NATURE IN NIGERIAN CHILDREN'S LITERATURE: AN APPRAISAL OF SELECTED VERSES

BY

IWUJI, UGOCHUKWU OGECHI

MA/ARTS/26169/12-13

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE POSTGRADUATE SCHOOL AHMADU BELLO UNIVERSITY, ZARIA, IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE AWARD OF MASTERS DEGREE IN ENGLISH AND LITERARY STUDIES.

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH AND LITERARY STUDIES

FACULTY OF ARTS,

AHMADU BELLO UNIVERSITY, ZARIA

OCTOBER, 2015

DECLARATION

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

IWUJI, UGOCHUKWU OGECHI _____ _____

MA/ARTS/26169/12-13 **Signature** **Date**

CERTIFICATION

This thesis entitled "Nature in Nigerian Children's Literature: An Appraisal of Selected Verses" meets the regulations governing the award of Master of Arts in English Literature of Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, and is approved for its contribution to knowledge and literary presentation.

Dr. Ezekiel Solomon Akuso	_____	_____
Chairman, Supervisory Committee	**Signature**	**Date**
Prof Sani Abba Aliyu	_____	_____
Member, Supervisory Committee	**Signature**	**Date**
Dr. A.A. Liman	_____	_____
Head of Department	**Signature**	**Date**
Prof. Kabir Bala	_____	_____
Dean of Postgraduate School	**Signature**	**Date**

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my loving parents, Hon. Samuel Uzogo and Mrs Margaret Chinyere Iwuji for all their affection which made me see hope early in life. Thank you for your uncommon efforts.

AKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank the Almighty God for His immeasurable kindness to me in all my endeavours in life. He is the one who gave me great parents and teachers to nurture my dreams.

I want to also thank Dr Ezekiel S. Akuso, not only for supervising and mentoring me, but also for setting an unusually high standard for me without which I could not have known the rigours involved in an academic enterprise. Thank you Sir for being a worthy shepherd to me. Similarly, I am deeply appreciative of Professor A.A Sani, my second reader, for his critical comments and suggestions that saw this work through.

I appreciate the rich experiences I garnered from the tutelage of Professors T.A.N Abubakar, I. Bello-Kano, Drs E.O. Abah, A.S. Jaji, K. Odiwo, A. Joseph and other great lecturers in the Department of English and Literary Studies, Ahmadu Bello University. I won't forget Dr A.A Liman, the Head of Department of English for his usually interesting expostulations during seminar sessions.

Lastly, I thank Mr and Mrs Kingsley Iwuji, whose residence in Zaria became a second home for me in the course of this programme; and Mr. Yakubu Dodo for his uncommon kindness from the very beginning of my academic inquest in Zaria.

ABSTRACT

This study appraises selected Children's nature verses drawn across five Children's poetry texts. It, among other things, instigates a renewed academic and creative inquiry into the field of Children's poetry so as to illuminate its relevance. It makes use of the ecocritical theory as a framework of analysis. In this light, it highlights the need for a reinvigorated zest in the study of Children's poetry, particularly nature poetry, considering that poetry for Children has not enjoyed the popularity of prose. This obviously skewed state of Children's literature in Nigeria calls for attention hence this study is justified in exploring Children's poetry. Considering its style and structure, poetry is a great literary tool that is distinguished by its beauty and urgency. Accordingly, a research on Children's poetry is phenomenal in bridging the widening gap amongst the three literary genres of Children's literature. More importantly too, dwelling on nature, a factor very familiar with Children, makes poetry even more interesting. Also in a society where the environment is constantly vitiated, a research such as this is relevant. The methodology used in the study is explanatory and interpretative in line with the qualitative research of the humanities, a process through which this study appraises nature in selected Children's poetry texts of Olajire Olanlokun (*Children's Poetry for Pleasure*), Philip Onuoha (*Songs for my Mother*), Efe Lovetta Ani (*Elo Poetry*) and John Sarpong Asiedu (*Sweet Talking Drums* and *Poetry for the Young Ones*). In the end, this study establishes among other things that nature holds familiar symbols and images that could interest children to study poetry. It also reveals that poems of nature predilection stir the consciousness of children to the safety of their environment. Amidst all these findings, this study further asserts its validity which lies in enlarging the boundaries of Children's nature poetry in particular and Children's poetry in general.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Conceptual Premise

This study seeks to boost the corpus of Children's literature by appraising the representation of nature in selected Nigerian Children's poems. It makes use of Ecocriticism as a theoretical framework in illuminating the essence of nature in the selected verses. As an introduction, chapter one foregrounds this thesis with some basics of Children's literature, which effectively provide a basis for the various presentations and postulations of this study. For instance, the background of the study is relevant as it advances some archetypal arguments in Children's literature such as the sophistry of the 21st century children vis-a-vis the crux of their literature. It also takes into account the various age levels of children in relation to their literary works. This is vital especially to writers and critics alike of Children's literature as the work so produced should blend in style and theme with the children's age for which it was published. The onerosity of writing for children is also highlighted in the background, just as the appropriateness of diction in their literature is illuminated. The background of the study is so positioned to give impetus to other sub-topics in this chapter such as the development of Children's literature, statement of the problem, as well as the aim and justification of the study. The scope of the study is spelt out, just as the methodology is elucidated. In the end, the theoretical framework of ecocriticism is introduced and highlighted together with its basic tenets.

1.2 Background of the Study

The precociousness of today's children is gradually impacting on the scope and meaning of Children's literature. Children of today are in tune with the modern world hence their unprecedented exposure to life and its ideals and dynamics. Huck et al (1993:7) consider this fact thus:

> Children today appear more sophisticated and knowledgeable about certain life experiences than those of any previous generation. They spend a great deal of time within view of an operating television. According to the Nielsen *1990 Report on Television*, actual watching time for children ages 6 to 11 average almost 24 hours per week. Preschoolers watch more, approximately 27 hours per week.

This, however, does not change the fact that even though Children's Literature could be enjoyed by adults; it is still the type of literature primarily designed for the pleasure of children. This, of course, does not foreclose the fact that "most adults, and almost certainly the vast majority of those in positions of power and influence, read children's books as children, and it is inconceivable that the ideologies permeating those books had no influence on their development" (Hunt: 2005:1). In conceptualizing Children's literature, Smith (1967) Nikolajeva (2005), Hunt (2005), Mickenberg Julia and Vallone Lynne eds. (2011) agree that Children's literature comprises books that appeal to the sensibilities of a child. This is even as Hunt (2005:3) further corroborates that "children's books are different from adults' books; they are written for a different audience, with different skills, different needs and different ways of reading.".

Segun in Ikonne et al (1992:35) makes a case for the categorization of children according to their ages: "The age-levels widely accepted by Children's literature specialists are: pre-school (0-4); very young children (5-7), middle-aged children (8-12); adolescents (13-15) and young adults (17-18)." This categorization is meant to, among other things, guide the writer of children's books in considering the theme to deploy; characterization (especially in fiction), style and language use. This will ultimately guarantee a productive writing and reading of Children's literature. There are varied age brackets given by other schools of thought to enhance efficiency in situating age-range in Children's literature. This study however believes that it is safer to have four main age brackets in Children's literature. This is especially as we consider the rate of sophistication amongst the 21st century children

where it is not even unusual to find children of sixteen in the university. This will also help to correct the fundamental weakness in Segun's categorization where there is no provision for those 'child-adults' beyond 18. In the light of the foregoing, this research makes a case that ages 0 to 5 could be called lower class; 6 to 8, enlightenment class; 9 to 13, middle class; while 14 and above could be known as advanced class. This could be helpful to potential writers and scholars of Children's literature. Indeed, writing Children's literature could be described as a herculean task. The onerousness of the task is captured by Meniru in Ikonne et al (1992:46):

> Writing for children is not, as some people think an easy task. When I hear people talk of it as just a simple passing of time, I marvel at their cleverness or their naivety. When for instance, you try telling a group of children's stories, you will discover that one minute, you have their interest, the next minute you have lost it completely. The same thing applies to writing their literature.

The import of Meniru's postulation is that adult literature is easier to write than that of children. In adult's literature, for instance, the writer is not subjected to the world of extreme care and caution in the application of diction as he freely uses words as they come to him. In spite of this, Children's literature is sometimes treated with disdain and prejudice as most institutions have not still recognized it as a mainstream literature. In Nigeria, for instance, a number of universities do not offer Children's literature and scholars wishing to undertake more research on it are discouraged by the fear of being treated with the same prejudice. Nikolajeva (2005:xiii) laments this prejudice thus:

> Some scholars go as far as to deny children's literature a place in the literary system; they say children's literature can only be discussed and studied in an educational context …. Some common prejudices about children's literature, maintained not only by its adversaries but even by its most ardent supporters, include the claims that children's literature is simple, action oriented rather than character oriented, optimistic and with happy endings, didactic and repetitive.

The fact is that these prejudices are largely ill-founded. One cannot for instance dismiss Children's literature as simplistic as the child-readers, by no means, can ever characterize what they read as so. For even in simplicity, there is complexity as meaning can often be allegorical.

1.2.1 Development of Children's Literature

The oral tradition historically marks the take-off point of Children's literature. This is synonymous with any other type of literature as "man spoke before he wrote," (Onuekwusi 2001 and Babajo 2011). Huck et al (1993:109) report that 'from the fifth to the fifteenth century – stories were told around the fires in cottages or sang in the great halls of castles. Young and old alike listened, with no distinction made between stories for children and stories for adults…' In the Middle Ages however, there were differences in the kinds of tales told as heroic stories of Beowulf and other legends were told in castles and manor houses. When special types of literature for children were later designated in the western world, it was the Bible and the Greek and Latin classics that served the purpose. The invention of printing in the 15th century helped in increasing the range of Children's literature. The Hornbook appeared during the 16th century, consisting of a printed page covered by a transparent sheet of horn which was used for elementary instruction as it contained alphabets, the *Lord's Prayer* and Roman numerals. Huck et al (1993:iii) describes the hornbook thus:

> A hornbook was really not a book at all but a little wooden paddle to which was pasted a sheet of parliament printed with the alphabet, the vowels and the Lord's Prayer…. Most hornbooks were tiny, measuring 2 ¾ by inches … What made these little books unique was that now the child could handle them and see the print close up, rather than merely look at a manuscript held by the teacher.

Chapbooks followed afterwards in the 17th century. The Chapbook contained nursery rhymes and other medieval romances which were versions of popular literature. During this period too, works of moral and religious instruction for children gained prominence. *The*

New England Primer (1660) was printed in Boston, Massachusetts. There was also *Spiritual Milk for Boston Babes (1646)* which embodied a tone of religiosity like other children's works in this period. Children's classics like John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress (*1678) and *A Book for Boys and Girls or Country Rhymes for Children* (1676) were published. Towards the 18th century *the Arabian Nights,* a collection of old tales from India, Percia and North Africa was published. Although intended primarily for adults, some of the stories in it like 'Aladdin', 'Ali Baba' and 'Sinbad the Sailor' were appropriated for children's consumption. In the same manner, Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (1719) was appropriated for children even though the story was not originally meant for children.

More than any other age before it, the 19th century witnessed a great harvest of Children's literature. In Britain, during this period, the writings of Sir Walter Scolt, noted for his tales of chivalry, were read with delight by children. There was Edward Learn, English painter and author of limericks who wrote a book *A Book of Nonsense* (1846) and *More Nonsense* (1870). Perhaps, one of the arguably prominent children's texts of the 19th century fame is Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865) and *Through the looking Glass (1872).*

According to *Encyclopaedia Britannica (2012) Alice in wonderland* "improved none, delighted all." This postulation may not be unconnected with the fact that the book has no fundamental moral to teach children. It is one story steeped in a weird fantasy. Yet it has come to be enjoyed as a children's classic. For Huck et al (1993:126) "What made this story absolutely unique for its time was that it contained not a trace of a lesson or moral. It was really made purely for enjoyment, and it has delighted both children and adults ever since." Other well known fantasies also published within this period include George MacDonald's *At the back of the North Wind (1871), The Princess and the Goblin (1872).* There was also *Adventures of Pinocchio* by Carlo Collodi which was ultimately published in 1891 in the

English Language. With the firm establishment of Children's literature in the 19th century, the 20th century however may be regarded as the golden period of Children's literature. Not only was there Children's Literature writers' organizations, there was also many publishing firms concerned with the development and publication of Children's literature. In 1945 the Children's Book Council was established to promote Book week and to distribute information on children's books throughout the year (Huck et al 1993:133). As a veritable booster, many awards have been instituted to reward writers that have distinguished themselves in Children's literature. The feats attained by Children's literature in the 21st century are a further build-up of the gains of the preceding century. For insanse the introduction of the literature as a course in some Nigerian higher institutions is a step in the right direction.

1.2.3 Children's Literature in Africa

If the written Children's literature had been flourishing in the West for several centuries now, it is relatively young in Africa. Onuekwusi (2007:68) illuminates the situation thus:

> Until the 1960's, there was little or no serious effort to produce written literature specifically designed for children. The possible role of children's literature at this time was to a great extent fulfilled by the oral tale and other elements of orature… In April, 1976, however, the first conference devoted to children's literature was held in Legion. Appropriately described as the Legion Seminar on the writing and production of literature for children, it blazed a trail in taking a hard look at a problem, the result of which has become invaluable in recent times.

The lack of effort adduced by Onuekwusi may not be unconnected with the low level of literacy amongst Africans; as well as the fact that most African states at the time were still colonized by European imperialists. One of Africa's renowned authors, Chinua Achebe did

not escape this problem as he paints a pitiable picture of the traumatic condition to which he was subjected by the typing agency that was to produce his classic, *Things Fall Apart:*

> What happened next was a near catastrophe. The typing agency, obviously having received the money I sent, was silent. One week passed, then two, three, four, five, six weeks and I began to panic. I wrote this letter inquiring about the status of the manuscript preparation and I got no answer (Achebe, 2011:36).

The experience of Achebe may not have been far from that of others hence the slow take off of Children's literature in Africa. In spite of all this, however, Segun (in Ikonne et al 1992:26) reports that a few books for children had begun to appear from about 1920. These books which were mostly published by various bureaus and governments in Nigeria, and Ghana were mainly written in local languages. There were *Azundu* (1927) by William Baikie, which became a major reader for most Igbo children then; *Omenuko* by Peter Nwana and *Karamin Sani Kukumi* (1955) by Abubakar Imam. There was also D.O. Fagunwa's *Ogboju Ode Ninu Igbo Irunmale* (1931). Cyprian Ekwensi had earlier in 1947 broken new grounds by publishing a frontline Children's text *Ikolo the Wrestler and other Igbo Tales.* Interestingly, Ekwensi followed up his unquenchable quest to publish for children with titles such as *An African Night's Entertainment (1948), The Drummer Boy (1960), The Passport of Mallam Ilia (1960), Burning Grass (1961), Rainmaker and Other Stories, (1965), The Great Elephant Bird (1990), Samankwe and the Highway Robbers (1975), Juju Rock (1966).* There were other writers also that made their mark: Nkem Nwankwo (*Tales out of School*: 1963), Anezi Okoro (*One Week, One Trouble*: 1972), Teresa Meniru (*Ibe the Cannon Boy*: 1987) Mabel Segun (*My Father's Daughter*:1965), (Peggy Appaiah: *The Children of Ananse*). The year 1987 marked an interesting period for Children's literature in Africa as there was renaissance of a sort. Segun (in Ikonne eds.1992:27) captures the position of Nancy Schimidt on this:

> In 1987, the typical children's book is markedly different from the typical children's book of 1957. It is written by an African author, illustrated by an African artist, edited and published by Africans, in Africa. The context is almost always African, usually specific to the African country or geographical region in which it is published. Folklore includes stylistic features of oral literature to the extent that this is possible in print. Illustrations depict African people in African settings and are more often in colour than they were in 1957.

By 1987, for instance, most African countries including Nigeria had a fairly abundant list of Children's texts to introduce to their schools, thereby discontinuing the usage of thematically and stylistically distant European works like Carrol's *Alice in the Wonderland* which has no decipherable moral to teach the African child or *Humpty Dumpty (*Michael Evans: Illustrated). Meanwhile, the growth of Children's literature in 1980's prompts Onuekwusi (2007:69) to submit that:

> More than six hundred children's literature books were listed in the 1983 African Books in print. The number has since increased. Educators, Librarians, Writers and Publishers have in the recent past had a field day in the production of children's literature. In addition to stimulating seminars held on children's literature in the seventies and eighties, the competitions on children's writing organized by publishing companies especially Macmillan and the African University Press, there are other reasons for the rapid groth of children's literature.

But beyond Macmillan and African University Press (University Press Limited), Evans Publishers has a long list of children's titles to its credit. Heinemann Educational Publishers has also contributed a sizeable number of titles to the development of Children's Literature. Among these publishers, however, Literamed publications which publishes under the title, LANTERN BOOKS has made a steady progress to become an outstanding Children's literature publisher, especially in Nigeria, thus encouraging new writers of Children's literature to emerge. Literamed Publishing has so advanced that its publications

are printed in colours with very beautiful illustrations. Worthy of note is also the fact that the character of letters used in the publication is very bold for children to read and enjoy. Writing on the title "Lantern Books: Children's Publishing Success in Nigeria", Abrams (2011:1) points out that,

> Today, Literamed publications limited is Nigeria's leading children's book publisher, and its imprint *Lantern Books,* has become a household name in Nigeria and throughout West Africa. By publishing textbooks by established authors in line with approved curriculums to story books which serve as a spring board for young readers, Lantern, Books caters to West African youth from pre-school through secondary education.

The import of the foregoing is that Literamed Publication is about one of the few publishers which publishes more of Children's texts; and this has made its reputation in the world of Children's literature very significant. Consequently, there is hardly any Nigerian primary or secondary school without one or two Literamed publications on its reading list. The only short-coming in Literamed publication, however, is its inability to publish many Children's poetry books. Till date, the company unfortunately has only one poetry title, *Children's Poetry for Pleasure* by Olajire Olanlokun, which is one of our primary texts in this study. Consequently, this has further widened the lacuna between works of prose and that of poetry in the literature of children. Beyond these factors, the publishing house is gradually setting the pace in Children's literature publishing in Nigeria. For instance, the mode of book classification of Lantern books is commendable, thus correcting the outburst of Catherine Acholonu on the near absence of age or level specifications for Children's texts:

> The first thing that strikes any scholar of children's literature is the dearth of good and adequate literature of children as well as the lack of order and an organized and systematized list or reading books for this level. Most of the books do not bear clear specifications as to the level, class and age of readers. (Emenyonu ed. 1990:233)

Today, a typical Lantern book, besides its quality publishing, carries age classifications and even the thematic category of the text. These innovations have tremendously given a boost to the publishing of Children's literature in Nigeria, nay Africa. There are other publishers of Children's texts besides Literamed. It is however, instructive to state that many of the titles in Children's literature are self-published. This may be because some "renowned" publishers do not entertain the idea of publishing children's titles (especially poetry); or the poor quality of the writings arising from inadequate style and language use, to which Onuekwusi (2007:76) comments:

> Perhaps the greatest discredit of many titles that pass for children's literature today is the language used in communicating content. The point has been made that there is a misconception that the identity of children's literature lies in slimness of volume. Very often children are subjected to literature written in the language of adults… diction should be simple and figures of speech, idioms and other nuances of language should be avoided as much as possible.

Onuekwusi's intervention above once again brings to the fore one of the challenges bedeviling the development of Children's literature in Nigeria, where some works originally meant for adults are quickly converted as children's books, an act which had in the past limited the development of Children's literature in Nigeria nay Africa.

1.3 Literature Review

Poetry has been variously understood in many ways. Boulton (1982) and Kennedy and Gioia (2007) agree that poetry is communication in the most intense manner. But what distinguishes this condensed piece of writing from other genres of literature like prose and drama is that poets use a variety of rhythm and rhyme to communicate their message (Opaskar and Trost 1998:129). Other devices used in bringing out poetic quality in communication may include: repetition and figures of speech. However in Children's poetry, the use of figures of speech is sparsely and cautiously deployed. This is even as a Children's

poet should not stretch the imagination of a child reader beyond limits. Children must be made to understand poetry meant for them so that the purpose is not defeated. This is done through the use of simple diction, familiar imagery and symbol including extensive repetition. The length of Children's poetry must be relatively short and compact as to sustain their interest and zest.

For the purpose of this dissertation, this study will situate Children's poetry as the concise and rhythmic use of language to reflect the imagination and experience of children with the purpose of educating and entertaining them. From the foregoing, two paradigms are discernible. The first indicates that the nature of Children's poetry could be according to its sound or musical qualities of rhythm, rhyme, etc; while the second paradigm situates the nature of children's poetry in the context of meaning, its thematic thrust. Succinctly put, therefore, it follows that the nature of Children's poetry could be discussed according to: its sound import and thematic import.

So while not ignoring the sound aesthetics of the poems that will be discussed, this study will concern itself with identifying and explicating Children's nature poetry in order to highlight the place of nature in the psyche of children, which in turn help to showcase the functions of children's poetry. For instance Opaskar and Trost (1998) write as the function of poetry thus:

> Poets may write to celebrate special occasions, to share personal feelings, to describe significant experiences, or simply to enjoy the sound of language. Many poets write to explain a certain point of view or to persuade readers to adopt a particular way of thinking or acting (200).

Yet these can by no means constitute all the functions of children's poetry. The functions, no doubt, vary and are to a great extent determined by the nature of the poetry itself, even though they are defined by their entertaining and educating attributes.

Poetry for children was a latecomer to the literary scene as attention was thus paid to other genres of Children's literature such as folktales, myths, legends, animal stories, etc. Huck et al (1993:127) recount this much: 'Poetry for children began to flourish in the nineteenth century.' It was this period that Ann and Jane Taylor published their first book *Original Poems for Infant Minds* (1804) which contained one of the classics of children's poetry:

Twinkle, twinkle, little star
How I wonder what you are!
Up above the world so high
Like a diamond in the sky.
When the blazing sun is gone
When the nothing shines upon?
When you show your little light
Twinkle, twinkle all the night (Ogunniyi, 2008:39).

There was also William Roscoe's *The Butterfly's Ball* and *The Grasshopper's Feast* (1807) with pure nonsense, rhyme and rhythm that delighted children. There were no moral lessons in them, just an invitation. It was so fresh and different that it generated many imitations (Huck et al 1993:127).

Edward Lear's poetry popularly regarded as nonsense verse was one of the century's contribution to Children's poetry. He published his first book, *A Book of Nonsense* (1846) and followed it up with *A Verse of Nonsense* (1872) about twenty six years later. Worthy of note is that the poems of most early Western Children's poetry bore no moral predilection for the child. From Christina Rosseti's *Singsong (1972*), William Allingham's *In Fairyland (1870)* John Greenleaf Whittier's *Child life, a collection of poems* (1871), Robert Louis Stevenson's *A Child's Garden of Verse (1895),* Eugene Field's *Poems for Children* (1896) to some other anonymous poems captured in Ogunniyi (2008:11), such as:

Peter Piper picked a peck of pickled pepper
A peck of pickled pepper Peter piper picked
If Peter piper picked a peck of pickled pepper
Where's the peck of pickled pepper Peter pier picked.

Most of these poems thus are steeped in western imagery and symbol, their poetic essence especially to a Nigerian child being their use of rhyme and repetition. This is one of the reasons this study mainly focuses on the Children's poetry of Nigerian persuasion. For instance, in Nigeria, there is a preponderant attention of Children's literature writers and publishers to prose fiction than any other genre. No much attention is thus paid to the dramatic and poetic genres. Segun bemoans this situation thus:

> Surprisingly, poetry which used to permeate traditional life in the form of work and play songs, praise and ceremonial songs, guild chants, dirges and incantations, does not feature prominently in Nigeria children's written literature (Segun in Ikonne et al 1992:34).

Accordingly, the little attention paid to Children's poetry by writers and publishers alike has posed a great challenge in the development of children's poetry tradition in Nigeria. This is even when the literary world tends to ignore the obvious fact that poetry carries a sense of immediacy and urgency in the education and entertainment of the child than any other literary genre. Some of the early Children's poetry collections published in Nigeria include Mamman Vatsa's *Children's Rhymes (1978),* Mabel Segun and Meville Grant's *Under the Mango Tree One and Two.* There is also Ianna Solaria's *Coconut Palms* and Pita Gnaivo's *Magic pot.*

In contemporary times, just as it was the case in the 70's, 80's and 90's, Children's poetry publications are still in short supply vis-a-vis their prose counterpart. A publishing giant like Literamed, for instance, still bears only one poetry title in its stables, a development which is not healthy to the growth of Children's poetry in Nigeria, nay Africa. It is therefore in the light of the foregoing that we acknowledge the effort of Efe Lovetta Ani (*Elo Poetry Book:* 2009),Olajire Olanlokun (*Children's Poetry for Pleasure:*2009), Philip Onuoha (*Songs for my Mother:* 2007*),* and John Asiedu Sarpong(*Poetry for the Young*

Ones1991; and Sweet Talking Drums 1996) authors, whose works we are using to interrogate our thesis.

One significant essence in the selected texts is that they contain poems that are truly Nigerian. They are an obvious shift away from the "nonsense poetry" of the West with its distant images, symbols and diction. The poems in the books are not ones that will keep a child reader confused and afraid of poetry. They are also well illustrated for the reading pleasure of child readers. Above all, the texts maintain the same age category of nine to twelve years. Meanwhile, it is noteworthy to state that the stipulation of age brackets in Children's literature does not foreclose the fact that other age ranges can enjoy and appreciate the book.

Significantly, also, these texts have not been assessed with the ecocritical lens. Yet the need to start applying the tenets of ecocriticism on Children's texts is persuasively glaring, as children are very much attuned to their environment. Writing on the concept of natural poetry and the way children respond to it, Huck et al (1992:478) maintain that:

> Children, like poets, are very attuned to the world around them. They are fascinated by the constant chances in nature and enjoy poems that communicate their delight in the first snow, for example, or their sense of wonder when they touch a pussy willow, hear a foghorn or see a deer.

This goes to validate the fact that nature poetry cannot be overlooked. In fact its place in the psyche of children is very firm and stable. A child in spite of his geographical location is an ardent lover of the natural world around. Most times he may wish to touch and feel these nature gifts. So, when nature is represented in poetic writing, children are bound to get fascinated in art especially poetry.

In Nigeria, however, there are scarcely written Children's poetry texts devoted to the celebration of nature. Indeed, one hardly comes across any research work on Children's

poetry that establishes any ecocritical essence. This is perhaps the reason why the literature review is not as extensive as it ought to be.

1.4 Statement of the Problem

This study uses selected Children's verses to appraise Children's nature poetry. This problem draws from the fact that not much attention has been given to the study of Children's nature poetry especially in Nigeria. Prose, has thus, taken the attention of Children's writers and critics alike. Poetry, which ironically, predated prose has today, almost become an orphan in the history of Children's literature in Nigeria. For instance, there are many more of Children's prose titles in the stables of nearly every publisher of Children's literature in Nigeria than their poetry equivalents. If adequate attention is, therefore, given to Children's nature poetry, a child will at an early age gain the needed consciousness and awareness about the natural environment which begs for a careful attention of mankind and literary critics alike. Identifying, considering, learning, evaluating and critiquing Children's nature poetry provide a sure way of giving Children's poetry a fresh breath.

1.5 Aim and Objectives

This study implicates nature in Nigerian Children's literature by appraising selected Children's verses. Some selected poetry texts are used to achieve this: Efe Lovetta Ani's *Elo Poetry Book,* Olajire Olanlokun's *Children's Poetry for Pleasure,* Philip Onuoha's *Songs for My Mother and* John Asiedu Sarpong's *Sweet Talking Drums* and *Poetry for the Young Ones.* The objectives of this study therefore are to show that:

- The representation of nature in Children's poetry tradition is a potent means of creating the needed interest in poetry, a genre that is striving to gear up with its prose counterpart in an environment where poetic works for children are still not given the needed consideration.

- Children's poetry in Nigeria could be studied effectively using the ecocritical theory which ultimately will reposition the psyche of Nigerian children to appreciate nature and resist any form of environmental vitiation around them.
- Children's poetry in Nigeria could be a rare literary and literacy material that would better encourage and sustain recourse to nature, especially in a society stunted and dented by various degrees of environmental hazards.
- Nature offers familiar images and symbols that make Children's poetry easily accessible and understandable. For instance, the images of sun, moon, star, river, tree, etc, do not task the imagination of a child-reader.

1.6 Scope and Delimitation

This study focuses on Children's nature poetry by some Nigerian writers with a view to bringing out the relationship between literature and the environment. Since the theoretical framework is ecocriticism, it becomes even more expedient to narrow our discourse down to Children's poems of nature predilection. Accordingly, some selected archetypal texts on Children's nature poetry are used to explicate the thesis of this study. However where necessary, this study will also explore poems from other texts irrespective of national origin, to comparatively illuminate issues raised. The focal texts of this study: Efe Lovetta Ani's *Elo Poetry Book*, Olajire Olanlokun's *Children's Poetry for Pleasure,* Philip Onuoha's *Songs for my Mother* John Asiedu Sarpong's *Sweet Talking Drums* and *Poetry for the Young Ones*, are chosen based on their merits of embodying good Children's poetry which highlights the authors as nature-conscious writers. Significantly too, they are texts appropriate for children between nine and thirteen years of age. Again they carry impressive illustrations and graphics which further make them stand out.

1.7 Justificaion and Research

Children's poetry is in dire need of serious critical attention in Nigeria, for while prose flourishes, poetry for children stagnates. This is in spite of the fact that it carries a sense of urgency in its stylistic features. A research, therefore, on Children's poetry is one in the right direction as the area is over-ripe for a fruitful academic inquiry. A study in this area will not only arouse the needed interest of writers to explore the area, it will also ginger critics to delve into the area. By studying Children's poetry (especially that of nature), it is hoped that significant attention will be paid to this "forgotten genre." It therefore follows that Children's literature (especially in Nigeria) will not be complete if the overwhelming attention currently paid to prose fiction is not replicated in poetry.

More importantly, too, the currency of nature studies and impacts of environmental hazards have made an inquiry into Children's nature poetry relevant. Indeed there is no more suitable age to instigate a valid epistemological foundation than childhood, an age that makes Osuafor(2003) posit that Children's literature should have the "ability to reflect children's interests at various ranges of the child's biological and consequent psychological development"(119). And when viewed with the ecocritical lens, Children's poetry can indeed provide the long-awaited panacea for the campaign against environmental degradation.

1.8 Methodology

This study is explanatory and interpretative in line with the qualitative research of the humanities. Our main sources of information, besides the primary texts used include critical texts in Children's literature, journal articles, newspaper articles and internet sources.

1.9 Theoretical framework

This study is predicated on Children's nature poetry, thus making it expedient for it to be interpreted with ecocriticism. As a critical framework, ecocriticism is relatively new into literary criticism. Variously called ecopoetics, environmental literary criticism, green cultural

studies, or compost structuralism, ecocriticism has assumed a pivotal position which has made its relevance even valid by the day. In a world beclouded by unabated pockets of environmental hazards, where the environment, man's natural habitat has been polluted and constantly degraded to unimaginable magnitude, it is to ecocriticism we take recourse in highlighting this trend. This study is even made more interesting as it focuses on children's poetry which has the capacity of raising the needed awareness in children at such an early stage

The concept of ecocriticism has been given sundry epistemological thrusts by different critics; Dobie (2012:33) sees ecocritism as that literary tool whose primary purpose is thus:

> To examine the relationship of literature and nature as a way to renew a reader's awareness of the non human world and his or her responsibility to sustain it because all life is inter-related, the impact of human activity on the environment should be minimized.

If literature according to Eagleton (2008:9) is a highly valued writing, it then follows it is a treasured tool for interrogating the degradation of man's natural environment which Ann Dobie, above, seems to posit. Abrams and Herpham (2012:96) corroborate by viewing ecocriticism as a theory which "explores the relationship between literature and the biological and physical environment."

Writing on 'Ecocriticism: Nature and literature', David Yarian(2007:1) posits that:

> The field of ecocritism examines how we think about and express artificially, the complexities of the natural world. It looks at the implicit assumptions about nature that are emmbodded in the invented worlds of literature through which the author aspires to speak deeper truths about the world; which we live. Ecocritism holds that, since nature is the underpinning of every world, we can humanly imagine, it requires the same level of consciousness we bring to character and society and ideas.

Long as the above excerpt may be, it is full of very valid postulations about eco-criticism, the thesis of which is for humanity to wake up and become conscious of the natural

environment. And if nature is the underpinning of every world it follows that it demands no less attention from the "occupants'' of the world. It also implies that humanity is dependent, and indeed helpless to its beauties and verities. It is no doubt for these reasons and others that ecocritics ask the following serious questions, goaded to reawaken man's consciousness to his natural habitat:

- What do we mean, exactly, when we say nature?
- What is and isn't part of nature?
- How have people related to nature in different ways of different points in history? What is all that got to do with evolving technologies, industrial and post-industrialism?
- In a place – like, under an oak tree with a squirrel eating a nut – a distinctive laws through which we should read literature and see the world?
- What do our different approaches to the natural world – e.g Rape and Pillage? Preserve? Adore? What? And to writing about the natural world, tell us about human development throughout history? What do they tell us about nature itself? About subjectivity and objectivity? (http://www.shmopp.comecocriticism)

The assertions above are indeed serious and weighty as they are all symbolic of the indifference of mankind towards his natural habitat, an indifference that has undoubtedly made the study of eco-criticism even more topical and relevant. The uses of rhetorical questions which betoken the stylistic import of the excerpt are entirely and most auspiciously goaded to stir a regime of sober reflection in humanity, on how it has managed nature and its realities. It thus encourages an earth-centred approach even in literature. It is this approach that Glotfelty (1996) advocates in Grey Gerrard (2004:3):

> What then is ecocriticism? Simply put, ecocriticism is the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment. Just as feminist criticism examines language and literature from a gender-conscious perspective, and marxist criticism brings an awareness of modes of production and ecocriticism takes an earth-centred approach to literary studies.

And as regards the job of an ecocritic in literary discourse, Gerard (2004) quotes Richard Kerridge (1998:4) as saying that "the ecocritic wants to track environmental ideas and representations wherever they appear, to see more clearly a debate which seems to be taking place, often part-concealed in a great many cultural spaces."

This is even as Kate Rigby (2004:4) decries the negative impact of environment degradation on the earth. Like a lone voice in a lonely wilderness, she recounts the pervasiveness of environmental hazards on earth's natural habitat thus:

> It might be countered at a time when there is allegedly no place on earth that has not been affected in some way by humanity's alteration of the natural environment, the precedence of nature has been questionable. It is however precisely the imperilment of the biosphere wrought by that alteration which implies the ecocritical reinstatement of the referent as a matter of legitimate concern.

From the prevailing corpus of discourses on the concept of ecocriticism, and for the purpose of this study, we shall view ecocriticism as a critical perspective which veritably seeks to highlight the pivotal place of nature as a phenomenon that needs care and preservation. The consequences of this position to Children's poetry are many. This is even as the pivotal position of children both in the family and society cannot be over emphasized, a position on which Julie Agbasiere in Ikonne et al (1993:128) reflects thus:

> The child occupies a central position in the life of the family in particular and the society in general. Important in the continuity of the group, the child becomes the link between the past, the present and the future. Since the child of today is the adult of tomorrow, it becomes exigent that he should be brought up in a manner that makes it possible for him to fit in the society.

Childhood is indeed a veritable stage to inculcate the tenets of ecocriticism. After all Agbasiere still reminds us that 'The child in the society learns fast and integrates well' (129). Furthermore, the nature of poetic diction makes anything read to easily stick to memory. This much is stressed by Trots and Opaskar (1998):

> …Poetry express personal thoughts and experiences by using sticking language that helps others understand and appreciate them. One of the important characteristics of poetic language is that it makes unexpected connections and forces readers to see familiar situation from unfamiliar viewpoints (146).

1.10 Evolution and Ecocriticism

Ecocriticism is one of the newest critical theories in the literary world. According to Abrams and Harpham (2012:96), "Ecocriticism was a term coined in the late 1970s by combining 'criticism' with a shortened form of 'ecology', the science that investigates the interrelations of all forms of plant and animal life with each other and with their physical habitats." And for David Yarian (2007:1), the publication of *The Ecocriticism Reader* edited by Glotfelty and Fromm; and *The Environmental Imagination* by Buell marked the formal launch of ecocriticism in the literary world. Beyond these works, there were also *The Song of the Earth* by Jonathan Bate, *The Green Studies Reader: From Romanticism to Ecocriticism* by Coupe Lawrence (ed), *The Green Breast of the New World, Landscape, Gender and American Fiction* by Westling Louise and others.

Michael Branch traces the evolution of ecocriticism to the publication of William Ruekert's seminal essay 1978:

> The word 'ecocriticism' traces back to William Rueckert's 1978 essay 'literature and ecology. An experience in ecocriticism and apparently lay dormant in critical vocabulary until the 1989 Western literature association meeting (in Coeur d'Alene), when Cheryll Glotfelty not only revived the term but urged its adoption to refer to the diffuse critical field that heretofore had been known as the study of nature writing (1994:1).

Ecologically-minded scholars have been publishing progressive works on ecocriticism since the renaissance of environmentalism in the late 1960s and 1970s. The formation of professional organizations with ecocritical ideals further helped in the evolution of the theory. For instance the formation of the Association for the Study of Literature and Environment (ASLE) helped in no small measure in the advocacy of the new theory; a development which prompted Dobie (2012:241) to write that "another indication of the interest in ecocriticism was the formation of a professional organization dedicated to its development." In spite of the blooming of ecocriticism in the 1990s however, nature writings have always been with humanity. Abrams and Harphan (2012:96) corroborate this further thus:

> Representations of the natural environment are as old as recorded literature, and were prominent in the account of the Garden of Eden in the Hebrew Bible, as well as in the pastoral form in inaugurated by the Greek Theocritus in the third century BC and later imitated by the Roman Poet, Virgil, an idealized depiction of rural life, viewed as a survival of the simplicity, peace and harmony that had been lost by a complex and urban society.

Some critics however believe that ecocriticism may have evolved from America, a fact to which Barry (1995:161) confirms thus: "ecocriticism, as it now exists in the USA takes its literary bearing from three major nineteen century American writers whose work celebrates nature."

In England, ecocritical studies are unarguably traceable to the works of eighteenth century Romantics led by William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge in an era that also included the likes of John Keats, Percy Byshe Shelley and George Gordon Lord. Indeed Onuekwusi (2002:16) aptly situates the subject matter of these Romantics thus:

> To the romantics, the subjects of poetry are the common incidents and situations of life, through which the poet traces the primary laws of nature. It is the 'low and rustic' life which choruses the feelings of men in ernest meditation. A glance at the table of contents of romantic poems will show the degree to which the natural scene was a primary poetic subject. William Wordsworth wrote 'Lines Written in Early Spring', John Keats' On the Grasshopper and Cricket', P.B. Shelley 'Ode to the West Wind' and Samuel Taylor Coleridge's 'Frost at Midnight.'Descriptions of landscape and other natural phenomena are prominent in romantic poetry. This is why to many people, romantic poetry is 'nature poetry' and the romantic poets are 'nature poets'.

If indeed Wordsworth et al were the precursors of the ecological tradition, the practice itself could safely be traced to the publication of two seminal works both published in the mid-1990s: *The Ecocriticism Reader* edited by Cheryl Glotfetty and Harold Fromm(1996) and *The Environmental Imagination* by Lawrence Buell(1995). It is noteworthy to mention that since their publications, scholars have been embracing the discipline which has since remained valid especially with the rising trend of environmental degradation around the globe. Accordingly, the tenets of ecocriticism when applied to Children's literature (poetry) is even more interesting as most ecocritical scholars have not in fact contemplated the application of the theory on children. Indeed, the study of ecocriticism has assumed an interesting dimension by the day as most works forgotten and over-researched can be revalidated through the approach. As a branch of literary studies predominantly interrogated by psychoanalysis, Children's literature gains more verve when

interrogated with Ecocriticism. After all, Dobie maintains that 'Ecocritics do not lack for interesting areas of study' (2012:24).

1.11 Basic Tenets of Ecocriticism

The various tenets upon which ecocriticism is hinged provide a researcher deploying it as a theoretical framework with the knowledge of the general norms guiding the application of the theory. The tenets are indeed many, but for the purpose of this research, only four of these tenets will be highlighted:

a. Ecocriticism explores the ways in which we imagine and present the relationship between literature and the natural environment. Cheryll Glofelty, one of the progenitors of the ecocriticism in an article 'What is Ecocriticism?' lists some of the questions potentially asked by ecocritical theorists:

> How is nature represented in this sonnet? In the plot of the novel? Are the values expressed in this play consistent with ecological wisdom? How do our metaphor of the land influence the way we treat it? How can we characterize nature as agency?... In what ways and to what effect is the environmental crisis seeping into contemporary literature and popular culture?(2007:1).

Accordingly, in setting out on any ecocritical expedition in a text, Glofelty's posers are valid for cognizance. The representation of nature should thus be paramount in any work of ecocritical dimension. The effect of nature should also be highlighted. This is in addition to exploring the various ways writers have related to nature. Some of the ways could be by means of valorizing nature or repudiating it.

b. Another tenet of ecocriticism highlighted by Cheryll Glotfetty is the fact that ecocriticism raises consciousness about the various environmental crises mankind into which mankind has been plunged. This consciousness raising according to Glofelty is "the most important task of ecocriticism"(2007:2).

c. The principles of deep ecology which Jelica Tosic (2006:4) highlights below are also within the boundaries of ecocriticism:

i. The well-being and flourishing of non-human life on earth have value in themselves; independent of the usefulness of the non-human world for human purposes.

ii. Richness and diversity of life forms contribute to the realization of these values and are also values in themselves.

iii. Humans have no right to reduce this richness and diversity to satisfy vital needs.

iv. Present human interference with the non-human world is excessive, and the situations rapidly worsening.

d. The question of what ecocritics do continue to trudge the mind as this study explores the tenets of ecocriticism. The major tasks of ecocritics are succinctly encapsulated in Peter Barry (1995:169):

i. They re-read major literary works from an ecocentric perspective with particular attention to the representation of the natural world.

ii. They extend the applicability of a range of ecocentric concepts 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 and resources.

iii. They give 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 Jogn Clare, the work of Thomas Hardy and the Georgian poets of the early twentieth century.

From the postulations and varied presentations of ecocritical scholars highlighted above, it is evident that all the tenets of ecocriticism revolve around the concept of nature. The need to recognize the place of nature in human activities, the need for literature to serve as a veritable critical instrument to gauge the relationship between nature and man is indeed,

at the basis of ecocriticism. If literature, according to Nwachukwu-Agbada (2008) enables the human being to exercise one of the faculties of the mind which nature had blessed him with upon creation, it then implies that an ecocritical scholar is interested in deploying the instrumentality of literature to interrogate nature issues in literary works. In this light an ecocritic is concerned with the treatment of nature in a literary text – how nature is presented, whether it is valorized or degraded.

1.12 Ecocritical Approaches

Ecocritical studies have been approached in different ways. These approaches provide veritable critical stand-points for scholars and researchers on ecocriticism. For instance some ecocritics approach the study like feminists, using forgotten texts in an effort to find new 'ecofeminist' perspectives in them. Some also examine different theoretical issues such as difference in the depiction of nature by male and female writers. Three basic approaches through which an ecocritic can work are presented below:

1. Questioning the representation of nature: Addressing the first category of interest, representation of nature, means taking an earth centred approach to literary study by looking at the role nature plays in a given work. It should be noted among ecocritics nature is not synonymous with environment. Nature refers to the environment before it was impacted by technology; the land, its flora and fauna, its waterways, living creatures, and the ecosystem that nourishes the. Environment on the other hand is the surrounding landscape, environment about who support conservation and limits are sometimes referred to as 'light green' 'dark greens' are deep ecologists who advocate a complete return to nature.
2. Looking at nature writing: If you are drawn to exploring the second developmental phase of the ecocritical movement, the one that seeks to make the genre of nature writing more visible, you will need to make a case for the importance of studying a

word, play or poem, or writer that is not widely read and discussed or in some cases a work that has not been read or studied for its environmental relevance. To begin, you can make sure of the following questions about it:

- Why is this text not widely known or not well known for its depiction of nature?
- What should it be?
- What insights about the natural world does this text (or writer) have to offer?
- Does it raise questions or issues about nature or the environment that readers should be concerned with?

3. Examining Ecocritical issues and Questions: For readers who want to explore more global issues that are of interest to ecocritics, those involved with the third stage of the field's development, the consideration of theoretical issues, Cherry Glotfelty has provided a set of questions that address aspects of genre, ecology gender, institutional attitudes towards nature, and more. She suggests asking the following questions:

- Are the values expressed in a given literary work consistent with ecological wisdom?
- How do our metaphors of the land influence the way we treat it?
- Do men write about nature differently than woman do?
- In what ways has literacy itself affected mankind's relationship to the natural world?
- How has the concept of wildness changed over time?

(Ann Dobie 2013: 243-246).

The second approach as explicated above will be of paramount concern to this study. This is as this research is geared towards examining nature writing especially in Children's poetry regarded by many as not bearing any ecocritical persuasion. The presentation of the natural world is therefore the focal point of this thesis. In doing this, the significance of Children's poetry is further brought to the fore, a significance that was hitherto unnoticed.

In Olajire Olanlokun's *Children's Poetry for Pleasure* for instance, the representation of nature is made prominent in 'Wind of Joy' a poem whose thematic focus valorizes nature's wind. Wind is seen as a phenomenon that heralds joy:

> Wind o f joy
> Blow across the land
> And soothe the pains
> Of those in sorrow (Olanlokun, 2003:18).

The symbol of wind as used here is symbolic of man's ceaseless need for the comforting presence of the natural world. 'Wind' is also significantly presented as a natural force that spreads joy across a world beleaguered with pains and agonies. Accordingly, it follows that there are any ways the wind can speard joy. It could be by way of bringing the needed natural touch that would make plants and flowers bloom in order to produce food that will feed the hungry lot of the world (Mayesky 2006:558). The pains which the poem asserts will be soothed by the 'wind of joy' are symbolic of the pangs of hunger and drought. Indeed when there is hunger in the land, people are bound to be sorrowful as no one is active while famished. The joy arising, therefore, from a bountiful harvest instigated by the wind of joy is significant as it is capable of putting an end to the agonies of the world.

The stanza two of the poem makes a passionate appeal to the wind to come and assume the position of a companion to humans so as to bring joy:

> Winds of joy
> Be our companion
> And put a smile
> On the face of mankind (18).

The representation of nature is once again at play in the above excerpt. First, nature is accorded a priority in the provision of joy to mankind. The symbol of 'companion' is that of a wanted ally that heralds happiness. The poet's speaker in desiring the presence of nature, represented by the wind (of joy) seems to be disillusioned by a world of modernity steeped in artificiality which his condition so represents it.

To a child-reader who is exposed to the beauty of nature, its verities and ideals at an early stage, nature poetry therefore becomes a veritable study that should be taken very seriously in the world of literature. Accordingly, an ecocritical study of selected poems such as this is therefore a timely research that will contribute immensely to the corpus of Children's literature in particular and literature in general.

1.13 Conclusion

When juxtaposed with its prose counterpart, Children's poetry has not developed considerably. A study such as this is intended to boost the corpus of critiques on Children's poetry, a genre that has not enjoyed the same reception and universality as prose, especially in Nigeria. As a beautiful piece of writing that educates and entertains, Literature cannot be successfully studied when only one genre is given an overriding prominence. In this light therefore, this study uses the ecocritical theory to reappraise selected children's nature poetry with a view to highlighting the representation of nature in them. In the end, the study re-establishes its validity which draws impetus from the need to enlarge the frontiers of Children's nature poetry in particular and Children's poetry in general.

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CHAPTER TWO

CONCEPTUALISING NATURE

2.0 Preamble

Historically, nature poetry was given massive attention in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries with the timeless works of the likes of William Blake, William Wordsworth, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Keats, Shelley and Bryon. These poets popularly called, the Romantics, gave English literature a voice through their nature inspired poetry. This is why any discourse on nature poetry still accords them an enviable status. Children's poetry stands to gain a reasonable boost through nature poetry. Markedly, everything about nature is within, real and available. It is not an abstract subject matter that befuddles children. This chapter therefore draws its breath from the explication of the concept of nature; its significance to Children's literature and how it has effectively been an instrument within the framework of ecocriticism. In doing this, some selected Children's poetry will be instrumental.

2.1 The Concept of Nature

Dobie (2012:353) defines 'nature as the environment before it was impacted by technology.' This implies directly that it is due to this adverse impact of technology that the study of ecocriticism in literature has become highly relevant. Even Sydney in his *Defence of Poetry* conceptualizes nature thus:

> There is no art delivered to mankind that without the works of nature for his principal object, without which they could not consist, and on which they so depend, as they become actors and players, as it were, of what nature will have set forth (Borlik, 2011:28).

The import of Sydney's assertion is that nature is in itself pervasive to the extent that it cannot just be ignored by writers. Since writers always dwell on the physical world, nature

would conveniently refer to the phenomena of the physical world and also to life in general (http://www.definitions.net/definition/nature).

Etymologically, Edurne Scolt posits that the word "Nature" is over 5,000 years old but has only been used in the English Language for 700 years. The word, he says, was adopted from old French which meant 'course of things, character, the universe and birth' (https.//suite.10/edurne-scott/19dy 237). Yet nature in the modern times has gone beyond the course of things. For instance Kern Fenton in her seminal work *'Nature and Ecocritisim',* defines nature as 'a symbol representing one's relationship with the environment'(2008:1). The ecocritical implication of this is already palpable as Glofelty postulates that Ecocriticism studies the relationship between nature and literature.

Mane (2014:2) sees nature as the 'origin of all sciences' thus making it impossible to study literature without recognizing the place of nature. According to her:

> Not any writer could keep himself away from beauty of nature and its depiction in literature. This nature gives life force or prana to writers by why all living entities are upheld and on manifestation nature takes on the forms earth, water, fire and either.

The place of nature has once again been given a generous appraisal, an elucidation which also confirms the overarching importance of ecocriticism in a world already engulfed in environmental crises. Indeed nature is life and literary criticism such as ecocriticism is a criticism on a field of life.

This pervasiveness of nature is once again revalidated in the words of Borlik (2011:23) that 'nature is hardly terra incognita in the voluminous scholarship on the literature of the English Renaissance.' Like every other English period, nature has been ubiquitously represented 'just as the works of Shakespeare, Spenser and Sidney display an exceptionally nuanced understanding of the interplay between art and nature that offers a blueprint for reconciling ecological assumptions' (Borlik 2011:28).

William Wordsworth (1770-1830), a remarkable exponent of the English Romantic period unarguably exalted the transcendental strand of nature. Indeed he is aptly described by Mahfuzur Rahman as:

> One of the greatest British Romantic poet as well as a poet of nature. He is a high priest of nature and worshipper of nature. His love of nature is perhaps true, more sincere and more loving than that of any other English poet. He believed that there is a divine spirit pervading all the objects of nature. This belief finds a complete expression in his nature poem *Tintern Abbey*. According to Wordsworth, spiritual power lives and breathes through all the works of nature. (http:www.studyenglish24.org).

Rahman's assertion is further given a boost in Wordsworth's *Lines Written in Early Spring* where the persona aptly compares man and nature while asserting that man is the only creation that has intentionally reduced the joy of creation by deliberately taking advantage of others with the aim of causing them sorrow:

> If this belief from heaven be sent,
> If such be Nature's holy plan
> Have I not reason to lament
> What man has made of man? (Onuekwusi, 2002:37).

While man avariciously seeks to cause his fellows pains, nature is all fair and good to itself:

> The budding twigs spread out their fan
> To catch breezy air
> And I must think, do all I can
> That there was pleasure there (37).

According to Onuekwusi (2002:38), this poem captures 'Wordsworth's belief in animism, that religion that teaches that plants and animals have spirits', as such there is a vital force in all creatures that should be respected. When this order and peace are maintained, there is pleasure. Wordsworth's view about nature aptly runs through all his poems. But it is in the *Lyrical Ballad*, his foremost book on criticism that he enunciates the centrality of nature to his artistic endeavour thus:

> The principal object, then, which I proposed to myself in these poems was to choose incidents and situations from common life and to relate or describe them, throughout as far as was possible, in a selection of language really used by man; and at the same time to throw over them a certain colouring of imagination, whereby ordinary things should be presented to the mind in an unusual way, and, further and above all, to make these incidents and situations, interesting be tracing in them, truly though not ostentatiously, the primary laws of our nature: chiefly as far as regards the manner in which we associate ideas in a state of excitement. Low and rustic life was generally chosen, because in that condition, the essential passions of the heart find a better soil in which they can attain their maturity, are less under restraint, and speak a plainer and more emphatic language; because in that condition of life our elementary feelings co-exist in a state of greater simplicity, and consequently, may be more accurately, contemplated, and more forcibly communicated (Onuekwusi, 2002:138).

The quotation of Wordsworth is instructive as it properly contextualizes his view of on nature. For him, there is no better form of communicating knowledge to man than through nature-goaded thoughts that 'germinate from those elementary feeling; and from the necessary character of rural occupations…. Because in that condition, the passions of men are incorporated with the beautiful and permanent forms of nature ' (138-139). Wordsworth's predilection towards nature may have been informed by the distraction posed by the industrial Revolution of the 18th Century England, a distraction to which Trivedi (1995:333) alludes:

> He was torn by a conflict between his Patriotism and his loyalty to the principles of the Revolution. The crisis deepened when Napoleon betrayed the revolution by entering upon a career of military aggression. All his hopes and aspirations for the betterment of humanity collapsed. He was filled with gloom and despair.

It was in the web of this intra-personal crisis that Wordsworth may have found solace in nature. And indeed 'Nature restored his faith in divine Providence, which is the only sure support a man has amid the trials and tribulations of life' (333). In this light, Wordsworth

saw nature as a spiritual affair. Yet Trivedi (1995) believes that Wordsworth's attitude to nature did not become mystical or spiritual all at once. According to him there were three stages in Wordsworth's poetic development:

> In the first stage, his love for nature was like that of a child-sheer animal delight in the freshness and beauty of natural objects. This, in the second stage, developed into an impassioned love like a young man's passion for his beloved when 'The sounding cataract/haunted one like a passion'. The third stage was reached when these 'aching joys' and 'dizzy raptures' of youth yielded place to a quieter and more sober mood in which he became aware of the spiritual and human significance of nature. He saw that nature was the abode of God. Trivedi (1995:334).

The import of the excerpt above further shows that nature has an over-arching power to stimulate a regime of spirituality in man, a kind of spirituality that systematically but unconsciously develops as we give it a concentrated attention. It is also significant because this spirituality has the power to restore the lost joy and peace of mankind.

Before Wordsworth, however, there was William Blake (1757-1827) who even though had no formal education wrote beautiful nature poems published in *Songs of Innocence and Songs of Experience.* In one of his poems *Ah Sun Flower* Blake presents an illustrative picture of the relationship between the sun and the Sunflower which remarkably blossoms at the wake of the rise of the sun: 'Ah sun flower! Weary of time, who countest the steps of the sun,'Onuekwusi (2002:33).

This relationship as romanticized by Blake is symbolic of a sensual one between lovers where the complementarity of each other is felt at the absence of one. The imagery of the sun which is also generously involved in the poetry of Olajire Olanlokun is that of an energizer whose absence could be catastrophic for other natural elements. Blake's representation of nature in this light is therefore significant as it presents the workings of natural entities of 'the sun and sun flower*'*.

However, it is William Wordsworth who took the concept of nature to a notch higher, especially by giving it a transcendental essence, an aura that marked a water-shed in Wordsworth's poetic expedition. Therefore in such poems as *Expostulation and Reply, The Tables turned, My heart leaps up, The Lucy poems, Lines composed upon West Minister Bridge, September 3, 1802, It is a Beauteous Evening, I wandered lonely as a cloud, The world is too much with us, Tintern Abbbey,* there is a significant ubiquitous representation of nature. In *The Tables Turned*, for instance, Wordsworth's romance with nature is vividly seen as the persona engages in a dramatic conversation with nature which admonishes him to quit his books and admire the offerings of nature:

> The sun above the mountain's head
> A freshening luster mellow
> Through all the long green fields has spread
> Her first sweet evening yellow (40).

The imagery of the sun is once again visible in the poem as it is presented as a potent natural force that not only brightens the day and keeps it beautiful and admirable, but keeps the fields green and productivity. This eternal essence of the sun which represents light and life, is contrasted by the persona bearing books with 'a dull and endless strife'.

The eternal beauty of nature is also given uncommon ventilation by the persona. This beauty, for the persona, symbolizes 'wealth' and 'health' which nature embodies:

> She has a world of ready wealth
> Our minds and hearts to bless
> Spontaneous wisdom breathed by health
> Truth breathed by cheerfulness (40).

The use of 'cheerfulness' in the last line further symbolizes that with nature, there is no dullness and solitude. For, 'sweet is the love which nature brings', hence the persona hints that mankind should 'come forth, and bring with you a heart/That watches and receives.'

The symbolic presence of the 'sun' in Wordsworth's poetry is transferred to the 'rainbow' in his *My heart leaps up* as the persona bursts out in a fit of enthusiasm and childish excitement at the presence of the rainbow:

> My heart leaps up when I behold
> A rainbow in the sky
> So was it when my life began;
> So it now I am a man
> So be it when I shall grow old
> Or let me die! (43).

The 'rainbow' is used as a symbol of hope and joy which brightens the mood of the persona, who is obviously not in the right frame of the mind. The beauty of nature as seen in the multiple colours of the rainbow is in line with the ideals of Wordsworth's nature poetry.

The transcendental essence of Wordsworth's poetic ideology is further visualized in the poem as the persona submits that the rainbow has been a natural element right from his childhood, a feat which he uses to validate the adorability of nature. In its timelessness, nature assumes an endearing mien which so rhapsodizes the persona that he voluntarily submits to be 'bound each to each by natural piety'. (Onuekwusi 2002:43) In this light, the transcendentality of Wordsworth's poetic vision is re-echoed and revalidated. This, no doubt, may have made literary critics and pundits see Wordsworth as a worshipper of nature. Trivedi (1995:332) voices his position thus:

> He worshipped nature, because he saw in all natural objects the indwelling spirit of the supreme being. To him the myriad forms and phenomena around us were nothing but various manifestations of the divine. In short he was a mystic, one who sees unity in diversity.

By taking nature seriously and to a realm of transcendentalism, William Worldsworth unwittingly made for himself, disciples and passionate proponents of nature writing and representation in poetry. Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772-1834) became a friend of Wordsworth's because they shared common grounds in Nature writing. Some scholars even

allege that the *Lyrical Ballads* was co-authored by Coleridge. Like Wordsworth, Coleridge also professed transcendentalism. Onuekwusi (2002:58) captures this predilection thus:

> Coleridge believes that there is a vital force in all creations. In his poetry he owes no apologies to a world that may wish to mock him as he insists that there is in all natural creations a strong love, joy and piety that can be observed.

Coleridge's reverence to this 'vital force' explains why his persona in *The Rhyme of the Ancient Mariner* is repentant after killing an albatross. The decimation of the innocent albatross is reminiscent of the destruction of nature. His penitence and renewed love for nature leads him to bless nature, an action that restores his lost sleep:

> O happy living things! No tongue
> Their beauty might declare:
> A spring of love gushed from my heart
> And I blessed them unaware
> Sure my kind saint took pity on me
> And I blessed them unaware (64).

Coleridge's candid admiration of nature is all very resplendent in this verse as the symbol of nature assumes a pivotal position which when displaced could spell doom for the victims as does the killing of the albatross in *The Rhyme of the Ancient Mariner.*

In his *To Nature*, Coleridge heightens the Wordsworthian transcendental treatment of nature as he glowingly declares that:

> It may indeed be phantasm, when I
> Essay to draw from all created things
> Deep heat felt inward. Joy that thing
> And trace in leaves and flowers that
> Round lie lessons of love and earnest piety (58)

The symbol of love essence that Wordsworth attributes to nature is reechoed by Coleridge in the above verse where the mere presence of the leaves and flowers so excites the persona that he unashamedly and militantly fantasizes about nature. In his extremist declaration of love for nature, the persona proclaims:

So will I build my alter in the fields
And the blue sky my fretted dome shall be
And the sweet fragrance that the wild flower yield
Shall be the incense I will yield to thee (58).

The tone of this verse is that of a passionate apologist of nature who is determined to revel in the glorious offerings it so presents. Accordingly, all the nature elements are markedly described in glowing terms. The blue sky, for instance, is desired by the persona as an abode; where the 'sweet fragrance that the wild flower yields' will form the incense that will exude comfort to the persona.

Coleridge's celebration of nature is further given a voice in such poems as *To the River Otter, The Eolian Harp, Kubla Khan, Christabel, Frost at Midnight, Dejection; Ode To William Wordsworth, On Donne's poetry, Limbo and Epitaph.* And remarkably his *The Rhyme of the Ancient Mariner* a long poem as it were, is still a classic in nature studies.

John Keats (1795-1821) is another nature poet reputed as the youngest of the Romantics. He was said have died very young of tuberculosis. Some of his poems include *On the Grasshopper and Cricket, When I have fears, Ode to a Nightingale, Ode on a Grecian Urn', The fall of Hyperion, To Autumn, La Belle Dame Sans Merci and The Eve of St. Agenes.* Keats' poetry is rich in imaginative essence and candour. In *To Autumn,* the celebration of nature is given a noble balm. The poet's persona regales the season of Autumn with varied sweet metaphors:

Season of mists and mellow fruitfulness
Close bosom-friend of the maturing sun
Conspiring with him how to load and bless
With fruits the vines that round the thatch-eve
rhyme(Onuekwusi, 2002:72).

The imagery of joy and bountiful harvest which the persona conjures in the lines above is significant of the manner nature is romanticized by the romantics. The season of autumn is impliedly hailed by the persona as the harbinger of great goodness which is

manifest in the blooming of fruits and flowers for the benefit of man. Indeed, the beautiful image of a prosperous harvest which autumn instigates is painted thus:

> To bend with apples the mossed cottage trees,
> And fill all fruits with ripeness to the core
> To swell the gourd, and plump the hazed shells
> With a sweet kernel, to set budding more (72).

The centrality of nature in the survival of mankind forms the import of the images of swelling fruits and gourd. It is this role that impliedly makes it imperative for humanity to appreciate nature and whatever it represents. And like Wordsworth and Coleridge, Keats remarkably approaches the treatment of nature with a sensuous style that sustains readership, an attribute that makes Wilson Knight in Onuekwusi (2002:66) describe his poetry thus:

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

Like Keats, P.B. Shelley was a Nature poet of literary repute. He wrote remarkable nature poems such as *Prometheus Unbound, Ode to the West Wind, Adonais, Ode to a Skylark, The Witch of Atlas* and *The Triumph of Life*. In *To A Skylark* for instance the Wordsworthian transcendentalist echoes reverberate in Shelley's treatment of nature as eternal and spiritual. To the skylark, a bird, a creation of nature he addresses thus:

> Hail to thee, blithe spirit
> Bird thou never wert
> That form Heaven, or near it
> Pourest thy full heart
> In profuse strains of unpremeditated art (78).

This opening stanza marks the poems out as an ode, which of course, is dedicated to the celebration of nature as represented by the bird, skylarks. The persona of the poem uses the metaphor 'little spirit' to describe the skylark which is always cheerful and lively. The transcendentalist undertone of the poem as seen in the metaphor of 'spirit' is symbolic of the

spiritual essence of nature. The cheerful chirping of the bird, to the persona, aptly strikes chords of beautiful art that retains its beauty even when it is not planned or premeditated. The poet's persona further celebrates the sweet music of the skylark in the twelfth stanza:

> Sound of vernal shower
> On the twinkling grass
> Rain-awakened flowers
> All that ever was
> Joyous, and clear, and fresh
> Thy music doth surpass (80).

The symbol of neutrality strikes a loud chord in the lines above as the skylark's music is described as 'joyous' 'clear' and 'fresh', attributes that are capable of keeping man in a comfort zone. The imagery of 'vernal showers' evokes a picture of freshness and liveliness which nature so represents. With nature therefore, there is definitely no room for a dull moment marked by lethargy and melancholy as the persona proclaims:

> With thy clear keen joyance
> Languor cannot be:
> Shadow of annoyance
> Never came near thee (81).

This poem is similar to Wordsworth's *The World is Too much with us* where the persona presents nature as being able to obviate sorrow and sobriety:

> So might I, stranding on this pleasant lea,
> Have glimpses that moved make me less forlorn;
> Have sight of proteus rising from the sea
> Or hear old Triton blow his wreathed horn (50)

The symbol of 'forlorn' which the persona expresses in the first line above represents a world of hopelessness which the unwholesome activities of man has produced, and which nature is able to heal with its '*pleasant lea'*. The allusion to *'Proteus'* a sea god who could change forms at will in line 3, and which Nature offers is symbolic of the completeness in nature. The tone of the verse which is didactic seeks to admonish mankind from getting distracted so much as not to see the wonderful pleasure and joy that Nature offers: *The*

world is too much for us; late and soon,/getting and spending,. We lay waste our powers' (49).

Another nature poet who followed the imprints of Wordsworth is Gorge Gordon Lord Byron (1788-1824). Onuekwusi (2002:83) describes him thus: "Gorge Byron was a cosmopolitan Aristocratic gentleman. He loved liberty and nature but hated oppression and hypocrisy"(83). It is his love for nature that motivated him to write poems such as *Hours of Idleness, English Bards and Scotch Reviewers, Child Harolds Pilgrimage Stanzas for Music, Darkness, Prometheus, Don Juan, So we'll go no more a roving* and *Manfred.* In *Stanzas for Music*, the persona describes the beauty of nature as seen in the refreshing insight he gives to the workings of the ocean and moon. For the ocean, he compares the sound it produces to a good, mellifluous music:

> And like music on the water
> Is thy sweet voice to me:
> When as if its sound were causing
> The charmed ocean's pausing
> The waves lie still and gleaming (84).

The use of simile, 'And like music on the water' in line one heightens the admiration Byron's persona has for nature as represented by the ocean which produces beautiful music when stirred. The role of the moon at night is celebrated in these lines: 'And the midnight moon is weaving/Her bright chain o'er the deep/Whose breast is gently heaving' (84). The imagery cast by the lines above is that of an overwhelming presence of the moon whose light illuminates the depth of the waters; just as its 'breast*'* gently heaves 'as an infant's asleep'. The personification used in describing the moon as possessing a heaving 'breast' aptly shows how nature is eternally a living phenomena just as Wordsworth in *The Tables turned* describes it as a woman in 'She has a world of ready wealth/our minds and hearts to bless' (2002:40).

In the world of literature, the poetry of William Wordsworth and his 'Romantic disciples' has given the world inkling on the beauty of nature which surrounds them. *Nature* which is written in capital 'N', according to Duduyemi (2009) is so because the Wordsworthian perception of nature as a proper noun is used to equate nature to purity or holiness. They thus saw nature as something beyond an ordinary essence. In his poem *It is a Beauteous Evening,* Wordsworth so admires the beauty of nature as represented by the 'beauteous evening' that he describes it as a holy time as quiet as a 'Nun/Breathless with adoration…'(48). It is in the light of this that he advises humanity on the divinity of nature: 'Listen! The mighty being is awake/And doth with his eternal motion make/A sound like thunder – everlastingly' (48).

The imagery conveyed in 'The mighty being' is that of an all-too-powerful personality who has a commanding presence. Indeed, this is the imagery that Wordsworth wishes humanity to bear about nature which he took as the model around which life is centered. In his view therefore Wordsworth advocates through his poetics that man should find salvation in nature as grace and goodness abound in her. Even though there is no document to support that William Wordsworth was a deeply religious man in the orthodox sense, his poems have lucidly confirmed he was a great worshipper of nature hence all his poems are characterized in the of persuasiveness for humanity to revert to nature as a saviour and possible lee way out of depression and agony.

The gargantuan literary productions of the Romantics on nature have orchestrated massive advocatory writings on nature issues which have been gaining currency and due relevance. *The Nature conservancy* is a nature advocacy body that is evidently discontented with the various damage meted to nature by the unwholesome activities of mankind. The tone of their focal points is mournful:

> With each year that passes, the challenges facing our natural world grow in scale and complexity. Forest connive to be plowed over to make way for reckless development, learning lifeless patched around them. Rivers are over-cased, stressed and strained, pushing the life they sustain to their very limits (https://support.nature.org).

This group has ultimately sustained the proclamations of William Wordsworth and his romantic compatriots whose works had in the eighteenth century awoken mankind to the vitality and divinity of nature which should not be ignored but cherished. Since the Wordsworthian era therefore, the meaning of nature has attained an unconscious bifurcation into physical and transcendental paradigms. Yet, in spite of the physical or metaphysical epistemic undertone of nature, it is only ideologically illuminated in artistic discourses.

For the purpose of this study, we may view nature as those environmental elements which were not made by man. The moon, the sun, the wind, plants, birds, creatures etc, were not made by man. Without them, man may not live comfortably. Our position on nature is tailored towards nature writing which is germane to the tenets of ecocriticism which this study professes. According to Buell (2005:154):

> Nature writing has been of central interest for ecocriticism from the movement's beginnings… Historically, nature writing has focused on exurban locales though it can be practiced in urban contexts too, as ecocritics increasingly stress.

Among other things, nature writing brings to the front burner, the importance of nature and the need to preserve it by all means. This advocacy could be by way of appreciating nature like the Romantics did. By appreciating nature, for instance, its values are unconsciously highlighted. Also by appreciating nature, its intrinsic, hidden characteristics are made more salient. Nature advocacy could also be by way of repudiating through literature, the magnitude of damage done to nature as virulently presented in the award-winning poetry of Uche Umez *(Dark Drough the Delta),* an anthology which, in the main

berates the authorities and oil companies alike for the level of harm done on the environment of the people of Niger Delta.

Since our study is on Children's literature, nature poems presented in the books used for the study adopt mainly the appreciative style where nature is valorized and romanticized. Children who read these poems are easily engaged and rhapsodized by the attraction that Nature offers, hence their interest in reading the poems and acquiring or internalizing their poetics. The style Olanlokun adopts in romanticizing nature in the palm wine tapper is instructive: 'Palm wine tapper, hold fast to your rope/As the palm leaves dance/To the music of the wind'(2003:27).

A child easily gets lured and engrossed in this poem with the graphic and artistic attention to the natural interplay between palm wine tapper and the palm tree he is tapping. This is typical of nature representation to children who want any writing for them to reflect their values (Huck et al 1993:531)

In our treatment of nature in this study, we shall not however, relent in taking recourse to the Wordsworthian poetics on nature especially as it has to do with the exquisite valorization of nature, an attribute that children may find quite instructive. If Wordsworth is seen as the progenitor of the nature-tradition in the English literary annals, Ralph Waldo Emerson is viewed by the Americans as the foremost proponent of Nature writing, just as Buell (2005:13) aptly reveals that "Some Americans might argue that the origin should be set much earlier, at least as far back as Ralph Waldo Emerson's*Nature* (1836). The first canonical work of US literature to unfold a theory of nature with special reference to politics."

Beyond Emerson, there was also Walt Witman whose *Leaves of Grass* (1855) inaugurated a Romantic tradition which along with the like of Philip Frenau (*The wild Honey suckle),* Edgar Allan Poe (*A sonnet to science),* William Cullen Bryant (*A Fairest of the*

Rural Maids), Henry Wadsworth Longfellow (*Hyperons and Voices of the Night)* Some critics believe that Witman's *Leaves of Grass* published in 1855 greatly influenced the study of nature in America's literary world, this is in addition to the revolution he brought to poetic practice of writing in free verse that can dwell on any subject (Onuekwusi 2002:111)

Gerald Manley Hopkins (1844:89) sustained the voice of the Romantics to an extent in the Victorian period of English literary history. Besides religion, he gave nature writing a priority. His devotional poems are an interesting mixture of delight in nature and love of God. '*Ad Mariam'* in praise of the month of May (spring's daughter) is Swinburnian in both its luscious style and its music(Trivedi 2013:702). Even though his style has been pilloried by the troika of African literature, Chinweizu et al (1980:173) with their mantra of 'Hopkinsian syntactic jugglery*',* Gerard Manley Hopkins remains a formidable nature poet of note, just as Trivedi attests that 'formidable as the list of his defects is, they should not blind us to the poetic power of Hopkins' (Trivedi, 2013:705).

2.2 The Significance of Nature Representation in Childrens Poetry

Poetry according to Huck et al (1993:450) has a special appeal for children, as it reflects one of the major ways they explore their world. This further brings to the fore the argument among children's literature scholars that children are an adventurous lot. Their inquisition leads them to touch or feel what is around them. Indeed, there is no better way through which children could explore their world than representing this world in poetry.

The representation of nature in children's poetry can help them understand their surroundings and learn to be observant as nature poem are rewarding and form great educational pastime *(http/eclecticeducation.huppages.com*).

Iris Hesselden's "Peaceful hours" could be a rewarding pastime for children as nature is highlighted in terms that the child reader would not forget easily. The persona aptly describes the wonderful aura of the summer days,

Summer days and sunlight morning
Lift our hearts and minds,
Watching swans serenely gliding
Where the river winds
Feeling gentle breezes blowing (Thomson ed.2012:63)

The symbol of 'summer days' is that of a joyous illumination that instigates 'sunlight morning' that is capable of brightening the day of children by gladdening their hearts and minds. The persona's tone of excitement and joyful reminiscence attains its crescendo:

And soon the sky is wonderful
And filled with mauve and gold,
A perfect ending to the day
A marvel to behold (63).

The various images that refreshingly come to mind in describing the sky fill a child-reader with a sense of puzzlement that fire his adventurous mind to observe nature. And like Wordsworth and Coleridge, these lines are capable of giving him the natural impetus to admire nature and its beautiful offerings. Interestingly as the images acquired by a child reader of nature poems come alive, he becomes, unconsciously though, part of the experience represented.

The wonderful experience that nature relays to the child-reader can only be felt in the lines of poetry. Olanlokun's "The Yam Barn" for instance stimulates the psyche of a child to further appreciate nature. In this poem nature is presented as a benefactor to man, which aside its aesthetic power can nourish the physical hunger of man. The staked yams are admired by the poet's persona who exclaims in his childish excitement,

The yams beckon to me
Like to bees, flower plants
Fat fleshy smooth yams
Don't rest for too long…
Sweet new harvest
Come down to make my day (Olanlokun, 2003:30).

The imagery of a staked yam waiting to be untied for cooking builds up as a child reads these lines. He is unconsciously goaded into observing staked new yams next time he

sees it. This way, the immense power of observation that a nature poem imbues in a child is overwhelming. This in turn leaves him with good background knowledge of the world (http/www.best-books-forkids.com/poetry-for-children.html).

This representation can make a child understand the workings of nature as represented in the various seasonal realities. This could help them to weather through certain challenges posed by the nature of atmospheric seasons just as Melissa Thibault (2004) maintains that Children's Literature (poetry) teaches children to transcend their own challenges. Okogbule Wonodi's *August Break* is highly educative as it helps a child understand the reality of a break in rainfall right in the middle of a typical rainy season. The child persona in the poem evidently excited by the 'August Break*'* describes it thus:

> After three months of long rains
> The land is a sodden bed
> Of dried pond. The tarred roads shine
> Fine threads of steam to the air (129).

The symbol of the 'August Break' strikes a balance with the poetics of ecocriticism which studies the relationship between nature and literature. This relationship comes alive as literature serves as a veritable vehicle of appreciating and protecting nature. In line two above, the land which hitherto was wet has suddenly become a *'*bed of dried pond*'* even as 'the tarred roads shine'. The climax of the 'August Break' is highlighted as

> The play grounds jump and chalter
> With the presence of children
> In games abandoned yesterday.
> When the sky was falling tears (Onuekwusi, 2002:29).

The beauty and attractions of nature give a child-reader a good vantage point to savour the educational riches it offers. In the above lines, the beautiful imagery of exuberant children playing with glee on a typical sunny day fills the child with wonderful thoughts.

The representation of nature in Children's poetry is also significant as it motivates a child to imbibe the healthy culture of reading, which unfortunately is seriously lacking in today's children, a development which Sandy Lakstrom (2010:1) decries:

> In society today, it is not unusual for some children to never pick up a book to read unless they are assigned to do so in school. Even when that is done, some children too often resent the act of reading and even see it as a punishment The television set and video game consoles have become babysitters in many households and there is little motivation for a child to open a book and put his or imagination to work.

A typical Children's nature poetry just as it is the case with good children's poetry is beautifully illustrated to sustain perusal and encourage a comprehensive intellectual harvest in a child. In all the selected poems in this study, we see alluring illustrations that aptly demonstrate the thematic posture of the verses read. In John Sarpong's *Sweet Talking Drums*, for instance, we see verses celebrating nature and its essence being illustrated with good pictorial quality that is both educative and endearing. Sarpong's *Basic Nutrients I Need* presents archetypes of the symbolic fruits which help the poem to make more impact. In the last stanza the persona mentions the basic nutrients he needs thus:

> Cabbage, carrot onions, peas
> Potatoes, pumpkin, lettuce, beans,
> Cucumber, mushroom, sprouts and leeks
> Other vegetables with fish or meat
> Highly give the nutrient I need
> Able to achieve good healthy indeed (Sarpong,1996:69).

The poem illustratively and significantly carries the images of the fruits described to make the child-reader more involved in the development of the thoughts offered by the poem. By merely seeing these fruits on the pages of the books, he is motivated to read on with pleasure. Indeed, Segun has explained the importance of illustrating in Children's literature thus:

> If children are to acquire the reading habit, they must be given attractive books and as everyone agrees for young children, attractive books also mean well-illustrated books. Even a baby of two months can enjoy looking at a picture book (Ikonne et al: 1993:31).

Children's nature poems are really the tonic to sustain a regime of good reading habit in the psyche of kids. Interestingly, the images they present do not carry any abstract essence as they are easily recognized by the child-reader who often sees them all around him. Indeed, images of 'cabbage, carrot, onions and peas*'* cannot as much task the reader as they appear all around, a development to which Smith (1967:128) refers as 'the wonderfulness of reality where the real world supplies a great variety of subjects to be used as raw materials.'

The culture of a people is given voice in children's nature poetry, a development which Crippen (2012:1) believes is crucial for their 'social and personal development'. The moon, for instance, is a natural element which is admired by children. But in the Nigerian context (especially in the Eastern part) there is something cultural about the moon which besides its illuminous function signals a time for an important social activity for children. This is captured quite illuminatorily in Onuoha (2007:58):

> Children run helter skelter
> Calling each other to gather
> To hear stories from mother
> She tells under the moon light.

The cultural symbol of the moon is significant. Its appearance is an opportune time for acquiring knowledge as besides playing and running, children utilize it to listen to good rhymes and stories from village sages, bards or from their parents and grand-parents. It is instructive to note that many writers of note have sprouted from these story-telling sessions. This once again raises the issue about the history of Children's literature and literature in general which all take ancestry from the oral tradition. Even though Africa is no longer backwards in written literature, the place of orality cannot still be underestimated. Akinwumi Isola recognizes this much in his *Children's Oral Literature and Socialization in Yoruba*,The

socialization of children into Yoruba culture is through poetic language where rhythm is deliberately foregrounded (Darah.G.G ed.2008:152).

2.3 Interrogating Nature

The nonhuman world uncreated by man aptly defines the concept of nature to which ecocritics are committed to appreciating, explicating and defending. As the centre-piece of their concern and engagement, nature is a force that affects human beings and which human-beings can affect (Dobie 2012:240).

Accordingly, ecocriticism seems to be a direct contrast to so many other literary approaches. For instance where Formalists, New critics and Structuralists try to create a distinction between texts and the real world, ecocritics view the real world as its focal point; for to what end, they may have argued would criticism tilt if it cannot defend the non-human world which is after all the backbone of human survival? The inherent frustration is so gargantuan that ecocritics picked up the gauntlet to advance a literary revolution in ecocriticism, a frustration that is given more breath in Dobie (2012:240).

> Some scholars have suggested that the interest in ecocriticism is fueled in part by public frustration which complex postmodern theories that seem to have little relevance to life as people experience it.

There is a refreshing and timeless outlook that ecocriticism has given to literary criticism in the way it analyses the nature import of literary texts hitherto forgotten. When they apply a range of ecocentric tenets on them, the works wear a new epistemic toga which at best promotes the whole essence of literature as a timeless enterprise. Barry (1995) recounts this much in,

> They (ecocritics) give 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 work of Thomas Hardy and the Georgian poets of the early twentieth century (169)

It is for this reason that the canons of Wordsworth and his American counterparts are still relevant till date. Thus when some canonical texts have been assumed to have undergone an exhaustive analysis and criticism, ecocritcism comes handy to launch a new critical inquest on the treatment of nature there.

Kerri Fenton (2008:1) quotes Faber, a retired English Professor in Ray Bradbury's dystopian science novel as suggesting where to find happiness as he says: 'Look for it in nature and look for it yourself.' This may have some implications to literary criticism. For instance in the highly ideological and often times postmodernist theories that deconstruct themselves, ecocriticism could be the much needed theory in which critics might find happiness. This is because a neglect of nature which the theory propounds, is a neglect to man's happy survival. Not many people would want to live in a vitiated environment; just as not many would wish others to live in unfriendly places where man's activities have made an enemy of nature.

Nature has a relationship with man; this is even as man finds himself within the confines of nature assets. This relationship between man and nature is what is explored by ecocriticism (Beatriz Rivera-Barnes 2008). It is also for this reason that in the late 1980's, Cheryl Burgess Glofelty set about compiling a bibliography of nature writers and scholars who wrote on environmental issues.

In a world beset with serious ecological crisis such as air pollution, acid precipitation, global warming, deforestation and loss of biodiversity, ecocriticism has proved a veritable critical tool to analyzing the extent to which literary texts embody the representation of nature. By so doing, literature contributes to the cause of environmental preservation (M. Zhang 2000:1). This is so just as Zhang submits that 'nature satisfies man's spiritual and psychological needs for without nature's satisfying man's various needs for feelings of

threat, fear, loss and mystery, man cannot have a colourful emotional experience and spiritual life' (2).

The centrality of nature in man's affairs has remained ever current and topical. This is despite the fact that man has made enormous scientific discoveries to guarantee his comfort. The implication is that man's technological advancement is without its flaws (Fenton 2008:1). This therefore makes nature a powerful force that cannot be controlled. Indeed, so long as the natural environment continues to be reduced and decimated by man, ecocriticism will retain its currency as that literary critical tool that unknots the nature tapestry in a text. This way, the much needed awareness and insights about the need to preserve nature is communicated. It is little wonder why 'ecocritical scholars heartily assert that nature is important in the study of literature' (Dobie 2012:250).

Perhaps, due to its cadence and other rhythmic features, poetry seems to give nature writing a significant aura in the literary world. Its lines which come in measured pattern also give a considerable tonality to the cause of nature and eocriticism. In Emily Dickinson's *Nature, the gentlest mother,* the poet's persona aptly makes use of good poetry to describe nature, a title which gains validation in Lorcher (2012) as 'nature is personified as a gentle mother… who watches over her creations, personified as children.' Yet of much significance is the imagery of 'the Gentlest mother' in the poem which markedly casts a picture of a benevolent mother showing affection to her needy children. Also, the superlative (gentlest mother) attributed to nature implies that even though human mothers could be gentle, none indeed could attain the gentleness of nature. As a theory therefore, ecocriticism is interested in how Dickinson treats nature while appreciating the symbols and images deployed and involved in the process. This is just as Kerri Fenton (2008:1) states that 'An ecocritical approach may look at nature as a symbol and what ideas it may evoke.' Like Dickinson,

Alice Drury in her nature poem *Damson Tree* evokes the imagery of care and love which nature offers to mankind. For in time of hunger and thirst, it is to nature that man runs:

> Our garden in the summer is a pretty thing to see with flower beds and bushes and lovely damson tree and when the fruit is ready and mum says the time is right dad climbs up the ladders and picks all fruits in sight (Thomson ed. 2012:70).

The concern of ecocritisim in the above verse is to acknowledge the symbols and images which the poetry uses to put nature in perspective. The symbol of beauty which nature represents is all over the verse in the uses of 'pretty' and 'lovely' which defines nature. This makes the tone of the poem to be that of admiration and gratitude to nature. This is further reinforced in the last stanza:

> We eat our bread and damson jam and then to our surprise
> Mum gives us damson trifles and some super damson pies
> And sisters Jane and Sue say that they both agree with me
> That we're really very lucky to possess a damson tree(71).

Nature's gift of joy and love is revalidated in the above verse as the persona asserts clearly that it is nature that nourishes them in hunger hence she expresses how lucky she and her sisters are for the presence of nature as exemplified by the *Damson tree.*

Ecocriticism also finds room for expression in Rosemary Bernett's *Glorious land* where the poet's persona reminisces on the season of autumn, which to her owes its splendor to the workings of nature which is transformative in essence. The 'Glorious land' is a metaphor for the joy that nature brings to man. Thus, the tone of the poem is that of a purposeful enthusiasm and gratitude:

> The glorious days of autumn
> With leaves of brilliant hue
> When nature's dazzling colours
> Transform our land a new(Thomson ed.2012:126).

The symbol of 'autumn' an element of nature is that of beauty where leaves become so colourful that the environment witnesses a transformation which according to the persona

in the second stanza, 'crowns the year with splendour.' Nature once again evokes a dazzling image of splendour which is associated with goodness, an attribute Garrard (2004:14) says is capable of instigating harmony amongst humanity.

'Autumn' as a symbol which beautifies the environment at its wake is once again seen in Iris Hesselden's *Perfect Plan* where the autumn symbolically 'turns the world to pink and red.' It is because of the splendour of the autumn that the persona gladsomely proclaims that 'All nature has a perfect plan' (Thomson ed.2012:104).

The magnificence of nature as presented in Gabriel Okara's *The call of the River Nun* is in line with the tenets of ecocriticism among which is to study the relationship between literature and the physical environment (Glofelty 1996: XIX). The persona in the poem, obviously an adult, remembers this childhood days with nostalgia as he got enraptured by the River Nun which makes pleasant sounds as it flows. The sounds which are poetically attractive are metaphorically referred to as a 'call' beckoning the persona to admire the nature's glory as manifested in the river. The persona here reminisces with glee about this significant call:

I hear your call!
I hear it far away;
I hear it break the circle
Of these crouching hills.
I want to view your fale
Again and feel your cold
Embrace; or at your brim
To set myself and inhale
Your breath (Onuekwusi, 2002:125).

The imagery of beauty symbolized by nature pervades the entire poem, thus making the persona be in the mood of pleasant expectations at the ravishing beauty of the river. Like an expectant pilgrim at the altar of nature, the persona expresses his readiness to inhale the breath of the river whose sound (call) is attractive and indeed refreshing. This poem, according to Onuekwusi (2012:126) can be equated to Samuel Taylor Coleridge's *River*

Otter where the persona in a moment of nostalgia remembers childhood games in the River Otter. Ecocriticism finds this poem relevant as the friendly relationship between and nature which runs through the lines of the poem is explored and appreciated.

The representation of nature in any poetry could be celebratory of the eternal beauty that nature offers, or jeremiadic as inferred in Garrard (2004:81). Nature writings that are ensconced in jeremiad are those which often lament the spate of environmental degredation on earth. Mcmalon (2014) defines the concept of environmental degradation as 'a process through which the natural environment is compromised in some way, reducing biological diversity and the general health of the environment'. She identifies a number of ways which nature can be degraded which amongst others include the depletion of air, water and soil, which could come through undue pressures from man. It was this line of nature representation that one of Nigeria's foremost environmentalists Ken Saro-Wiwa adopted. He vehemently protested, through his works, and later through social awareness and demonstrations, the environmental hazards orchestrated by oil companies which flared oil mindlessly as well as exploited crude oil without considering the dangers their activities posed to the Niger-Deltans. His death in 1995 in the process of a cause for which he passionately pursued was viewed strongly by the international community. Reuters of May 22, 2009, presents him thus: 'Mr. Saro-Wiwa, a popular author, playwright and television producer, had been one of Nigeria government's most articulate and determined critic. He had built a campaign against environmental damage by oil companies…'

Significantly, however, the death of this environmentalist, Saro Wiwa, did not deter environmentalists, and indeed the cause of environmentalism in Nigeria. For instance in showing its commitment to the cause of nature developments, the Nigeria government on November 25, 20014, launched what it called the 'Great Green Wall' project which was flagged off in Kebbi State to arrest the spate of desertification in frontline states of Kebbi,

Zamfara, Gombe, Yobe, Jigawa, Adamawa, Bauchi, Katsina and Borno (The News Nov 25, 2014).

2.4 Conclusion

In attempting to highlight the epistemology of nature, this chapter has also examined the historical significance of the possible progenitors of nature. It also further considers the compatibility of nature and ecocriticism in literature. By so doing, the chapter argues that the theory of ecocriticism may well gain further currency in view of the quantum of literary works on nature occasioned by the unabated vitiation of the ecosystem. The implication of this is that Ecocriticism may well have positive prospects in literary criticism. The bright prospect of ecocriticism is reechoed in Dobie (2012:241) who believes that 'the future of ecocriticism looks promising,' despite some ontological challenges that hitherto confronted it.

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CHAPTER THREE

NATURE REPRESENTATION IN THE POETRY OF OLAJIRE OLANLOKUN AND PHILIP ONUOHA

3.0 Preamble

The symbolic representation of nature in the poetry of Olajire Olanlokun and Philip Onuoha is significant in many ways as it is one thematic approach that cannot easily lose fervour. The thrust of this chapter which explores the concept of nature representation in Olanlokun's *Children Poetry for Pleasure* and Onuoha's *Songs for my Mother* is relevant as it does not expose children to ideological and conceptual paradigms of violence, crime and sex. This chapter, therefore, treads cautiously on the desired path of ecocritical tenets as it seeks to contribute to knowledge forms by examining the various forms of nature reprentation in selected poems from the aforementioned Children's texts.

3.1 Representation of Nature in the poetry of Olanlokun and Onuoha

Nature, according to Barry (1995) is a present entity which affects us, and which we can affect, perhaps fatally, if we mistreat it. What this implies, then, is that nature occupies an important place in humanity. It is always with man and therefore needs a good treatment from him. This is even as Barry has warned that nature could turn against man when ill-treated. The theory of ecocriticism comes handy in this scenario as a potent tool in the preservation of nature which when destroyed only brings environmental crises.

The two authors whose texts are interrogated in this chapter using ecocriticism could be termed nature-conscious as they used the medium of their works to espouse the centrality of nature. Remarkably too, they have published a number of titles on children. Though late, Olajire Olanlokun published the only poetry title on the stables of Literamed Publication, a work which this research is interrogating for its nature essence. Some of his other titles include *Tunde's Birthday party, My Baby Sister, Fugitive in love, The Choice, City Boy* etc.

Indeed Olanlokun's titles exeed well over twenty, making him win a post-humous award by the company, Literamed.

Philip Onuoha on his own has written quite a number of Children's works among which is *Songs for my mother*, one of our primary texts. Onuoha's works are published by Cel-Bez & company publishers, an Owerri-based publisher reputed for being the home of African literature. Onuoha, a native of Imo State and a staffer of Radio Nigeria Heartland FM, Owerri, is also a part-time lecturer in Abia State University, Uturu and Abia State Polytechnic, Aba. His latest Childen's publication is *Tears of a School Girl.*

Though the two texts by the two authors embody poems on nature, Olanlokun's *Children's Poetry for Pleasure* gives nature a more over-whelming treatment, a reason why more of his poems are presented here more than Onuoha's. In spite of this, the two authors pursue similar thematic thrusts in their works which essentially dwell on nature.

Olanlokun's "Sunflowers" for instance has an overwhelming representation of nature. In this poem, the persona appreciates the great effects nature has through the blossoming of flowering plants. Flowers to him occupy a prominent position in the natural world and of course commands a commendable presence:

Bright sunflowers
Your extended branches
Announce your presence to all
The foliage you display
Shows the essence
Of your being (1).

The symbol of 'Bright' as used in the poem shows that nature is beautiful and lively. Anything that is bright unarguably commands attention. In presenting nature (through the sunflowers) as bright, the persona consciously gives 'nature' a symbolic toga of a piece of beauty that should be cherished and appreciated and not destroyed.

The imagery of 'foliage' is that of a blooming mass of green leaves that exudes freshness and hope. Interestingly, it is this foliage, according to the persona that 'shows the

essence of being.' Once again nature is given an adorable beam which is capable of engaging the minds of children in appreciating the entire essence of nature. The symbol of foliage is also that of shelter. Nature is thus, presented as capable of shielding its inhabitants from the extreme hazards of the environment and danger.

Following the overwhelming eulogy of nature in the poem "Sunflowers" one can conclude that it is an ode written to nature, which is instructive especially to those who do not see anything vital in little flowers by their homestead; hence they derive joy in brushing and "harming" them. The adventurous nature of children often leads them to pluck innocent flowers on their way, an action they take unconsciously without underscoring the ecological dangers to which they indirectly expose themselves. This further makes the focal point of this thesis very valid as children are meant to understand that nature should be protected and not deflected. In the poem under study for instance, the flower (nature) is significantly presented as exuding sweet fragrance, such that makes it appear like a queen: 'The sweet smell around you/Makes you a queen/Among your peers'(1).

The symbol of 'sweet smell' is significant in the poem for a number of reasons. First, anything that smells fine easily attracts people, which implies therefore that if nature attracts people, the people so attracted should accord it a pride of place. Furthermore, it implies that nature is friendly; for if nature were not friendly, it would not exude 'sweet smell'. The smell, perhaps, would have been stale or insipid. In its totality, however, the symbol of *sweet smell* gives nature an attractive quality. It is for this reason therefore that the persona insists that nature is made a queen by its sweet fragrance.

The use of 'queen' evokes the imagery of royalty and magnificence, thus lending credence to a biblical allusion that King Solomon in his entire splendour was not as beautiful as the birds of the air (nature). The illustration of the Sunflower with its queenly gaiety

further heightens the imagery. The head of the flower has a crown-like decoration which adorns and gives prominence to the beautiful foliage.

According to Garrard (2004), 'Ecocriticism is unique amongst contemporary literary and cultural theories because of its close relationship with the science of ecology'(18). In using ecocriticism, therefore, as a key-opener to nature representation in Olanlokun's *Sunflowers,* nature represented by flowers is made more attractive, important and special in the psyche of children.

In the "Moon" by the same poet, the persona similarly gives nature a prominent position. He accords nature a beautiful description in the opening stanza:

> The moon crawls along the sky
> Like a river flowing into the sea
> Wrapped in black colour
> With clothes of cloud (10).

The abundant use of personification in the poem as in ''*c*rawl', 'flowing' 'wrapped', 'clothes' is all symbolic of the living attribute of nature. They are symbols effectively describing the form and movement of the moon. Evidently not satisfied with painting the moon in glowing terms, the persona goes ahead thus: 'The moon forms a semi-circle which later becomes a circle/Providing a clear light brighter than that of NEPA'(16).

In lines 3 and 4 of the stanza above, nature represented by the moon is presented as providing 'clear light' to mankind to help lighten his path. In this vein, the moon is presented as a symbol of light that extinguishes darkness. Children loath darkness because it is an agent of fear and worry to them hence the joy which pervades the veins of children when there is light is usually great. In portraying the 'moon' as providing an incandescent light, the persona implies that nature is a purveyor of happiness and joyful essence to man (especially to children).

There is a marked use of antithesis in lines 3 and 4 in comparing nature and man's creation, where the moon is presented as supplying 'clear light' compared with the blurred

one by NEPA, an acronym for National Electrical Power Authority. In presenting nature as a symbol that supplies 'clear light' and NEPA, a human creation with its artificiality and errors, the persona eloquently proclaims that the importance of nature cannot be comparable to any other thing that performs a similar function. It follows that if NEPA supplies light like nature, that of the latter is brighter and better. Its light is 'clear', and of course naturally bright; whereas that of the former is described as blurred as it does not shine like the natural light that is represented by the 'moon'.

The use of satire that is subtly intended to lampoon the authorities for being unable to provide a formidable electric power system to its populace draws from the ecocritical tenet that nature is kind, while man is unkind to his fellows. In being unable to stabilize NEPA, the authorities, according to the persona has impliedly failed to provide care to children who need light to play. This is why in the subsequent stanza, the persona, who is obviously a child, entreats the moon to grace him and his fellow children with his presence:

> Come to us always
> Provide unblinking light
> For children to play
> And make merry(16).

'The moon' is further presented as a symbol of happiness and comfort. The children express their joy and delight at its presence as they use it to 'play' and make 'merry'. By nature, Children are adventurous hence children always want to play and be happy. The presence of darkness and blurred light symbolized by NEPA is repulsive to them. They need light and its warmth actuated by the play and merry they make in its presence.

The imagery of 'unblinking' is that of something which never gets tired of shinning or beaming. Nature, by implication is presented as an element which is infinitely functional in providing light. In according an eternal status to nature, the persona impliedly validates the beautiful essence of nature in the provision of joy to children.

The metaphor of ‘woman’ accorded nature in lines 9 and 10 is instructive of the kind essence of nature: “But the moon is a woman/kind, lively, caring mother”. In comparing the moon to a woman, the persona undoubtedly valorizes nature by giving it a motherly status which in itself is symbolic of kindness, care and liveliness. Impliedly therefore, while a mother cannot harm or overtly show hatred to her child, NEPA is a direct antithesis of whatever nature represents. For, where the moon (nature) does not blink, NEPA blinks. Where the moon is bright, NEPA is blurred. Furthermore, where the moon is kind, NEPA is unkind because children cannot play and merry under the blurred light it gives. Finally, where the moon is motherly, NEPA is indifferent. The import of these binaries goes a long way in revivifying the significance of ecocritical studies which expresses the relationship of literature and nature. Consequently, children desire the presence of the moon (nature) always as in ‘’come to us always’’ just as they see nothing good in NEPA which does not favour their cause with its blinking light.

Olanlokun’s “The moon” is similar to Iris Hesselden’s “Startlight’’, where nature elements of ‘star’ and ‘moon’ are given a pride of place. Whereas, Olanlokun’s ‘The moon’ brings ‘clear light’ that gladdens the minds of children, Hesselden’s ‘the moon’’ is symbolic of peace: ‘I gazed at the stars in the silent sky/when the earth was calm and still and/I watched the moon as she sailed aloft over the distant will/And I wished that this piece can still remain’ (Thomson ed. 2012:136).

The moon in the poem is symbolic of peace. If therefore nature is a symbol of peace, it follows that nature should be appreciated by man. Anything that is peaceful is loved by man; as such no sane person cherishes a situation of strife and disturbance. The persona so desires this peace that he proclaims: “And I wished this peace could still remain and last through the/coming day to calm the world with its stress and strife/And soothe the worries away” (136).

Nature represented by ‘moon’ is once again seen as a symbol of peace that comes to quell the crisis into which humanity has been engulfed. The imagery of ‘stress’ and ‘strife’ as used in line 3 above is that of a world that has been thrown into pandemonium and restiveness perhaps by industrialization and activities that denigrate nature and its essence. When therefore the consequences of this disdainful treatment of nature emanate, nature is once again entreated to come to the rescue. In this light, nature is viewed by the persona as the deux ex machina in a world full of crisis and worries; full of regrets and tears.

The reverence accorded to nature as represented by the moon is also extended to the stars, which the persona equally views as a symbol of peace and hope: ‘But I thanked the stars for the peaceful night/and the hope they gave to me!”(136). If according to the persona, nature brings peace and hope, it shows that nature is held in high esteem, for peace and hope are two factors so desired by man in a world that holds but little of them for its populace. For a child reader, it has its varied implication. One, when there is peace, a child grows and develops properly. He also experiences love and consequently exudes it. Importantly too, peace heralds hope, the beautiful anticipation of a glorious future - a future full of promises and good tidings. Fortunately, it is nature that is the harbinger of this peace and hope that foregrounds a child’s happy future. If this is so, ecocriticism therefore stands tall amongst other literary theories in being the key opener with which a critic appreciates nature and what it represents. And for the child reader, the representation of nature in the works he so reads serves as a tonic to sustaining his interest.

All in all, the tone of the poem is that of adoration for nature which is evidently depicted and valorized in glowing terms. For instance while the moon according to the persona symbolizes peace, the stars symbolise both peace and joy. Yet the persona is not done with nature. Having romanticized the star and moon, he alluringly presents the ‘sun,’ another gift of nature to man thus: ‘and when I awoke, the sun shone out/A joy for all to

see"(136). For the persona, 'sun' is symbolic of joy. The imagery of joy here is that of delight and glee experienced by a persona ensconced in solitude and melancholy. The metaphor of joy as symbolized by the sun, to a child reader, is reminiscent of the beauty of nature which deserves appreciation and unreserved attention. In this light, the function of Literature is appreciated, as according to Huck et al (1993:10) 'Literature develops children's imagination and helps them to consider nature.'

In line with ecocritical tenets, which Glotfelty and Fromm expounded in *The Ecocriticism Reader,* works of art that bring the essence of nature to the fore help to raise the needed consciousness which nature deserves. It is also in the light of this that Olanlokun's *Preserve the Environment* eloquently proclaims the beauty of nature and the need to shield it from harm. He begins with a glowing commendation of nature:

> Forest of a thousand trees
> Your inhabitants are counted in dozens
> Birds fly like the jets
> Antelopes run faster than sport cars
> Trees harry to reach the sun(Olanlokun,2003:38).

The tone of the verse is that of admiration for nature. Like a paid praise singer, the persona hails nature and calls it, 'Forest of a thousand trees'. The use of this metaphor is in utmost reverence to nature represented by the forest.

The use of simile in 'Birds fly like the jet' is in admiration of the beauty that is nature. It is also symbolic of the completeness of nature. Since jets are made in the mode of birds, it can be safely adduced that the manufacturers are only imitating nature, yet this imitation can only remain as any other which cannot be like the original. This is even as the persona quickly in the next line validates the superiority of nature over artificialities: 'Antelopes run faster than sport cars.' Fast as the sport cars could be, they still cannot equal the fastness and glory of nature illustrated by 'antelopes.'

The use of personification in ‘trees hurry to reach the sun’ is symbolic of the living attribute accorded nature. The persona uses human attributes for it in apparent admiration of its active essence. The imagery of hurrying trees determined to reach the sun shows how effortlessly nature blooms and blossoms to protect mankind from extreme heat and hazard.

Another significant use of simile in ‘streams flow as if they have an appointment’ is symbolic of the seamless coursing of the stream (nature). This natural flow has been observed by scientists to be responsible for the purification of the water from germs and other infections. In turn man enjoys this water by way of using it to cook and drink. Impliedly, therefore, if nature could be this kind it means it needs mankind’s collective attention and preservation. Little wonder the persona ends in a didactic tone, “For every tree felled, plant another/preserve the environment for all.” In implying that humanity should embark on afforestation when a tree is felled, the persona impliedly postulates that the destruction of nature is inimical to the survival of man. In this light, nature is made significant in the poem in line with ecocritical poetics. In ‘Preserve the Environment for all’, the tone of the persona is that of disgust with the untoward attitude of mankind towards the natural environment, where people mindlessly destroy nature and at the end expect to be protected by it. For the child-reader who gains consciousness towards nature through a poem of this ecocritical bent, he unconsciously matures to be a lover of nature, an attribute that gives impetus to the whole essence of ecocriticism.

Olanlokun’s poem, “Cotton Bud” is one poem that radiates with vitality as it proclaims the indispensability of nature. The symbol of the ‘sun’ in this poem, for instance, is that of an indispensable element that helps the environment retain its green glamour. The cotton bud is presented as a plant which depends on nature for survival just like every other plant does. In the poem, the cotton bud makes a passionate appeal for the sun to come and shine on it in: ‘Beckoning the sun for a chat/with the lips parting ways.’The use of

personification ‘beckoning’ once again reinforces the belief of ecocritics that nature is a living thing that needs to be given attention. For, if man could go to sleep or rest, nature in all its splendour does not. It works round the clock to make the earth habitable for man. Yet man most does not appreciate this as he wantonly destroys it.

The imagery used in the last line, “with the lips parting ways” is a sensual one showing the symbolic reception of the sun by the cotton bud. It is this that represents the photosynthetic activities of the sun which in turn aids the growth and greening of plants. Indeed, without this symbolic ‘chat’ between the ‘sun’ and the ‘cotton bud’; the latter will not effectively blossom and produce the needed raw materials that are processed for clothes to be made. Human beings are the direct beneficiaries of this ‘chat’ as the clothes so processed are worn by them. In more ways than one, therefore, nature has effectively asserted its central role in man’s life. It follows that humans must recognise the important place of nature in their lives so as to defend its cause.

Olanlokun’s ‘Cotton bud’ is also symbolic of the complex roles nature plays as the persona not only salutes the sun, he also recognises the symbolic presence of the “harmattan’’ which according to him is a ‘friend’ of the “cotton bud in the farm land”. The use of harmattan is symbolic in that it is the singular natural season or activity that instigates the process of pollination in flowers and as such helps the cotton to bloom. After the pollination, comes the beauty that is symbolically brought about by the sun, an action which the persona does not fail to admire and commend.

Indeed a child-reader whose awareness of nature is raised by a poem such as ‘Cotton bud’ stands to gain immensely. One, he will have at an early age learnt to take a helpful recourse to nature, which has proved, after all to be a potent element to the survival of mankind. Furthermore, his behavior and bearing will have been cultured to the things of nature, an attitude advocated by Ogbeide Victor in his “Beyond Complexion, class and race:

An Ecocritical study of Alex La Guma's *A Walk in the Night* and *A Threefold Cord,*" where he quotes Rigby (2006:535) as advocating a unity between nature and culture.

The representation of nature also gets a vivid picture in 'Nigeria, My Country' a poem where Olajire Olanlokun valorizes nature for the beautiful impartation it has made in the country Nigeria:

> Nigeria, my country
> The land of the ever-brightening sun
> Watered by rivers Niger and Benue
> Blessed with gold and diamond (5-7).

Nature in this poem is variously represented by the 'sun', 'River Niger and Benue.' The image of the sun is that of a natural element which not only brightens the horizon, but also aids the growth and productivity of nature products such as agricultural produce. It is for this that the persona maintains that Nigeria is a land where nature (yam, cassava and guinea corn) can 'Tame hunger and put off the flame/ of famine.' The image of the sun is further heightened in these lines as a helpful and beneficial natural force that makes agriculture to flourish bountifully. This in turn wards off the cold hands of hunger and famine whose rage and pains could be debilitating. Significantly, the symbol of 'sun' has been a recurring motif in the nature poems presented in Olanlokun's *Children's Poetry for Pleasure*. It is present in 'Cotton Bud'and 'Preserve the environment', a representation that lends credence to the overwhelming presence of nature in the stability of man's happiness and wellbeing.

The symbol of Rivers Niger and Benue as presented in the poem is reminiscent of the life and power which nature (through both rivers) bring in the stability of the country Nigeria. Being two rivers that criss-cross through many states in Nigeria, Rivers Niger and Benue have significantly served as a means of transportation of humans, goods and services across the length and breadth of Nigeria, in addition to serving as good sources of irrigation for Agriculture. Symbolically, the place of Agriculture in providing food to feed the hungry lot of Nigeria cannot be overemphasized. And farming is one activity that does not take place in

a vacuum, especially where there is no water. Furthermore, the presence of the two rivers is symbolic in providing reliable sources of potable water for Nigerians. When therefore the poet's persona proclaims that the country of Nigeria is watered by Rivers Niger and Benue, he takes into useful account, the power of water in the affairs of mankind.

Everything about nature in Olanlokun's poetry is markedly presented to exalt its centrality in the affairs of man. Like the persona glowingly recognizes the place of nature in 'Nigeria, My Country' where rivers Niger and Benue are presented as the sources of water that prosper the land, nature in 'Wind of joy' is once again proclaimed by the persona as putting smile on the face of mankind:

> Wind of joy
> Be our companion
> And put a smile
> On the face of mankind(18).

The metaphor of the 'wind of joy' in the poetry is symbolic of nature's usefulness in giving man the needed happiness and joy. This obviously could be by way of the wonderful ventilation it blows across, which helps to douse the heat produced by the ecosystem; as well as its ability to instigate the process of pollination in plants which makes them bloom and boom. When this happens, the aesthetics of nature and its agricultural import is appreciated and utilized.

The tone of the poem is that of admiration for nature for being a harbinger of joy to mankind. In appealing to the wind of joy to 'blow across the land/and soothe the pains /of those in sorrow,' the persona impliedly reposes trust and confidence in what the wind is capable of doing. The symbol of 'pain' and 'sorrow' is reminiscent of the recurring famine and poverty pervading the ranks of humanity, an indication that man has not been able to be of any significant help to fellow man. Similarly, the imagery invoked by 'pain' and 'sorrow' is that of people benighted by hopelessness and gloom, a situation that throws them in a state of mourning where they bemoan their fate with pangs of regret. Sending a clarion call to

nature to come to the rescue therefore aptly revalidates the premium humanity places on nature as a dependable ally that can put a smile/on the face of/mankind (19).

The representation of nature is made more evident in Olanlokun's "Drought" where nature is passionately entreated by mankind to come to the rescue in the debilitating situation of drought ravaging the land. Indeed, the outcry of the persona is mournful:

> The drought has come again
> Like a thief in the night
> Taking away from the land
> The treasures we all cherish (33).

The imagery of the 'drought' in this poem is that of a heartless fiend who makes the people to grieve in utter helplessness. Indeed, the persona brands it 'a thief in the night,' an appellation befitting only to an enemy of the people, who does not want them to eat or be happy. Similarly the imagery in the third line (taking away from the land) further pictures the surreptitious act of drought in purloining the treasures (happiness) of the people.

The gory picture of the stark effects of the drought is succinctly captured by the persona in his mournful outburst thus: 'There is thirst in the land/There is hunger in the land/There is illness in the land'(line7-9). The imagery here is a serious one as the stark reality of the drought is presented in a frightening manner. By so doing, the use of catharsis to evoke pity at the untoward condition of the people is symbolic of the helplessness of humanity in the face of drought. Consequently, the persona passionately beckons on nature to come to the rescue of the people so as to restore their land, lost treasures and health: ''Earnestly we pray/Rain, please come again' (lines 10-11).

The tone of the poem is that of an emotional plea for nature to intervene amidst the rampaging drought engulfing humanity. The symbol of this appeal to nature for restoration and merciful intervention revs up against the backdrop of the stabilizing role of nature. Man thus retains the belief that nature's role in his overall well-being is just non-negotiable.

Impliedly, therefore, the persona is full of respect and gratitude to nature (rain) for possessing the innate capacity to protect and shield man from hunger and sickness, a role which he beseeches it to play in order to salvage their pitiable condition of drought.

The capacity of nature in restoring normalcy in a land ravaged and beclouded by drought in Olanlokun's 'Droughts' is figuratively proclaimed by the persona who goes emotional in pleading that nature sends rain to drive away drought, which by implication shows nature as the ultimate solution to man's unending problems. This much is reasserted in Iris Hesselden's 'Wishes' where the persona presents a number of his heartfelt wishes for his beloved who is apparently in a serious, pitiable situation:

> I wish you a rainbow after storms
> And a soft wind from the sea
> With small wild flowers round your paths,
> Which others may not see (Thomson ed. 2012:4).

The natural elements of rainbow, soft winds and wild flowers, are symbolic of the solace that is nature. For, despite the degree of his distress and solitude, the persona is optimistic that nature can effectively restore his lost joy and glory. In the light of the foregoing, the tone of the poem is that of optimism that nature's restoration power can certainly end the distressful situation of his beloved. For if the 'rainbow' with its beauty and splendour can give the beloved a wonderful entertainment, a 'soft wind from the sea' is capable of serenading him to a peaceful sleep which blesses the deep recesses of his soul and fills him with delight and pleasure thereafter.

The value of nature is once again explored in the last stanza as the persona proclaims his last wish for his beloved:

> I wish you the beauty of nature
> The wonder of all you can see
> With love growing stronger around you
> And all that tomorrow can be (line 18-21).

Nature is glowingly valorised in the above lines as possessing immense beauty that can rhapsodise a distressed person. This way, nature is presented as being self-sufficient

enough to give comfort to the discomforted, happiness to the unhappy and rest to the restless. This self sufficiency in beauty and splendour is heightened in the second line where the persona metaphorically considers nature as 'The wonder of all you can see' which is capable of giving a distressed and a hopeless, hope as seen in the last two lines: 'With love growing stronger around you/and all that tomorrow can be'. Nature, thus, betokens hope which makes mankind to be symbolically positive about life. The consequent effect of this is joy which pervades mankind.

The representation of nature is apt in Olanlokun's "I look up the Sky" where the persona views nature with admiration and love. Like a typical Romanticist of Wordsworthian mould, he stands in utter wonderment at the workings of nature. At the end of his studious assessment, he arrives at the conclusion that 'I have no control on all'(60). This lends credence to the timeless and well-routined way that nature could exert some level of control over other things besides it. In this light he views nature as awesomely unique. The workings of nature further astound the child-persona as he proclaims,

I look up the sky
The sun rising from the east
I look up the sky
The sun setting in the west(60).

The symbol of the sun is once again invoked by the persona as one piece of beauty with which nature decorates earth. In other preceding nature poems in this anthology, the persona had seen the sun as a symbol of hope to mankind with its brilliant light which adds glamour to every nook and cranny of the earth. The persona may have laboriously wondered what and how the earth could have been if the sun had not been in existence. He may have also imagined how plants would grow food for man without the positive touch of the sun. In this light therefore, the imagery of the sun becomes that of a benevolent force that makes the sky and the earth glow.

For the child-reader, the implication of the poem is that his sense of adoration for the natural environment is heightened and intensified. He also gains some nature-induced knowledge on how the sun significantly rises and sets. With these nature-workings in mind, a child's awareness of nature is aroused and consequently sustained. He may even revel in the splendour of the rising and setting of the sun, an activity that may prompt him to stand symbolically like the illustrated child in the pages of the book who stands with hands placed across the chest, marveling and pleasantly wondering on how the sun rises in the east and sets in the west. With mouth agape at the piece of beauty he so imagines, as aptly illustrated by the image of a child standing with eyes admiring the sun, the child's sense of appreciation is further aroused as he may unconsciously plunge the results of his imagination to a physical drawing that captures his thoughts.

Nature also manifests in the poem with the symbolic reference the child persona makes at the moon as that which makes the night 'bright' for children to be happy and hopeful: I look up the sky/The moon making my night/bright (line 5-7). The symbol of the moon to the child persona is that which makes the night beautifully bright and inviting, thus confirming the fact that children are not in love with darkness. A child engulfed in darkness that the night brings is gloomy and full of fear. His melancholic state could even make him see nothing good in nature and all its bounties and beautiful essence. Therefore, the symbolic presence of the moon not only makes the night pleasant for him, it also makes it friendly. For instance, when the moon shines and exerts its brilliance on the earth, a child's enthusiasm to play and make merry is aroused.

The tone of 'The moon making my night/bright' stems from the fact that children want to be thrilled always as they do not cherish or contemplate any dull moment. Their simple nature and mind goads them to engage in any activity that may makes them glow with joy and triumph. When therefore the brightener of the day (sun) gives way and that of the

night (moon) sets in, the adrenalin to play literally revs up in the child. In this light, the moon assumes a symbol of joy for the child-persona who makes merry under its influence. This is even as the persona had in a similar poem referred to the moon as 'a woman/kind, lively, caring mother.' These are symbols of goodness represented by the moon.

The admiration of nature as expressed by the child-persona is taken a notch further as he relishes the process of rainfall which nature facilitates. In his pleasant puzzlement, he exclaims: "I look up the sky/The rain falling on my head''(line 8-9). The tone of these lines is that of love and appreciation for what nature offers to humanity. The persona apparently expresses his excitement at the manner the rain splashes on his head. The symbol of rain to a child-reader is significant in many ways. First, the rain provides a pleasurable experience for children, an experience which motivates children to march out with glee to play and merry under the rain. Secondly, the rain is always needed for children to drink in order to be healthy. Nature, thus becomes an object of good health for children. Also, the symbol of rain is that of a natural force that encourages greenery because when it rains, plants and crops are fed to blossom and bloom, a process that generates food and makes the environment healthy.

Nature according to Iris Hesselden (in Thomson ed. 2012:104) 'has a perfect plan/A special magic to impart'. This lends further credence to Olanlokun's lines in "I look up the sky,'' where the perfect plan of nature is clearly manifested in the timely rising of the sun in the east and its setting in the west, as well as the blossoming of the moon at night, and the falling of the rain at its appointed time. If nature has a perfect plan, according to Hesselden, it then means nature requires mankind's collective appreciation and admiration, a gesture which should be shown through the preservation of nature in order to enable it function adequately.

The power of poetry in capturing man's treatment of nature is instructive. Like Olajire Olanlokun in his *Children's Poetry for Pleasure,* under study, many ecocritical poets

are emerging gradually in Nigeria. These are poets who are concerned with the representation of nature in art; while some represent nature by appreciating its workings, others represent it by repudiating humanity for the undue harm it exerts on it. Uche Umez's *Dark Through The Delta*, for instance laments the degradation of nature by oil explorers:

> I see the fat of the land
> Being eaten out
> By the bourgeoning pollution
> By the intricate machinery of oil greed (2005:8).

The grim imagery in the above lines is symbolic of the harm that has been mindlessly done on the natural environment especially in the Niger-Delta parts of Nigeria. This harm has indeed adversely affected the living conditions of the people who have to live in very unacceptable situations because their major means of livelihood (the river) has been polluted. Accordingly the tone of the poem is mournful as the poet's persona is obviously sad at the state of his once prosperous land now 'eaten out' by unfriendly 'machinery of oil greed'. The symbol of the 'fat of the land' is that of the wealth of the people that sustains them, but which has been obviated by oil explorers. The persona characterises these explorers as greedy because they are oblivious of the harm their activities bring to the people. Figuratively therefore, he sees them as enemies of nature who do not mean well for the environment of the people.

The child-reader through this learns that it could be harmful to degrade nature; and as the 'fat of the land' is being 'eaten out' by the utter neglect of nature, a child reader is faced with the choice of embracing nature and its ideals so as to sustain their beautiful environment, which after all forms the beckon of his survival.

The disgust of Umez in the degradation of nature is also evident in "No Honey Flows Here" where the poet's persona bemoans the fate of the land in the hands of oil explorers who exploit their oil and ravage their environment without caring a hoot. He therefore

decries the abject poverty into which his people are thrown after their natural environment has been destroyed:

> No honey flows here
> Where children scavenge the streets
> In search of mildewed bread in the bins
> No honey flows here….
> Just the undying bitterness of a land shaded (10).

The imagery of the above verse is scary and frightening as a situation where children suffer and wander hopelessly in search of 'mildewed bread in the bins' is unacceptable to the poet's persona. Similarly a condition where the 'honey' of the land has been drained away by greedy oil companies is totally disgusting to the persona. The symbol of 'honey' as used in the passage is the natural environment which has over the time shielded the people from poverty and hopelessness. Unfortunately, it is this nature's gift to the people that has been mindlessly ravaged and purloined hence children, who after all, are always the worst-hit; roam about in a helpless adventure for food. The symbol of 'bitterness' and 'shackled' used in characterizing the land of the people evokes pity and soberness of the mind.

According to Garrard (2004:1) 'pastoral peace rapidly gives way to catastrophic destruction.' This is indeed evident in the lamentation of Umez whose ecocritical poetry is mournful in tone, arising from the mindless plundering of the natural environment of the Niger Deltans, a people who have historically been at the mercy of multi-national oil giants whose activities have been inimical to the ecosystem of the people. Impliedly, therefore, Umez is of the strong opinion that the oil explorers in the Niger Delta should preserve the natural environment of the people so that they do not entirely lose out both in the area of their oil and their environment.

A beautiful natural environment attracts tourists besides serving as a people's beacon of hope and survival, a type of environment which Gostelow (2007) captures in describing the natural beauty of South Africa thus:

> South Africa has a magic that captures every visitor. It casts its spell on one summer's night spent under the stars in the sands of the Kalahari. As the sun slipped below the horizon, we barbecued around a camp fire before resting our heads beneath the most romantic roof in the world (87).

The imagery of an aesthetically pleasant nature environment in South Africa pervades the mind as one read this. It is the allure of this environment that draws visitors and tourists to South Africa. It follows, therefore, that nature on its own has an attractive essence. And the symbol of magic in the excerpt above represents no other thing than the presence of a natural environment unspoiled by the activities of an industrialized world. It is this presence that Gostelow reminisces yet again about Pretoria: 'The region around Pretoria – called Jacaranda city for its avenues of trees that blossom into purples clouds in October is scattered with mansions and monuments that encapsulate in stone and bronze the country's exciting history (2007:3). The pride of place accorded the natural environment of South Africa is symbolic of the premium placed on nature by ecocritics. As an ecocritical journalist, Gostelow does not hide the sole purpose of the attractions and fascinations accorded South Africa, which is the beauty of the natural environment there.

It is in the light of this that Olajire Olanlokun maintains in "The Night and the Moon" that nature has a special beauty that makes it exude hope to mankind. In the poem, the child persona represents nature by capturing the relationship in function between 'The night' and 'The moon'. For instance when night, which of course symbolically divides two separate days, sets in, it brings darkness which is not in any way endearing to children. However, while mankind prepares for night through 'lamps of various sizes' which 'Run to embrace him,'(Olanlokun 2003:62-63) the persona still patiently awaits the arrival of the moon.

The child-persona uses the metaphor of 'a bride in the waiting' to compare the moon. The symbol of 'a bride' is that of a highly valued, cherished person whose absence could mar a wedding occasion. In symbolically presenting the moon as 'a bride in the waiting,' the

child persona implies that it is the presence of the moon that actually adds glamour to the night. And for children who are affrighted by a gale of darkness, it is this bride in the waiting that changes their gloom to bloom.

The tone of the poem is that of hopefulness. This is even as the child persona is confident that the moon (a bride in waiting) will 'creep in' and extinguish the darkness that frightens children. The valorization of the moon here which is symbolic of the working of nature is significant because ecocritics are always interested in how nature is represented in a literary work.

According to Chukwu (2008:5) ecocritical poets are unique for their exceptional ability to gauge the beauty of nature. It is in this light that Dorothy Morris, like Olajire Olanlokun, profusely admires and illuminates the essence of nature in "Living Flowers", a metaphor for beautiful birds and butterflies like the 'Peacocks' and 'Admirals'. The imagery cast by the mere perching of these creatures is that of flowers that are living and moving:

> They settle on the buddleia
> And I could watch for hours
> Red admirals and peacocks
> Like living, moving flowers
> With the middle-faintest tremble
> As though wafted by a breeze (Thomson ed. 2012:50).

Indeed it is only a poet obsessed by the exquisite offering of nature that can, like William Wordsworth, highlight the symbolic appearance of birds on the buddleia. The use of simile in line four typifies the flowery appearance of the birds on shrubs. The persona's comparison of the birds' appearance on the buddleia heightens with his disclosure that they create beautiful patterns that surpass that of an emperor:

> And I can gaze at ease
> At the richness of their patterns
> More exquisite by for
> Than the jewels of an emperor (Line 8-11).

The symbol of 'richness' and 'exquisite' is that of adorability at the natural beauty of birds. In being rich in beautiful patterns, the persona implies that the sight of birds offers engaging and admirable scenery which in its exquisiteness an on-looker 'can gaze at ease'. The result of this quiet gaze is peace, a reason for which Chrissy Greenslade writes:

> Inside, you'll feel tranquil and unwind
> Relaxing, you're healing within
> Refreshed in your mind you will find then
> What a state of composure you're in
> (Thomson ed. 2012:49).

Nature therefore offers peace in many ways. And this peace has a marked significance of providing a bastion of comfort in which mankind could forget his troubles and trials, a comfort which Brian Gent describes as Nature's gift in fulfilling 'her time-honoured tryst' with mankind (Thomson ed. 2012:91).

While Olajire Olanlokun celebrates nature in his collection with nine poems, Philip Onuoha does so with about five poems. Yet they are united in their stylistic and thematic approaches, a fact which justifies their being paired up in this chapter. "The Moon" is Onuoha's first poem to receive a critical highlight in this study. In the poem, the persona sees the moon as a nature element which glitters to the delight of the children. Impliedly, a night without the moon is a gloomy one for children, as there would be no play or folk song. Children have passion for nature as signified by the presence of the moon. Onuoha's "The moon" for instance, presents lines that vividly manifest the love children have for the moon:

> I love the moon
> It hangs in the sky
> Like bulbs on the roof
> I love the moon
> It brings light to the night
> Like the sun brightness the day (Onuoha, 2007:22).

The imagery of the moon in this poem is that of an illuminator of the sky, which by extension performs the function of the sun, at night. The simile in line three "like bulbs on the roof" recreates further the image of the moon beautifully hanging on the sky to beam light to the

earth on nightly basis. However, while likening the moon to a bulb, the persona does not lose sight of the fact that the binaries of neutrality and artificiality still ring bell between the two. This he expresses in the following rhetoric questions: "Why the moon does not fall/And break like the bulb/I wonder"(22). Once again, the permanence and timelessness of nature is highlighted in these lines. For, whereas the bulb, which in itself is manmade, can always break now and then, the moon cannot just fall down and break. In an apparent Wordsworthian posture of wonderment at nature, the persona's rhetoric question on the mystery of the moon further symbolizes the overwhelming beauty of nature. And in appreciating this beauty, a child's sense of aesthetics is further developed and expanded. Mayesky (2006:392) is apt in expressing that "for the young child, the world of nature is an especially appropriate avenue for a sense of aesthetics."

The persona further celebrates the moon by unmasking the various recreational activities which children utilize its presence to do:

> I know I love the moon
> When children gather
> On the rainless sand
> To sing songs of old
> And of heroes who saw
> The moon and left it for us (22).

Another veritable symbol of the moon is that it serves as a summon to children to gather for sundry adventurous activities. These activities which are organized and experienced outdoors, in full glare and protective glamour of nature, are symbolic and in tandem with ecocritical ideals among which is to appreciate nature and preserve it. Indeed Mayesky (2006:399) validates this when she opines that "Getting young children outdoors to touch and experience nature is the starting point of learning about ecology and the environment."

Onuoha romanticizes nature in "My Antelope" a poem which radiates with admiration for the antelope, one of nature's gift to mankind. The persona even uses a celebratory metaphor to describe the antelope:

> My antelope
> Smaller than the elephant
> Bigger than the tortoise
> You are not a snail
> But walks slowly
> Like the king of the forest(4).

The tone of affection for the antelope runs through the poem, prompting the persona to refer to the animal as "My antelope" in the first line. The natural endowments of the antelope are keenly represented in the poem. For instance, the antelope is described as "Bigger than the tortoise," and that even though it walks slowly, "You are not a snail" (4). In fact the persona artistically qualifies its gait as majestic in the simile: "like the king of the forest." The celebration of the antelope, besides its ecocritical bent, may have drawn inspiration from the Igbo cosmology of Philip Onuoha, the author, which believes that animals are great endowments of nature, a belief corroborated by Ezikeojiaku in Darah ed. (2008:44) who writes that "the Igbo perception of the world of nature is characterized by the hills, rivers, mountains, caves, anthills, trees, forests, shrubs, 'animals', and insects" (emphasis mine). Once again the universality of ecocriticism is validated here which further buttresses its timeless essence. It is also significant in the sense that ecocritical values have been with people of all races, long before the seminal work by the duo of C. Glofelty and H. Fromm (in *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmark in Literary Ecology*).

According to Mayesky (2006:393), children learn a lot when animals are discussed, a fact that may not be unconnected with the reality that animals also constitute nature. And besides its aesthetic purposes, nature is always capable of enhancing children's creativity. This makes Onuoha's romanticization of the beautiful features of the antelope even more

instructive. For instance, he symbolically advises the antelope to beware of the rain which can cause some damage to its beautiful colours:

> Always dodge the rain
> That washes your beautiful colours
> Remember you are the most beautiful
> Among animals of the forest (5).

The tone of affection as witnessed in the first stanza yet reechoes in the stanza above. By cautioning the antelope to "dodge the rain", the persona symbolically expresses his keen interest on the animal, an interest which allegorically amplifies the desire of the persona to protect nature from harm. Consequently, he revels in the beauty of the animal as he reminds it of its beauty, "Remember you are the most beautiful… (5). Having earlier qualified the antelope as "the King of the forest," a beautiful metaphor that significantly illustrates the beauty of nature, the persona now climaxes his elegant characterization of the antelope in referring it as "the most beautiful/Among animals of the forest" (5).

Onuoha's treatment of nature is further illustrated in "My Little Puppy," a poem where the joy that nature heralds is manifested through the potentials of the dog. The poet's persona in this twelve line poem is in a happy mood as he proclaims the great qualities of the dog:

> Father bought me a little puppy
> That makes me feel so happy
> It plays and runs around
> Like a star in the sky
> When I rub its hairy back
> It wags its tail for me (42).

The elegant cadence in line one and two symbolically amplifies the tone of excitement which the entire poem radiates. It is this exuberance that spurs the simile in line four where the persona compares the movement of the puppy with that of the star in the sky, thus evoking the imagery of resplendence and magnificence for which nature is acclaimed.

Nature indeed has the power to soothe the feelings of mankind, especially in times of distress and melancholy, a factor which leads the persona to further venerate the wonderful qualities of the puppy thus:

When I'm very unhappy
I love to play with puppy
When I want to sleep
It keeps me company
That is why
I love my little puppy (42).

If nature is this kind to man, giving him joy in his sad moments, rocking him to sleep in his moments of weakness, it means man is eternally indebted to nature. For a child reader whose interest is the focal point, this poem comes with a great moral to defend nature and indeed preserve it. For instead of viewing the puppy as insalubrious, he will start treating it with care.

The symbol of "love" which runs through the breath of the poem is significant. One, the poet's persona sees nature as a piece of beauty which should attract the attention of children, nay adults. This is because one can only love what he has keen interest in. Interestingly, any phenomenon that attracts the attention of children reinforces their sense of imagination and creativity, a factor corroborated by Mayesky (2006:576) thus: "…the beauty of nature can't help but encourage a child's creativity." Furthermore, by saturating the poem with the symbol of love, the poet's persona impliedly posits that nature has a lot to offer him. Little wonder he makes reference to the happiness it gives him, in addition to the company and fulfillment which the little puppy (nature) offers.

Onuoha's "The Sky" wears a unique stylistic toga as the child persona is filled with awe at the presence of the sky. To him, the sky is quite distant. In his adventurous quest to reach the sky, he fails hence he expresses his frustration:

I can't reach the sky
No matter how I try
It is so far away
Many, many miles away (50).

The persona's reflection on nature here is not that of derision, but admiration as he seeks, albeit in futility to unravel the mystery surrounding the appearance of the sky. Like William Wordsworth in the Romantic era in 'Tintern Abbey' filled with reverence and awe for nature, so is this persona whose palpable admiration for nature leads him to explore it further. Perhaps, while he can explore other worlds of nature, the persona apparently wonders why he cannot do the same to the sky. Also while he only sees the various changes in colour of the sky, he cannot touch this same sky. He admits that the sky changes colour: "At times it is white/At times it is bright? (2007:50). Yet, he cannot go near it, a childish puzzlement that makes him to end his adventurous quest with a rhetoric question: "But who will tell me why/The sky is still very high?" (50).

The import of the rhetorical question is representational of the curious and adventurous psyche of children, a factor which Heath (2005:291) recognizes hence she states that "young children are by nature, very active and curious." For Stephanie Feeney et al (1996:104), this stage of development in children enables children to make sense of their experiences.

Nature is indispensable to man, a reason for which Philip Onuoha's "The Sun" strikes a remarkable chord even to the psyche of a child. The poem which has four unequal stanzas begins with the persona's expression of pleasant amazement at the mysteriousness of the sun (nature) which blazes as if it were near when in fact it cannot be touched, "Mother/How can I/touch the sun/For it hangs so far/from us on earth" (6). This pleasant mystery surrounding the sun even makes the child love it the more as he expresses:

Mother,
I love the sun
Because it shines so bright
From a height so far
For any hand to reach (7).

The symbol of the sun is brilliantly encapsulated in the third line where its beam floods the earth with a brilliant light that not only brightens the day, but also illuminates the mind of the child persona. This makes the illuminatory imagery of the sun to well transcend the brightening of the day, to bringing joy to the heart of the child. Indeed, the beautiful psychological impact of the sun on children could conveniently be likened to that of the moon which besides the brightening symbol for which it stands, also bears a psychological effect of serving as a time for "moonlight stories", an activity which Onuoha (2007:59) illuminates in "We love moonlight stories/Because they erase our worries/And bring divided heart together/To sing and dance together." The impact of this is that nature markedly bears a physical and psychological essence on children, a reason for which William Wordworth a frontline nature poet reveals that nature "has a world of ready wealth/Our minds and hearts to bless" (Onuekwusi, 2002:40). When therefore, the sun makes appearance in the day, it is a blessing not just to the adult world but to the world of children. This much is justified in the last stanza of the poem where the persona exclaims:

Father,
I love the sun
For it touches everyone
With the light so bright
To make our day so right (7).

The imagery of the sun is taken a notch further as the poet's persona indicates that "it touches everyone," which impliedly reveals that nature is not discriminatory as man and his creations. Another import here is that nature is kind to everyone even in the face of man's indifference to it. For instance, Allen D. L. et al (1978:290) wonders why "people will casually pull off a leaf or a branch for no apparent reason," without realizing that "One

branch may not seem to count, but there are multitudes of people out of doors, these days, and such injuries add up". William Wordsworth's "The Tables Turned" gives a symbolic description of the sun which further corroborates Onuoha's representation of the sun:

> The sun above the mountain's head
> A freshening lustre mellow
> Through all the long fields has spread
> His first sweet evening yellow (Onuekwusi, 2002:40).

Symbols of beauty illustrated with the use of "freshening," "lustre" and "Sweet" as used in the poem validate the respect with which the sun (nature) is held. If therefore, everything about the sun is beautiful, it means that nature is friendly and useful. To this effect Allen D. L. et al (1978:148) aptly writes that:

> Every living thing depends on the sun.
> But only green plants, which make food by photosynthesis, can us the sun's energy directly. A plant eater as a grasshopper on your lawn, gets a share of the sun by eating plants. Shrews and other insects eaters obtain energy by eating grasshoppers.

It is easy to deduce from this except that the sun effectively powers the energy cycle for plants and animals, and by extension, nature. Accordingly, the survival of man depends on these natural elements which the sun powers. It therefore follows that a day without the sun may well spell doom for the existence of man. From this prism, one can then appreciate the celebration of this nature's gift (the sun) to mankind in Onuoha's "The Sun."

3.2 Conclusion

In consonance with the ideals of ecocriticism, Olajire Olanlokun and Philip Onuoha remarkably present archetypal nature poems that appeal to the sensibilities of a child. Interestingly too, the poems so far presented are capable of deepening the study of Children's nature poetry. And even though Olanlokun seems to have given nature a more overwhelming treatment as evident in the number of his poems so analysed, he is united with Onuoha who presents a lesser number of poems in their illuminating elucidations on nature gifts like the

sun, moon, flowers, wind, sky, animals etc, representing interesting themes for the edification of children. These themes are not abstract hence they do not enstrange a child reader. This is the more reason why children need to be exposed to nature poetry early in life. An exposure, for instance to the ideals and beauty of nature, fires the interest of children to nature as well as raises their consciousness to protect nature, a commitment that is at the very core of ecocriticism. Beyond this however, is the stylistic presentation of the poems which gives the totality of the poetry a child-friendly tone and cadence, a feature that appropriately defines Children's poetry.

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CHAPTER FOUR

NATURE REPRESENTATION IN THE POETRY OF EFE LOVETTA ANI AND JOHN ASIEDU SARPONG

4.0 Preamble

When Charles Nnolim (2010:1) proclaims that literature still tills its crops in many virgin forests, and also continues to speak many voices; he may, inadvertently perhaps, be pointing at the literary effects which the theory of ecocriticism bears on literary works. As a theory which primarily explores the representation of nature and other ecological issues in a literary work (Garard 2004:5), ecocriticim is still spreading its critical tentacles as seen in the poetry of Lovetta Ani (*Elo Poetry*), and John Asiedu Sarpong (*Sweet Talking Drums* and *Poetry for Young Ones*). Though nature is given a more overwhelming treatment by Sarpong in his two texts than Ani in her *Elo Poetry*, the two writers are paired based on the paramount importance they attach to nature, a factor made palpable in their representations in the chapter.

4.1 Representation of Nature in the poetry of Ani and Sarpong

The two authors whose works are interrogated in this chapter have made interesting marks in Children's literature. Ani, for instance has published over twelve works for children. Her passion for writing Children's works may have driven her to establish Ratek schools, a private school based in Kaduna. Interestingly, Ani writes for virtually all categories of children, a reason why she has a poetry amthology published in three volumes to take care of the literary needs of nursery, primary and secondary pupils.

Similarly, Sarpong has written many works for children especially in the poetry genre, having considered the centrality of poetry in children's education. Originally from Ghana, Sarpong has lived in Nigeria for over twenty five years, a reason why his works embody images and symbols germane to the Nigerian culture. His two works are interrogated in this chapter due to their overwhelming treatment of nature.With over ten poems against

Ani's four, Sarpong's treatment of nature is significant. Both authors, however, chart the same artistic course in the presentation of nature, a reason why their works are interrogated with Ecocriticism.

Accordingly, Ani's "Things in the Sky" strikes an ecocritical chord, thus confirming the universality of the tenets of ecocriticism. The sky, to the poet's persona, presents a natural mystery which is capable of enthralling the child-reader. Similarly, the sky constitutes the atmosphere which changes colour and shape from an interplay of natural force. Allen D. L. et al (1978:227) note that "The atmosphere has a profound influence on what we see." This is true of the position of the sky in the matrix of atmospheric elements. When the sky, for instance, is dim, children are dull and sad, but when bright, there is a remarkable euphoria of excitement and zest. The sky as presented in Ani's *Elo Poetry Book* is a bright and pleasant one:

The sky is blue
The sky is bright
The sky is up
And the birds fly up (11).

The images of "blue" and "bright" strike a chord of excitement in the heart of the persona who looks at nature's sky as adorable and friendly to children who are never tired of playing and adventuring. Symbolically, the brightness of the sky is also enjoyed by non-humans such as the birds as seen in line four, which maximize the opportunity to explore the sky. In that mood of childish excitement, the persona also revels in the offerings of nature which are in the custody of the sky:

The stars are up
The moon and sun
Shine in the sky
Up in the sky(12).

These nature elements are so admirable to the persona that he glorifies Providence for creating a beautiful world. In another poem entitled "God is wonderful," the persona

significantly enjoins fellow children to "Praise God in the morning/Praise Him all the day" at the glowing beauty of the sky.In this euphoria, he proclaims:

> Oh! Look at the sun
> And admire your sun;
> See the stars and moon
> High up in the sky
> All are created by God (11).

The various elements of the sun, star and moon excite the child apparently because of their functions which cannot be effectively replaced. The sun, for instance, which according to John Parton (ed) (1990:307) "is a great glowing ball of gasses", floods the earth with an incandescent light that is irreplaceable; just as the beauty of the moon and star at night is unparalleled.

The symbol of the sky which runs through Ani's *Elo Poetry Book* is that of a motivational motif. When the sky is black or nebulous, children are not motivated to play. The sky is therefore, a significant symbol in children's nature poetry. This attitude of children is furher shown in the poem "Boys and Girls," where Anni's persona expresses his excitement at the brightness and clarity of the sky, a development which leads him to call out on other children to troop out and play:

> Boys and Girls
> Come out, come out
> The sky is clear
> It is time to cheer (3).

The tone of the poem is obviously that of exuberance and childish excitement. The brightness of the sky which is a nature element provides a significant aesthetic experience which encourages children to play. Mayesky (2006:35) views aesthetic experience thus:

> Aesthetic experience begins with and depends on the sense. It is seeing beauty in a sunset, hearing rhythm in a rainfall and loving the expression on a person's face. Aesthetic experiences emphasize doing things for the pure joy of its. Although there can be, there does not have to be any practical purpose or reason. The goal of aesthetic experiences is a full, rich life for the child.

The import of this is that nature is rich in aesthetic experience for the children hence they do not tire in exploring it to the fullest. Another silent import of the above excerpt is that where adults do not find the sky an aesthetic experience, children do. Accordingly, the persona calls out other children to come out and appreciate the beauty of the sky which even at night is brightened and beautified by the moon:

The moon is full
The weather is fine
Come out to play
Come out today (3).

Nature's symbol of "moon" is valorized as a brightner of the sky which motivates children to play. Parton (ed) (1990:212) defines the moon as "our nearest neighbour in space which loops around the earth." For the children, the moon may well be regarded as their neighbour because its appearance fills their hearts with joy and enthusiasm. Remarkably, the moon fires up a latent creative coefficient in children as most of them display their uncommon psychomotor skills, as according to Feeney et al (1996:125), "Children have an innate drive to explore, discover and master skills, these skills could be drawing, dancing, sliding, composing, etc." At the appearance of the moon, therefore, the persona does not relent in declaring before his fellow children:

It's time to dance
It's time to sing
Let's go places
And let's see faces(3-4).

The symbol of the moon which is reminiscent of an adventurous time is further validated in Sarpong's "Glittering Moon" where the persona declares:

I shall sing a folk song and more
Play hide and seek as you shine
So, beautiful moon!
Show your face all the time (Sarpong 1996:89).

The tone of gratitude which pervades the entire poem is significant of the pleasure that children feel at the sight of the moon. The symbol of "beautiful moon" in line three

shows that the moon and by extension, nature is delectable and precious. And in entreating the moon in the last line to show its 'face all the time,' the persona eloquently expresses the fact that nature is always a welcome phenomenon as its functions, values and place cannot be replaced by any other factor. By implication therefore, the absence of the moon in some occasions expresses his frustration:

> Where did you go, moon
> To hide for so long a time?
> Leaving me in nights of gloom
> I was sad all the time (89).

The ubiquitous use of pathos in the lines above is symbolic of the awe with which the persona holds nature. It is also symbolic of the infinite dependency of man on nature. For just as "Every living depends on the sun" (Allen D. L. et al (1978:148)), so does every living thing depend on the moon. It is for this reason that the persona pours a copious eulogy on the moon:

> Oh glittering moon!
> Good friend of mine!
> Glad to see you so bloom!
> Once more in the night time (89).

The use of "glittering" is symbolic of the preciousness of the moon which is so dear to the persona that he calls it a "Good friend of mine." Priceless as it is, the persona whose mood evidently is that of exuberance proclaims with candour and rigour that he is "Glad to see you so bloom". This positive attitude towards nature is capable of making children become "Nature Smart", a term which Mayesky (2006:74) defines as "Naturalistic Intelligence," hence she proclaims that;

> Children with naturalistic intelligence enjoy outdoor activities and have a strong connection to the outside world or animals. They notice patterns and things from nature easily. They love collecting flowers, rocks, leaves, etc. They may enjoy stories, shows or any subjects that deal with animals or nature happenings.

Mayesky's concept of nature smart children is indeed in line with the tenets of ecocriticism which aims at producing writers and critics whose goad and goal is to deploy the instrument of literature to defend nature. Accordingly, one may eloquently add that children's nature literature (be it poetry, prose or play) aims at producing nature smart children. These are the ideal children which ecocriticism ultimately aims to produce, children who would declare with delight, "I'll plant a Tree" as Sarpong's persona does declare in the poem "I'll plant a Tree," an archetypal Children's nature poetry intended to imbue children with ecocritical ideologies of appreciating and protecting nature. This poem is significant in many ways as it ingeniously broaches the tenets of ecocriticism. Stylistically crafted in three equal stanzas which appear in septets, the persona first revels in the lofty goal of planting a tree in the first triplet, while the quatrain following ingeniously highlights the benefit of tree planting. In doing this, the persona characteristically outlines three ecocritical gains derived from planting a tree. In the first septet, he celebrates the protectiveness of nature:

I'll plant a Tree
I'll plant a Tree
Around the place I live
The SHADY TREE, I believe
Will give me shade and breeze
The scorching sun I see
Won't sting me like the bee (68).

The use of capital letter "T" to write the common noun, tree, significantly makes it to assume a special status of a proper noun; which is indeed reminiscent of the awe with which the Romantics held nature so much so that they wrote it in capital "N" (Nature) in order to connote its extraordinary symbolism. Also, the stylistic highlighting of two words in the fourth line in each septet is symbolic of the metaphysical importance of the tree. The first stanza, for instance, bears "SHADY TREE," the second stanza, "BLOOMING TREE", while the third, FRUITFUL TREE; attributes that glowingly justify the need to protect nature. Furthermore, the symbolism in the use of repetition in the first couplet of the third stanza

indicates the irreversibility of the decision of the persona to plant a tree; which impliedly shows the passion of the persona to protect nature. In characteristically repeating this decision (to plant a tree), the poet's persona, no doubt, has underscored the pivotal position of a tree in a man's life, a position that has been given more credibility and ventilation in Allen D. L. et al (1978:33):

> It is tantalizing to know what a tree is, yet to find their definitions so elusive. We know what trees do. They give off vital oxygen. They moderate temperatures, hold soil and prevent erosion. They are beneficial to the animal world, including man. Not the lean important thing about trees and forests is their power to influence the human spirit-somehow to soothe and inspire.

The moderation of temperature, which is an important role of trees and which has been highlighted in the fourth line of Sarpong's "I'll plant a Tree" is significant of the caring attribute of trees, especially in shielding man from the extremities of the weather. The poet's persona, however is not done yet as he celebrates the tree for providing a "pleasant scent" which nourishes and relaxes the mind. Indeed Allen D. L. et al (1978:34) submit that "When you inhale the odours of a forest, the mixture of scents is dominated by its most numerous trees", a role which further makes trees to be central to man's survival. In all this, the ability of the tree to produce food is not overlooked by the persona as he declares: "The FRUITFUL TREE, I believe will give me fruits as food' (68) which of course will enhance his health.

The nature representation in Sarpong's "I'll plant a Tree" is apt as it is exquisite. The persona obviously filled with uncommon determination to protect nature (by planting a tree), sounds an impressive note to a child reader on the need to be protective of his environment as their lives depend on it (Mayesky 2006:398). It is for this reason that Mayesky further warns that "When children do not have a safe environment in which to practice or the opportunity to face challenges, they're more likely to be involved in some type of accident" (497).

Furthermore, in situating nature in Sarpong's "I'll plant a Tree," one underscores a pervasive imagery of sowing and nurturing throughout the twenty-line poem. For in adumbrating that he will plant a tree that will provide shade, scent and food, the persona acknowledges that a tree is not just planted and abandoned as it needs to be tended and nurtured in order to bloom and flourish. For a child reader who studies this poem, the latent desire to plant a tree is given a boost which in so doing nature is given a commendable relevance and attention. After all, "The key to protecting nature" says Allen D. L. et al (1978:290) is just to show respect to it.

When Sarpong's "Basic Nutrients I Need" is brought to the 'ecocrtitical periscope', one may easily owe gratitude to the sun for making the blooming and productivity of these food nutrients so valorized by the persona. Written in sestet of six stanzas, the persona presents nature and its beauty with a tone of excitement and enthusiasm. He gives us an aesthetic vintage of the offerings of nature, the fruits and food it produces without which a child may not survive. The first stanza opens this celebratory verse:

Fresh fruits
The nice and sweet
Daily do I suck and eat
So much that I sit and grin
My shining belly free from ill
Able to eat well and fine (69).

The symbols of 'fresh', 'nice' and 'sweet' are all celebrative of nature's beauty and usefulness which these fruits represent. The sixth line with its symbols of wellness as illustrated with "well" and "fine" indicates succinctly that nature is capable of saving a child from getting sick. Some of these fruits are symbolically mentioned by the persona to include: "Coconut, Orange, Mango, fruits/Banana, Apple, Pawpaw fruits/Melon, Pear and Pineapple fruits," all nutrients which once again, the persona adduces will "make me grow fit and bloom/like cherry blossom in the noon." The use of simile in the last line to compare with the blossoming of the cherry which is a natural element is symbolic of the enviable status of

nature which commands attention. It is little wonder that Mayesky (2006:398) submits that the "Environment is one of the most important influences in the lives of children." This is why an environment which bears no nature appeal does not really attract children, a development which prompts Mayesky to opine that children "need an environment that provides for their basic needs: water, food, clean air (398).

In this light, the friendliness of the persona's nature makes him to further celebrate its fruitfulness in line three:

> Fresh, Greens
> Are nice and sweet
> Daily do I boil and eat
> So much that I sit and grin
> My pearly eyes so bright as pin
> Able to see well and fine (Sarpong, 1996:69).

The imagery of beauty indeed pervades this verse, a reason for which the persona postulates that the nature nutrient of "Green" are "fresh", "nice" and "sweet." This is significant as it further attests to the delectability of nature, as well as the latent ability of nature to bring good health is stressed as it is able to make the "pearly eyes bright as pin."

The persona also celebrates other natural products like "Cabbages, Carrot, Onions, Peas/Potatoes, Pumpkins, Lettuce, Beans/Cucumber, Mushroom, Sprout and Leeks, which he believes give him the nutrients with which he is "Able to achieve good health in deed"(69). In this light, man's, and indeed, a child's dependence on nature is stressed. For the child reader, the mere discovery of these natural fruits makes him get involved, even more passionately with nature, an involvement which Mayesky (2006:400) encourages thus: "To be involved with nature, all you need are curiosity, joy of exploration, and a desire to discover first and the wonders of nature." It may be for this reason that John Asiedu Sarpong is interested in presenting nature environments that provide "joy of exploration" to children. After all, Feeney et al (1996:206) postulates that "The environment speaks to children".

Sarpong's "Sweet and Juicy Pineapple" in the light of the foregoing, celebrates nature. The three stanza poem written in sextet starts by extolling the glamour of the pineapple, and then offers the child reader a practical experience of how to make a pineapple juice, while the third stanza refreshingly celebrates the juice so made from the pineapple. The valorization of nature in the apt description of the pineapple as seen in the first stanza is salutary:

Sweet and juicy pineapple
Your skin so shiny as marble
That if you can spring alone
And follow me to my home
I'll make a refreshing drink deluxe
From your sweet, flavoured juice (70).

"Sweet" and "juicy" are symbols of pleasantness which significantly pervade the nature poems under study in this chapter. Indeed, nature is embraced, romanticized and celebrated by nature writers and poets because it is pleasant. Fortunately, this symbol is not only manifest in the physical essence as besides looking beautiful, nature protects man both from dangers of physical and psychological realms, an attribute of nature which has made many scholars to aver, and rightly too, that man's dependence on nature is both irreversible and irrefutable.

In line two, the persona makes use of simile in comparing the shiny nature of the pineapple with that of a marble. This so attracts him that he desires that the pineapple follows him home so that he can make "a refreshing drink de luxe" from it. This dramatic desire of the persona in wishing the pineapple to be with him at home is quite symbolic of the desire of children to have nature all around them, a need which Mayesky (2006:49) validates when she states that "children look for what they need".

The second stanza offers a practical experience to children on how to make a pineapple juice, an experience that is symbolic of the rigour involved in attending to nature in order to maximize its potentials. For instance, the persona demonstrates that he would "first

slice you into peelings/into a cup, all the peelings/Add some water and sugar cubes/leave you for two or three days" (70). The imagery also so prompted up in these lines equates that of a nursery bed environmentalist dutifully watering his young plants in order to bloom soon. At the end, the beautiful result so achieved signifies that with care and attention, nature blooms and blossoms.

This is symbolically seen in the last stanza where the effort of the persona produces a good juice from the pineapple which he enjoys:

> I'll taste and sip!
> I'll taste and sip!
> I'll sit and sip and drink!
> Your drink as nice as spring
> Of sweet and pleasant flavor
> To give me a real delight (70).

The sweet cadence of this stanza forms a perfect rhyme with its tone of excitement. The repetition in lines one and two further adds beauty to the rhythm of the poem, which ultimately enhances memorability in children, a factor which makes Feeney et al (1996:411) to see poetry as consisting of "words carefully chosen that remain in memory long after they are gone, words that have magic and power."

The mood of the persona in the poem is that of enjoyment which is prominently represented in line three where the persona expresses with glee that he will "sit and sip and drink." The assonance which pervades the line to illustrate its musicality further reveals the celebratory mood of the persona, who is deeply attuned to the offerings of nature, hence he savours them with relish.

According to Mayesky(2006:40) "giving special attention to the environment (nature) can help develop the aesthetic sense of children." It is in this light that one appreciates the persona's qualification of the sweet pineapple (nature) in the last triplet in exquisite form. First he compares the drink with the pineapple and spring in pleasantness. Mayesky (2006:365) describes the season of spring and the children's experiences with it thus:

> The gradual coming of spring brings many signs of beauty, such as the colour and texture of flowers in the sunlight and the pattern of delicate leaves against the sky… Young children enjoy the rainy and windy days of spring…Spring is a time of growth and changes. The world springs into colourful growth.

Embedded in this revealing excerpt are images of beauty and freshness which spring represents. Unlike the dryness and aridity of the autumn, the spring presents a ravishing resplendence which rhapsodises the mind of children. For instance, the blossoming of the flowers, the rain, the gentle wind, the "Colourful growth" of nature are all images that capture the scenery of the spring which Sarpong's persona uses to compare with the freshness of the juice from the pineapple. And in giving the poem a sound ending, the persona once again describes the flavour of the pineapple as "sweet and pleasant", symbols that accord nature a befitting status of a timelessly enduring beauty.

For a child reader whose sense of aesthetics is awakened by this artistic valorization of the pineapple, nature's offspring, it goes without saying that literature is indeed a veritable instrument of promoting development in the society, a view which Feeney et al (1996:406) strengthen in stating that literature is a "work of excellence that has permanent value." The ecocritical value which the child unconsciously acquires in reading poetry such as this cannot be overemphasized.

Sarpong's interest in using nature's gifts of fruits to expound a latent ecocritical vista is noteworthy. His "Kaduna Carrots" and "I'm the sweet Orange-red Root Carrot," further illustrate this point. The two poems are almost identical in embodying one thematic object: carrot, which is a natural product. "Kaduna Carrot" is written in quatrains of three stanzas, where the poet's persona characteristically presents the carrot fruit in resplendent toga, reminiscent of the description of the city of Sydney in *The Traveller* (October 2013):

> Loveably and lively, cool and captivating, this city has never been one to shy away. And why should she with a beauty that's adored. When you swim in the rock pools,

join the city set in slick bar or fork out for the latent haute
cuisine, infatuation is compulsory.

The above excerpt fondly captures the natural allure of Sydney, and with the artistic presentation of various images of beauty and coziness of the city, a reader is left with no other choice than get enraptured in the world of the writer. This is the artistic achievement which most of Sarpong's poems gently attain. For instance, the first and last stanzas of the poem, "Kaduna carrots" take liberty in celebrating the Kaduna species of carrot which nature in its benevolence has availed Kaduna people:

Kaduna carrots
So nice and sweet
That all fly like parrots
Just buy and eat(54).

The symbols of "nice" and "sweet" exquisitely describe this nature's gift which further illustrate the beauty of nature, which Allen D. L. et al (1978:11) describes as having the capacity to instigate pleasure from its 'colour and contour.' It is for this reason that people "fly like parrots/Just to buy and eat" the Kaduna carrots. The ecocritical implication of this is that nature stands indispensable to everyone living on earth. And this indispensability in the last couplet of the poem where the passion people have for the carrots is recreated thus: "That all fly like parrots/All days to buy and eat (Sarpong 1996:54). The imagery of these lines bespeaks people who are forever in need of the nourishment of nature as represented by the carrot fruit. This need impliedly gives the survival of a person to nature, making a child reader who underscores this fact to acquire the needed consciousness to appreciate nature.

Sarpong continues in this instructive feat of using fruits as nature symbols in his yet another valorization of different species of carrot, the orange-red root carrot. In this poem entitled "I'm the Sweet Orange-red root Carrot," the persona is the carrot itself which munificently bares its potentials:

I'm the sweet
Orange-red root carrot
I'm as sweet
As the words of the grey parrot
The young and the old go about
Daily to look for my hideout (55).

The symbolic use of personification in this poem betokens the writer's style of broaching nature issues in an awe inspiring way. The symbol of "sweet" which has become a recurring motif in most of Sarpong's verses under study indicates the pleasantness of nature. When this coalesces with the imagery of beauty and attraction in "Orange-red root carrot," a child reader is filled with nothing short of admiration for nature.

In significantly adducing that both the young and the old are all in pursuit of the red carrot, the persona resonates his earlier stance on the indispensability of nature to man's survival, a position that is anchored on the suitability of nature at all seasons. The persona for instance corroborates this suitability thus:

Eat me raw at sunrise
Fry me with boiled rice
In a meat-pie
And a beef stew so nice
That hunger leaves you
Till day drives away noon(55).

This verse, stylistically hued in sextet is steeped in the imagery of care and love which nature so exudes. This imagery gains further momentum in William Wordsworth's "Tables Turned" where nature is described as having "a world of ready wealth,/Our minds and hearts to bless." (Onuekwusi, 2002:40). The imagery of benevolence cast here lends further credence to Sarpong's Orange-red root carrot" which revels in its self sufficiency and magnanimity as to indicate the various ways it could be ravished. The ultimate result here, which is in itself symbolic, is that when the offering of nature, (as symbolized by the carrot) is savoured, "hunger leaves you." Sarpong's "I'm the Sweet Orange-red Root Carrot" is ultimately a poem, that betokens the love and care which nature radiates. When children,

therefore, are taken in by this open invitation of nature for mankind to come and satiate their hunger, they learn to attend to nature with the utmost care it so deserves.

"Young Children," says Feeney et al (1996:420) "have a compelling curiosity to figure out why and the world works." It is in this light that Efe Loveth Ani's "Rainy Season" strikes an instructive chord in the psyche of children. Embedded in this nature poem is the workings of nature as symbolized by the season of rain. This four stanza poem, written in quatrains begins by panting a graphic picture of how rain droplets emanate:

> It is rainy season
> The windows of heaven are opened
> And that is the reason
> There's a downpour (Ani, 2004:16).

The imagery in line two, gives a lucid portrayal of how the sky opens to make way for the rain. In Stanza two, the persona depicts what happens to the sea when there is rainfall: "Can you really see?/That it is filled/Filled to the brim." This activity is symbolic because the same water which fills up the sea vapourises to form rain droplets in the fullness of time. Paton ed. (1990:262) captures this much thus, "When rain pours down, it is only the sky returning the same water to earth that originally evaporated from the land and sea."

The representation of nature in children's poetry using a concept such as rainfall is symbolic in so many ways. For besides enlarging water coasts, the rain is seen as one factor which makes nature to bloom. A picturesque sight of lush grasses and plants becomes so as a result of the rain. Allen D. L. et al (1978:144) corroborate this fact thus: "Rainfall is the most obvious factor in determining whether grasses or trees will dominate a particular area." When children understand the significance of the rainy season, through this poem, they will be in a better position to underscore why there is low rainfall in areas with less bodies of water.

A significant representation of nature in this poem "Rainy season" is for children to have an in-depth knowledge of the workings of nature so as to be cautious where necessary. For instance, the third stanza cautions against swimming in rivers when there is rainy season

to avoid drowning: “The sea is full; so don’t be a fool/To go for a swim” (17). Accordingly, it is during this time that water currents are on the increase, a reason Allen D. L et al (1978:308) caution: “You should never swim alone, no matter how good a swimmer you are or how safe the water seems to be. A stream or river may have currents that vary from place to place.” A nature poem such as this, therefore becomes apt for children so as to carefully maximize the varied potentials of nature; and so long as “all children are curious as they explore the world and want to know how things work and why,” (Feeney 1996:409), Ani’s Poem “Rainy season,” becomes a quintessential nature poetry.

On his own, John Asiedu Sarpong approaches the representation of nature in his poem “Rainy Season,” with marked imagery of sublimity which most nature poems exude. In this five stanza poem punctuated with various images of excitement and hedonism, the poet’s persona, expresses with glee, the beauty of nature which the “Rainy Season” instigates and revivifies. The first stanza opens with a proclamation of joy and exuberance: “Hip, hip! Hurray!/Hip! Hip! Hurray!” When the second stanza opens with its sweet cadence, the beauty of nature as symbolized by the rainy season is foregrounded,

Farmers are happy
Children are happy
Everyone is happy
For the rains have come (77).

The imagery of hedonism and celebration so seen in this stanza clearly represents the joy that nature brings to mankind. Farmers, for instance are symbolically happy because the rainy season marks the advent of the farming season, without which food availability will be uncertain. On their own children are happy because the season of rain provides a refreshing moment to play and poke some fun. According to Feeney et al (1996:117), Children find playing “pleasurable, enjoyable, and engaging,” qualities that characteristically make them glee at the sight of rain.

The third stanza is symbolic of the planting season which the rainy season instigates:

The land's wet
Ready for planting
The crops for the year
For the rains have come (77).

Humanity depends on food from the farm, which in turn yields well when touched by the rain. The wetting of the land and its subsequent preparation for farming are all pointers to the ever caring disposition of nature to mankind, a disposition that further affirms the belief of ecocritics that nature forms the beacon of human survival.

When children are exposed to the world (of nature) the result according to Heath (2003:91) is "sheer delight, exuberance, curiosity and magical thinking." Accordingly, the persona once again erupts in a fit of excitement at the anticipatory appearance of nature after the rains. When he therefore proclaims, "Hip! Hip! Hurray!" he is certainly overwhelmed with the change that rains effect on the natural environment. For instance, there will be "greenery everywhere," which to the persona is the beauty of nature. Significantly too, the pervasiveness of a quaint green environment is symbolic of hope and life which nature offers.

If nature could be so beautiful, caring and enjoyable, "it becomes necessary for human beings to return to the wonder of nature" (Allen D. L. et al 1978:316). Besides the rainy season, which is a wonder of nature, there is also a season of wind which is no less desired by farmers which in Europe is called autumn. In Africa, however, it appears as wind called "Monsoon winds" which Sarpong interestingly takes as a title to highlight the indispensability of nature:

Far and strange
Are the Monsoon winds
Every farmer's saviour
Along the west coast of Africa
Their timely arrival every year
Makes us dream of no hunger(1991:41).

The symbol of indispensability which nature betokens is used in the above verse where, in line three, the poet's persona brands the wind as "Every Farmer's Saviour," just like the rainy season is. It is with the effect produced from the wind that plants bloom, an activity that beefs up the hope of a farmer towards a bountiful harvest. In fact, Allen D.L. et al (1978:230) add that when local winds such as the monsoons fail, a threat of starvation is imaniment.

For a child-reader whose sense of nature is aroused and sustained in this poem, the likelihood that he will never take nature elements, such as the wind for granted is glaring. In this light, the importance of poetry to the child is validated, a fact which makes Feeney et al (1996:410) regard poetry as a tool that inspires children. This inspiration may come in the form of acquiring the zest to appreciate and observe nature for what it is. In this light, Sarpong's "The Great River Niger," makes much meaning as the child persona gets rhapsodised at the aesthetic sight of the Niger River:

I see
I see the great river, the River Niger
Flowing from the mountains
The Futa Jalon Mountains(37).

Symbols of appreciation for nature perspicaciously saturate the entire poem. For instance, the first stanza perceives the river as a "Mother"; the third conceives it as the "longest" river; while the fourth stanza takes the metaphor of greatness to its crescendo in depicting the Niger River as a "Saviour."

These symbols basically highlight in a lucent manner, the pivotal position of the river in the survival of mankind. Similarly, by casting a charming imagery of the river, a child reader is wont to perceive the river as a blessing. For instance, the river is presented as a "blessed River Niger" which in salvaging mankind, helps in making the land fertile. The symbol of fertility as adumbrated by the persona is significant in bringing happiness: "And

our farmers happy" (Sarpong, 1991:37). Associating the great River Niger with happiness veritably reveals that nature brings joy to mankind, without which life will be gloomy.

Sarpong's use of metaphor "saviour" to make reference to nature is symbolic of the centrality of nature to man's lives. This metaphor is similarly used in his poem "Monsoon winds" where he refers to the wind as "Every farmer's saviour," a reference that valourises the might of nature, which Allen D. L. et al (1978:170) corroborate:

> Water is the driver of nature.Without the evaporation of water from the sea, its fall as rain or snow, and its return to the sea via the world's network of rivers, there would be no weather. Without the water cycle, much of the world would become too hot, too dry, or too cold to support life.

It is this symbolic significance of water that motivates nature poets to give it an impressive and tawdry vantage. For if the weather is not friendly, and there is no rainfall, nature would definitely not gain any impressive portrayal. And instead of the exquisite symbols used for it, only the use of lampoon and burlesque would greet it. It is, perhaps for this reason that Ani entitles one of her nature poems "Water" in order to further illustrate the eternal usefulness of this nature's gift.

The eternal verities of nature are made glaring in Ani's "Water", a poem written in three stanzas marked by a sweet cadence steeped in parallelism. The first stanza introduces the indispensability of nature:

> No one can do without you
> No one can live without you
> How on earth can we survive?
> Oh! Not possible (Ani, 2004:9).

The popular saying that water is life is given a pertinacious elucidation in this verse with the use of litotes. For indeed, if "No one can do without you" (water), it means that the purpose of this study, which is reappraising Children's nature poetry, is valid in seeking to make a salient statement in the sense that the centrality of nature in man's survival is

unquestionable. Accordingly, therefore, the very core of ecocriticism which concerns itself with examining the representation of nature in literature is sustained, validated and highlighted.

Having significantly theorized on some eternal verities of water on earth, stanza two goes charitably practical:

> We use you every day
> We drink you every day
> Our needs are therefore
> Not complete without you (9).

The imagery of a life enhancer which the above verse instigates validates the multipurpose value of water. Impliedly, therefore, nature serves many purposes in the survival of mankind. It is for this that the tone of the persona changes to that of gratitude to providence for making nature so serve man's needs even when he is helpless: "We thank God for you;/We bless God's holy name" (10).

Similarly, the tone of gratitude is what saturates Sarpong's "Sunrise and sunset," where nature so fills the persona with awe that he expresses gratitude to providence, an impact which Allen D. L et al (1978:290) describe as "marvelous surprises" which nature brings. For an innocent child who wakes up in the morning to see the sunrise and then set in the evening, there is bound to be a sixth sense which arouses a string of inquisition in him. This poem therefore draws its breath from the restless mind of the child persona seeking an answer to a puzzle:

> I wake up in the morning
> I see the rising sun
> Where it rises from
> Nobody knows
> It's the work of God (Sarpong,1991:39).

The "marvelous surprises" which Allen D.L. et al (1978:290) adumbrate about the working of nature manifests prominently here as the persona in astonished with the seamless way with which the day gives way for the night through the rising and setting of the sun.

Hard as he tries to hazard an answer, the meaning instead eludes him. In this sense, nature becomes an enigma, which symbolically unknots the imaginative power of children. Accordingly, a phenomenon which proves to be a mystery naturally attains an ennobling height. Such is obviously the level to which the persona has placed the whole essence of nature, manifested through sunrise and sunset. At the end, however, he recognizes the hand of Providence in them all hence he proclaims: "It's the work of God."

As the poem progresses pertinaciously towards a conclusion, a more philosophical tone artfully snakes out in the last stanza. Here, the poet's persona sagaciously deconstructs the postulation of sages, as regards the rising and setting of the sun: wise men say/The sunrises in the East/Wise men say/The sun sets in the West" (39). However, instead of affirming this age-long belief, the persona imaginatively veers away with is conclusion that nature (sunrise and sunset) is the "work of God." The concern of ecocriticism in all this is safely anchored on the fact that the child persona is appreciative of nature, hence he symbolically philosophizes on its essence, an inquisition which Feeney et al (1996:294) validates thus: "Children want to know many things about the world they live in…about the natural and physical aspects of their environment."

Another marked philosophy which children bring in appreciating the working and realities of nature is affirmed in Sarpong's "Harmattan." First he acknowledges, and rightly so, that the season of harmattan brings dryness at its wake, with the cattle rearers and farmers being the worst-hit. Yet he acknowledges through his philosophical inquisition that this does not by any means make nature unkind:

> The blossom trees shed their leaves
> All creatures cry for water
> Might the feeling of mankind
> For it's Nature's Hand (51).

This verse bears similar tone with "sunrise and sunset." The persona being in the mood of imagination paints nature in noble terms, in spite of the apparent harshness of his

environment occasioned by the harmattan. When he therefore concludes, just as he did in "sunrise and sunset" that nature is "not so unkind"/For it's Nature's Hand," that he seems to tacitly say that nature needs to be understood and appreciated for what it is, for after all, if the harmattan did not come, plants may not shed their leaves in readiness for blooming. In all this therefore, the voice of the persona is consistent in according nature a pride of place with the strong belief that the imagery of aesthetics defines nature, whether fresh or arid. This much is sustained in the way Mayesky (2006:553) romanticizes autumn, a similar season as harmattan in the sub-Saharan Africa: "Autumn is nature's last fling of the year. The landscape is brilliant with raw and mented colours ranging from bright yellow to red-orange…" By this, the universality of ecocriticsm in ennobling, highlighting and appreciating nature is re-echoed.

Man is eternally indebted to nature, a point which Philip Onuoha's "I like plantain" underscores. This three stanza poem has a beautiful cadence where all the lines exhibit a uniform rhyme. This poem subtly affirms the postulations of some scholars that the message of a poem initiates its rhythm. In this poem, the copious appreciation of nature as symbolized by "plantain" reveals the obviously pleasant mood of the persona. The tone of the poem prominently expresses the indebtedness of persona to nature. This is why each of the stanzas markedly begins with lines that express his love for plantain (nature):

> I like plantain
> For what I gain
> Father buys plantain
> So as to sustain
> His family once again (Sarpong,1991:56).

Poems of ecocritical dimension are goaded to accentuate the values of nature, representations that are validated in the interest of the poet's persona on nature plantain (nature). He justifies his fascination with the gains of eating (embracing nature) plantain: "Mother fries plantain/So as to maintain/Good health without bargain" (56). This line is

symbolic in many ways. One, nature is justified to be responsible for maintaining good health amongst mankind. For instance, the air, water and then food as represented by the plantain, are all pointers to the unparalleled capacity of nature to encourage a healthy life. More importantly, nature according to the poem is kind and cheap as validated in "Good health without bargain." Essentially, therefore, this quality makes it readily accessible. When nature so offers these benefits, it becomes justifiable that literature should play a critical role in promoting its essence, a reason for which ecocriticism further gains its currency.

The proclivity of ecocritics in giving nature prominence in literature is further justified by Chukwu (2008:4) thus: "Poetry recreates as well as praises nature…" By implication, ecocriticism as a literary analytical too examines the treatment of nature in a given literary work (whether poetry, play or prose). Since "literary theory offers various ways of defining literature" (Roger Webster 1996:5) ecocriticism deploys as one of its ways of defining literature: appreciating nature. In this light, Sarpong's "Fly, Eagle Fly" can be justified as a nature poem as it profusely appreciates nature as sumbolised by the animals he so eulogize.

Representing nature using animals could be of veritable value to children as it enriches their understanding of nature. Mayesky (2006:393) adumbrates, for instance, that "Children are intrigued by the study of animals," a factor, she maintains, provides more than a science experience," for them. Sarpong's representation of nature with the eagle is fascinating. In this poem, "Fly, Eagle Fly," the persona praises the eagle as he calls it "Great king of birds," as he urges it to fly even above the sky:

Fly Eagle Fly!
Over the mountain-head
O`Great king of birds
Fly above the sky (40)

The imagery in the first line coruscates with the remarkable excitement of the persona at the ability of the eagle to fly so high in the sky. Accordingly, a child reader gets a mental

picture of a flying bird which still has the ability to come down. For having the capacity to fly "over the mountain-heads," the persona hails the eagle: "O Great King of birds", a metaphor which celebrates the stately nature of an eagle. Importantly too, the metaphor seems to derive from the ability of the eagle to fly higher than other birds. In fact, Paton ed. (1990:110) points that "eagles soar high above the ground," a feature which he opines, makes the eagle (the bard type) the national emblem of the United States. The strength of the eagle is further valorized by Encyclopaedia Britannica (2012): "Because of their strength, eagles have been a symbol of war and imperial power since Babylonian time." Any wonder, even some national football teams bear the name of eagles. Nigeria for instance has "Super Eagles," all pointing to the fact that the eagle, being one of nature's gifts deserves attention in the literary space.

The morale-boosting tone of the poem in encouraging the eagle to "fly high and high/Even above the sky" is equally symbolic of the awe in which nature is held, a respect which the persona justifies with the glowing metaphor with which he addresses the eagle as "Great King of birds."

Like every other poem, Children's poetry is not free from the use of symbolism. It is these symbols that appeal to the sensibilities of children. Akuso (in Joshua ed. 2001:14) elucidates this fact further when he adduces that symbols are stylistic devices a writer uses suggestively to express his ideas and values. To the child therefore, a symbol helps in the visual representation of something important to him (Mayesky 2006:197). This is why it is easy for the various poems this study has analysed to appeal to the child reader because they embody archetypal symbols that give nature its due prominence. Accordingly, the various symbols of water, animal, weather conditions, moon, sky, sun, star, food, plant, etc are lucidly deployed by the poets under discourse, to make children nature-conscious.

Interestingly also, these symbols are not so metaphorical, as they are all around and can be identified by the child.

A literary discourse of ecocritical bent becomes even more valid when we acknowledge that environmental issues play a gargantuan role in the development of the child. Indeed, Mayesky (2006:398) as we had earlier posited, strongly emphasizes this when she opines that "Children need to learn about their environment because their lives depend on the environment." This study therefore further gains currency and validity as the poems so studied are nature ones that essentially treat environmental issues.

4.2 Conclusion

In the light of the foregoing, this study makes bold to adduce that the study of Children's nature poems should be given a priority in the educational system of African nations, as their European counterparts have done. Unfortunately, poetry is not even taken with the needed seriousness it so deserves. In America, for instance, and other western nations, many books for young children are written in poetry. If this practice is replicated in Nigeria and other African countries, it will see to a remarkable renaissance in learning. This is because, besides its essential attribute of rhythm and rhyme, poetry consists of carefully chosen words that instigate memorability in children.

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CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

The study of Children's nature poetry such as this is indeed timely. Poetry for children has not experienced the needed symmetrical growth with Children's fiction. It is as if Nigerian writers and publishers are on holiday in the writing and publishing of Children's poetry, a situation that is not good for the development of Children's Literature .When juxtaposed with the literary development of Children's poetry in the western nations, the result is anything but cheering as poetry has been experiencing a steady growth there. Indeed at a time like this when African Literature has been vigorously squaring itself against the Western version, it becomes highly instructive to give children's poetry an auspicious pride of place.

The validity of this study draws from the ecocritical portrayal of Children's nature poetry which amongst other things imbues the young ones with the needed values to uphold in order to maintain an environment that is safe, fascinating and friendly. In the light of this, the importance of Children's literature gains prominent relevance. As a valid literacy tool, literature for children should, in fact, should be given maximum attention as a child is better positioned psychologically to adjust to the values expounded and celebrated by a literary work. It follows therefore that a great society is possible with adequate Children's literature striking a balance amongst the three literary genres. A situation, therefore, where only fiction dominates the literary space is unhealthy to a society's educational emancipation.

By their structural and epistemological aesthetics, the three literary genres have their various points of divergence. While prose may be as engaging and rhapsodic in its emplotment, and drama as histrionic and theatrical, none can parallel the ability of poetry to hasten the acquisition of language and knowledge as its aesthetic structures make these possible. Poetry for instance has rhyme, rhythm and cadence. Words are carefully and

painstakingly chosen to ensure elegance in sight and sound. Sentences are measured, maximized and compressed to look avant-garde. In the end, memorability is fostered and encouraged in the child's learning process.

In spite of the several advantages children stand to gain in studying it, poetry has maintained a back bench in Nigeria's and perhaps Africa's Children's literary evolution. A publishing giant like Literamed Publishing for instance (as has been emphasized in chapter one) only has one poetry title in its stables. This is insalubrious to the development of Children's Literature. Indeed other publishing giants are not left out in this show of indifference towards Children's poetry.

With all its stylistic nuances, poetry deserves a prominent position in the matrix of Children's literary development in Nigeria. Unfortunately, as it depreciates in quantity and quality, so does its criticism shrink even with an unwholesome rapidity.The focus of this study therefore on Children's poetry is geared and essentially too, towards resuscitating this great literary brand and saving it from an impending extinction. Accordingly, in choosing a dimension in Children's poetry: Nature poetry, this study aims at revivifying attention to children's poetry by using ecocriticism to evaluate some selected children's verses.

In doing this, five poetry texts whose predilection is on nature are chosen. To achieve structural balance, texts with an overwhelming treatment of nature are paired with those with less-significant treatment of nature. Consequently, no fewer than sixteen poems are interrogated in each chapter of analysis. In chapter three, Olanlokun's *Children's Poetry for Pleasure* presents a preponderant number of nature poems, a reason it is paired with Onuoha's *Songs for My Mother* with fewer poems. Similarly John Asiedu Sarpong's *Sweet Talking Drums* and *Poetry for the Young Ones* present a large number of poems on nature hence they are paired with Efe Lovetta Ani's *Elo Poetry* with a small number of nature poems. Significantly, however, the works paired share a somewhat identical stylistic

direction. For instance, Olanlokun's "The Moon" and Onuoha's "The Moon" romanticize the nature and essence of the moon in the ecosystem. Similarly, their "I Look up the Sky" and "The Sky" among others, valorize the splendour of the sky in line with the tenets of ecocriticism.

Accordingly, the same stylisitic bent is palpable in the works of John Asiedu Sarpong and Efe Lovetta Ani. For instance both authors dwell on the same subjects of moon, water, rainy season, atmospheric elements etc. Markedly, their approach is similar as it aims to bring out the beauty of nature as it appeals to children. This is also in line with the ecocritical tenet of examining the extent of nature representation in a literary text.

Children's poetry like every other Children's literature attaches much premium in the level of the psyche of a given target audience. Any work that cannot appeal to the psyche of a child for whom it is meant cannot be successful. Consequently the work and its function will have been working at cross-purposes. This is one of the factors portending a gloomy future in the world of children's literature in Nigeria. It is pertinent at this juncture to state that whatever a read read in one's childhood essentially formed one's mode of thinking and acting. Well written books with great experiences that appeal to children's psyche produce complete individuals well integrated in the values of his society. From the foregoing, the place of Literature in a child's development is once again re-emphasized and revalidated. Every writer comes from a society that promotes values hence a good writer implicitly or explicitly communicates these values in his works, in spite of the thematic predilection of his work.

Rhythm is also an essential feature of a good children's poetry as it is essentially what differentiates prose from poetry. There has to be some elements of good cadence in children's poetry. This engages them as well as enhances memorability. The dearth of good poetry today in Nigeria is telling. It is indicative of the need to give poetry a critical attention.

Where most educated adults, of say, fifty years and above can recite some good poems learnt in their primary and secondary school days, children of nowadays cannot boast of the same. Two factors are responsible: Children's poetry is not currently flourishing in Nigeria. Also children's poetry has not been properly integrated in the curriculum of our basic education.

A critique of this nature which focuses on Children's poetry further draws validity from the foregoing. In line with this, the study has been significant in adducing that children's poetry could be sorted and classified into: adventure poetry, didactic poetry, reflection poetry, praise poetry and nature poetry. Among the lot, Nature poetry has been chosen to explicate the beauty of the natural environment which should compel children's consciousness to be protective of nature, especially at a time like this when humanity is deliberately or inadvertently vitiating nature. Noteworthy also is the fact that nature poetry seems to bear a foundational cum cultural undertone in the educational emancipation of child. This way, a child's knowledge of his natural environment gives him a sound footing in approaching all other forms of knowledge.

The theory of ecocriticism is used in the work to give a scholarly interrogation to the nature poems so studied. As a term, Ecocriticism was coined by William Rueckert in his 1978 essay 'Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism.' However the work of Cheryll Glofelty and Harold Fromm, *The Ecocriticism Reader*(1996) formally inaugurated it as a literary critical tool. Its primary objective among others is to increase environmental awareness through gauging the treatment of nature in a literary work. It is with this theory that our problematic of reappraising Children's nature poetry is unravelled, appraised and interrogated. Much of what have been said so far constitute the thoughts in chapter one.

Yet the definition of nature requires a pertinent portrayal hence the validity of chapter two which lucidly foregrounds the concept of nature as it bifurcates nature into physical or transcendental realms. The physical nature is the ordinary state of the environment that could

be visible by man. Wordsworth was essentially a key exponent of the transcendental nature as he saw nature as a proper noun,'Nature,' because he discovered there was something extraordinary about nature. All his poems phenomenally valorize nature as bearing the potentials to comfort a disconsolate with its beauty and grandeur. The persuasive technique he deploys in his poems is symbolic of a clarion call for all to venerate nature. The position of this study and to which it has maintained an abiding fidelity is that nature constitutes those elements not made by man including the sun, moon, stars, animals, plants and other creatures which in the min, constitute the central focus of nature poems irrespective of the origin.

Olajire Olanlokun's *Children's Poetry for Pleasure* and Philip Onuoha's *Songs for my Mother* are the first to receive the critical beam of ecocriticism in Chapter three where the study examines the treatment of nature in the selected verses of the book. Some of the poems that received critical attention include 'Sun Flowers', 'The Moon,' 'Wind of Joy', 'Cotton Bud', 'My Antelope,' 'My Little Puppy,' 'The Yam Barn,' 'Preserve the Environment', 'I look up the Sky' and 'The Night and the Moon.' When in Chapter four the study evaluates the nature verses from the works of Efe Lovetta Ani and John Asiedu Sarpong, one discovers that nature poets are united in one mission: appreciating nature.

Owing to the great promises and potentials they bear, Children's nature poetry may well be the needed tonic that will salvage Children's poetry tradition in Nigeria from an 'extinction-bound plane.' Everyone including children is naturally attuned to the splendour of nature. In resuscitating their keen interest in poetry, children need to be introduced to good Children's poetry written in perspicuous style. To this end, writers of Children's poetry must devote a sizeable portion of the pages to churning out great nature poems laced in unambiguous grandeur and charm. For only then shall there be a massive rebirth in the culture of children's poetry in Nigeria which has been stagnant for some time.

The place of poetry in the teaching and learning process is quite non-negotiable. Exposing children early to this genre is highly central to their intellectual emancipation. It quickens their knack to use words in a refreshing manner just as it promotes an uncommon familiarity with words. Above all, their general sense of aesthetics is grown, nurtured and harvested in the study of poetry, especially nature poetry.

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