizens to save money and protect the environment through energy efficient products and practices, has results showing the American with the help of the project, saved enough energy in 2010 alone to avoid green house gas emissions equivalent to those from 33 million cars—all while saving nearly \$18bn on their utility bills (21).

Through ecocritical lens, environmental issues which go beyond private conduct to ethic and morality have been raised. This is achieved through the artistic collection of interrelated environmental issues vis-à-vis human activities and interpreting the structure of the interaction to arrive at how the environment is affected and humanity also. The focal point of ecocriticism is to advocate for the consideration of the environment at par with human beings, to be valued and protected. In the pursuance of environmental education for a tranquil ecosystem, writers depict human beings as nature, so that man comes to know that taking care of the environment is taking care of themselves. Man is part and parcel of nature; not just isolated humans whose presence in the environment is to subdue it. Listen to what Mrs. Chandles derives in return for the planting and maintenance of the flower plants in her precinct:

The morning glory flaunted bright red flowers, and the begonias spread out thick and undignified, send up tall flower stalks to overshadow small plants. But the prin anthuriums were the pride of the veranda. These gave Mrs. Chandles much pleasure, and so did the roses The flowers gave brightness to the houses and to the streets (*San Fernando*,89).

Anthony portrays San Fernando as located naturally in a hilly place with untouched vegetational cover. The vegetational covers protect the soil from direct heat from the sun and also from erosion. The hilly nature of the town facilitates quick surface water runoff during raining season. From Francis' observation The rainy season had been draining off now and the skies clearing up, and many people thinking back, said the rain had not been "much of a muchness". They said that it was good thing that such Fernando was so hilly and that the water always rain off yet they had feared about flood (*San Fernando*,111).

The author also brings to our knowledge that there is fear of floods rampaging their landscape despite the vegetational cover and the hilly topography of San Fernando. The fear emanated from the human activities that were not in agreement with nature's law of harmony with human beings. Francis tells us that, The cutters would come with their cutlasses, and the field, having been scorched of vermin and needless leaves, would be quickly cut down... Tomorrow when I got home from school I would see brown earth where the last patch of green used to be" (66).

This mowing down of vegetational cover to pave way for the sugar-cane plantation exposes the earth to erosion. For without harmony with our natural environment, one is at the mercy of floods that ravage our human sense of security can overnight drive man away from his home, turning him to a wanderer or refugee.

Apart from the fear of floods as a resultant effect of human activity on nature, the change in weather condition because of the burning of the cane fields and the smoke emitting from mills' chimneys, the environmental conditions to human beings become unbearable. Francis recounts Mrs. Chandles experience; Mrs. Chandle became very irritated by the weather and opened all the windows very wide that whatever breeze there was might come into the house and often she went to bed without letting me rub the pain away with the

mystical oil. She complained that it was mainly the heat from Usine Ste Madeleine, and from the burning cane-fields, that made the crop-time so unbearable (*San Fernando*,42).

Apparently, the changes in the weather condition reveal the changes in the dispositions of the characters. The rainy season for instance, reveals the kindness in Mrs. Chandles and that she derives temporary respite from the constant pain which she experiences in her body. This favourable weather condition makes Mrs. Chandles to, towards the beginning of December, venture out while she slips and falls. She never liked the sun but always excited by the new brightness.

It is pertinent to state, without mincing words that nature is powerful. It is self-deceit for man to believe that he can "conquer" nature and that nature is powerless to defend herself against unfriendly human activities. Destroying the environment is destroying humanity. The continual increase in human economic activities carry along with it not only challenges on human health and productivity of the earth, but its habitability.

Conclusion

Environmentalism is activism. Literary writers are to be political in their approaches to recreating human relationships with the environmental. This would educate the readers' minds, thus, empowering them to be conscious about the change imperative on their mistake/belief about nature. In the nature-culture conflict, this paper is of the position that man should be convicted, even for causing problems to entire human race. Taking a mental excursion back into religious history of creation and relationships in the garden of Eden, it was neither the animals nor the vegetation that was quitted. It was man. It is the continuation of that destructive tendency by man that has caused our environmental problems today. This is as a result of man's ill-formed mentality about his intimidating position in relation to the environment foregrounded by the misreading of God's injunction that man should "have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle and over all the earth..." (Genesis 1,26 p.2).

Recommendation

To clean up a river that has been muddled, the cleansing process should start from the source. This takes us back to the root (the mind, soul and heart), the cure of which is prerequisite to a long time solution to environmental problems. Writers, in their attempts to educate readers, thus empowering them to resolve the nature-culture dualism, should weave into their creations the various attempts by man to preserve nature, and conversely, the exploitative encounter of man on the environment and its reverberating effect on humanity. This should be artistically done with high sense of ingenuity to appeal to the minds of the readers, thus, uprooting the toxin from man's mind about the economic value of nature.

REFERENCES

- [1]. Acholonu, C.O (1995).*The earth unchained. A quantum leap in consciousness.*
- [2]. A reply to Al Gore Owerri: AFA Publications.
- [3]. Ajibade, T. (2012). "Nigeria at the Rio Earth Summit". *The Punch* June 25.
- [4]. Alam, F. (2011). "Reading Chinua Achebe's *Things fall apart ecocritically* in Blatter College Journal of Multi-disciplinary Studies, Dawtan, Indian. Vol. 1.
- [5]. Anthony, M. (1965). *The year in San Fernando*. London: Heinemann.
- [6]. Baballo, A.I. (2012). "Environmental Education: Relevance and Challenges". *Journal of Pristine* Vol. 6 No. 1.
- [7]. Buell, L. (2005). *The Future of Environmental Criticism: Environmental Crisis and literary imagination*. Maiden: Blackwell Publishing.
- [8]. Cronnon, W(ed.) (1995) *Uncommon Ground: Towards Reinventing Nature*.
- [9]. New York: Humanities Press
- [10]. Enger, Elden D. & Smith, B. F. (2006). *Environmental Science: A study of interrelationships* Tenth Edition. Boston: The McGraw-Hill companies Inc.
- [11]. Gras, V. (2001) "*Literary Theory and Ecology: Some Common Problems and a Solution in Human Ecology Review* Vol.8 No.2
- [12]. Heise, U. K. (1999) "Forum on Literature of the Environment" *PMLA* 114:5.
- [13]. Itua, E. (2013). "e-Waste dumping in Nigeria-The risk to our health and environment." *Daily Trust* January 24.
- [14]. Kovacic, J. (2011). "The Influence of Henry David Thoreau's Writing on the First and Second Waves of Ecocriticism" Master's Diploma Thesis. Department of English and American Studies, Faculty of Arts, Masary University.
- [15]. Odogwu, G (2012). "Power, bulbs and climate change" *The Punch*, November, 29.
- [16]. The Holy Bible, New King James Version. USA: Nelsonthomas Inc.