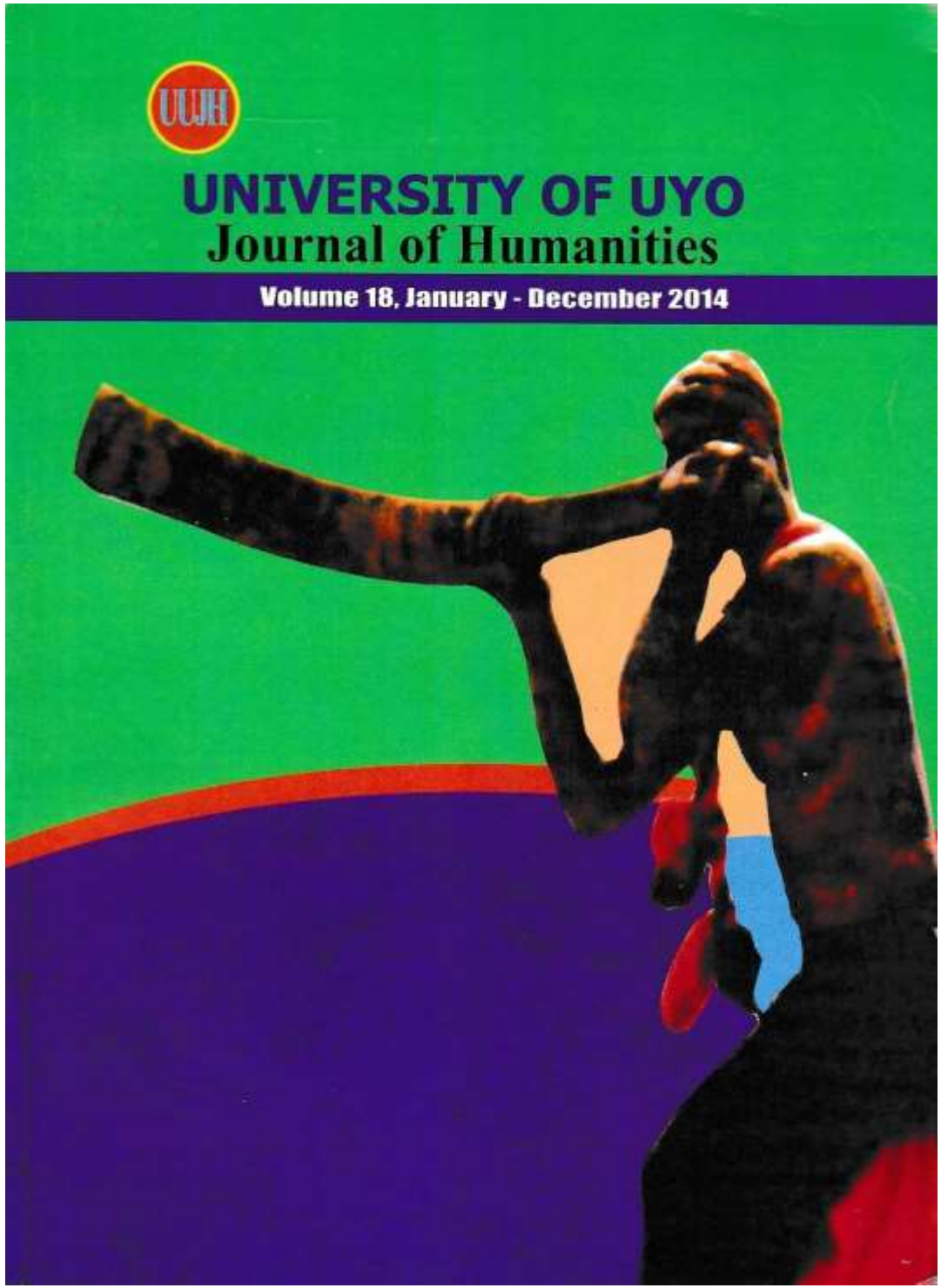

A Withering Shield: A Stylistic Study of Select Nigerian Poets

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Abstract

This paper studies the ecological poetry of five relatively young Nigerian poets, classified arguably as third generation Nigerian poets. The poets are Babatunde Ajayi, Remi Raji, Ibiwar Ikiriko, MSC Okolo and Nnimmo Bassey, from whose collections one poem each has been selected for the study. The selection takes into account the sub-division of Nigeria's eco-writing into two broad strands as suggested by Ushie (2001, 2014). The strands are eco-poems based on what has come to be recognised as Niger Delta protest literature, and the rest of eco-poetry that focuses on environmental exfoliation resulting from other causes. The selection is, however, consciously skewed in favour of Niger Delta protest poetry, from which three poems have been picked, while only one each from Nnimmo Bassey and M.S.C. Okolo have been chosen to represent the rest of the eco-poetry. This leaning more on Niger Delta protest poetry is informed by considerations such as the topicality of the sub-genre, the overwhelming volume of works in this flank of eco-writing, the particular incident of the hanging of Nigeria's foremost environmental activist, Ken Saro-Wiwa and other eight Ogoni activists, which ignited the condemnation, through poetry, and the already long-standing exploration of non-Niger Delta protest eco-literature. The study is situated within the broad canopy of Ecocriticism, but the analysis proper is guided by M. A. K. Halliday's Functional Grammar. The study reveals the grave concern of these young Nigerian poets about the environment as humankind's shield, whose withering is being escalated through natural factors and human agency as symbolised by multinational and transnational oil companies acting in collaboration with the nation's successive neo-colonial regimes. The paper also reveals that the poets, who wrote mainly during the murderous military era, employed self-protecting and self-preserving stylistic strategies such as personification and agent-deletion in referring to the fearsome political powers of the day. The researcher suggests that further studies on the subject may strive to be comparative in terms of bringing in insights from similar studies in other lands where non-human nature is similarly threatened through mercantile greed.

Introduction

The concern about humankind's environment has continued to rise especially beginning from the onset of Europe's Industrial Revolution when non-human nature became the sacrificial lamb on a hitherto unimaginable scale for humankind's progress. And in keeping with the interrelatedness of human experiences whether in the sciences and technology or the arts, European writers reacted to what they saw as a major violation of nature. Their reactions, mostly through poetry, are what have constellated into Romantic Poetry, which features such revolutionary European writers as William Worsdworth, Percy B. Shelley, John Keats, Mary Wollstonecraft and others. In the cyclical manner in which human progress, habits and general life-ways move, the world is today enmeshed in some other series and species of human activities that promise humankind comfort and progress, but which, ironically, may threaten the very existence of the human race. At the centre of these threats to the environment through human agency is the exploration for, and exploitation of, natural resources in a life-threatening manner. This, coupled with the natural but slow tear and wear of the environment, has once more precipitated a flora of reactions from the literaryscape, which has been crystallised into concepts such as eco-writing, eco-criticism, eco-literature, with many sub forms and variations from clime to clime and orientation to orientation.

Notable among these activities have been industrialisation, urbanisation, and oil exploration and exploitation, all of which have contributed to global warming and the consequent depletion of the life-sustaining ozone layer. Other activities include the slash-and-burn farming system, poaching, lumbering, and harmful waste disposal, all of which have adversely affected plant and animal life, with a consequent disequilibrium in the ecological system.

In Nigeria, this global concern about the environment has remained, and the poetry under study reflects it, as in Nnimmo Bassey's 'burnt river' and M.S.C. Okolo's "Receding Olives". But, beyond this, there has been a more immediate and lethal dimension of the ecological problem in the Nigerian milieu. This has been the issue of the country's Niger Delta area which, being endowed with large deposits of oil, seems to have been inadvertently endowed with death. The tragedy has been the destruction of farmlands, of streams and rivers, of fishes, of trees, of tin roofs and, consequently, of the means of livelihood of the agrarian populations whose lands hold the oil deposits.

Thus far, the struggle against this disaster has been championed by individuals from the Niger Delta area. The first attempt at secession from the Federation was over this vexing issue, and Isaac Adaka Boro led it in the early 1960s, peaking at his twelve-day revolution in 1966. The Federal Government in a matter of days crushed the insurrection. In terms of physical action

against the ecological problem, there was sangfroid until about 1990 when the writer and activist, Ken Saro-Wiwa, established the Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People (MOSOP) to mobilise the Ogoni minority ethnic group against the despoliation. At the launch of the One Naira Ogoni Survival Fund (ONOSUF) on February 27, 1993, at Bori, for example, Saro-Wiwa painted the picture as follows: "*In this most sophisticated and unconventional war, no bones are broken, no blood is spilled and no one is maimed. Yet, men, women and children die; flora and fauna perish, the air and the water are poisoned, and finally, the land dies" (148).* It was thus mainly through the activities of MOSOP that the attention of the rest of the country with that of the international community was drawn to the plight of the Niger Delta as the epicenter of this "war". But the military regime of General Sani Abacha hanged Saro-Wiwa and eight of his fellow Ogoni men on November 10, 1995, over ostensibly framed charges of murder. Much of the artistic reaction to this dimension of Nigeria's environmental issues was therefore primarily focused on this "judicial murder", with the reflection of the concrete conditions of the Niger Delta occupying mainly the fringes of the poetry. But, following these tragic killings, poets, mainly from the Niger Delta area, began to devote their art to the physical realities of the zone. The outcome is captured by Ushie in his recent essay, "Land, Language and African Literature in a Climate of Decay" (2014; see also Darah in Nwahunanya, 2011; Nwosu, 2011; Okorogbe in ANA Review, 2012).

This paper examines five poems, one each from five young Nigerian poets as follows: Babatunde Ajayi's "Giokoo", Remi Raji's "Deadlines", M.S.C. Okolo's "Receding Olives", Nnimmo Bassey's "Burnt River" and Ibiwari Ikiriko's "Under Pressure". Further, while most of the existing studies of Nigeria's Niger Delta Protest Poetry have been conducted from the traditional literary perspective, the present study approaches the subject from a stylistic perspective, within ecocriticism as a literary critical framework. The stylistic analysis is anchored on M. A. K. Halliday's Functional Grammar.

Halliday's Functional Grammar rests on three planks in the analysis of texts, according to the three metafunctions he believes language performs: the ideational, the interpersonal and the textual. According to him, the ideational component entails the use of language to describe or comment on the world around us, including our personal inner world of thoughts, wishes, ideas, opinions, etc. In other words, in making propositions or expressing our likes and dislikes, the meaning being shared is ideational or representational meaning. In Halliday's words, this is "meaning in the sense of content" and the grammatical choices that convey this meaning are "what in the broadest sense we call 'process' actions, events, processes of consciousness, and relations" (53). This is the component of language whose expression enters into transitivity relations. Labels such as Actor (representing the logical subject of traditional grammar),

Process (standing for the verbal group), Goal (representing the object), and others such as Carrier, Attribute, and Circumstance are used in describing texts in exploring their meaning potential from this perspective.

Language is also used in social relations among persons, and such relations can be "created/altered/maintained through language" (Hasan in Fabb, et al, eds). This role of language, expressed through the mood and modality systems, is referred to as the interpersonal function. Wales explains this function as "concerned with the relations between addresser and addressees in the discourse situation or the speech event" (256). Thus, the linguistic elements that typically manifest speakers' attitudes are the subject of the clause combined with the finite elements to constitute what Halliday labels as Mood while the rest of the clause is known as the Residue. Halliday clarifies that the "Mood element has a clearly defined semantic function: it carries the burden of the clause as an interactive event" (77).

Finally, in order to convey meaning, the assorted words and sounds of language are selected and arranged according to what kind of information or message the speaker or writer is conveying or asking for. Halliday maintains that in speaking or writing, what one sets out to express as one's message is usually fronted in the structure of the clause as the point of departure. This fronted element is known as the *Theme* of the clause while the remainder of the clause is known as the *Rheme*. He elucidates the nature of the *Theme* as "...the element which serves as the point of departure of the message: it is that with which the clause is concerned" (38). But it is not just every word occurring in initial position in the clause that constitutes its *Theme*. What happens, for instance, when function words such as conjunctions, relatives, prepositions and articles come first in the clause? This leads to a distinction between a Topical and a Textual/Structural Theme. Halliday explains Topical Theme as "some entity functioning as Subject, Complement or Circumstantial Adjunct" (54). Textual or Structural Theme therefore refers to any non-lexical (or non-ideational/non-content) elements such as listed above conjunctions, relatives, etc.

Thus, through a systematic isolation of the initial (Thematic) elements of the clauses of any given text, one can deduce its meaning from the writer's or speaker's point of view. This component of language is what is referred to as the Textual Function. These three metafunctions play semantic roles in Halliday's model since systemic linguistics generally is semantics-based. Each of the components helps in conveying the meaning potential of a given text from its own perspective.

Analyses of Texts

While all three metafunctions of language can be used in the stylistic

explication of any single text, only Babatunde Ajayi's poem, "Giokoo" (in Osundu ed., 44) benefits from analysis from the perspectives of all the three functional strands of the clause as representation, exchange and message, because of the poem's organisational structure. The rest of the poems are examined from any one of the three metafunctions only. However, only the labels for the ideational function are applied systematically to the full text of the poem; interpersonal and textual elements will be brought out in the analyses rather than being labelled separately in the examination of each component. This is for the reason of space.

Metafunctional Discourse in Babatunde Ajayi's "Giokoo"

"giokoo"

Giokoo				1
vocative				
your		raped	earth	2
Possessor		Process	Goal/possessed	
had had her	homestead		emptied // (Material)	3
Process	Goal		Process	
emptied of life // (Material)				4
Process				
emptied of light // (Material)				5
and her voice		cut // (Material)		6
Goal		Process		
Where are		your siblings, Giokoo? // (Relational)		7
		Process	Vocative	
your soil		desecrated // (Material)		8
Goal		Process		
your soul		severed	with the rigs of greed // (Material)	9
Goal	Process		Circumstance	
your song solemn and		solitary // (Relational)		10
Attribute		Attribute		
as you		harvest your sons from the cross // (Material)		11
Actor Process Goal		Circumstance		

"Giokoo As Representation"

The poem features six occurrences of the ideational element, "Goal". These are "earth" (line 2), "homestead" (line 3), "voice" (line 6), "soil' (line 8), "soul" (line 9), and "sons" (line 11), all of which represent the violated class in the text. The nature of the suffering or violation reflects in the processes as 'raped", "emptied" and "cut". On the other hand, there is one Actor and this occurs as "you" (line 11): "as you harvest...." Yet, this lone Actor does not feature as the agent of the atrocious acts of raping, emptying homesteads of life

and light, and cutting of voices. It stands for "Giokoo" who, by being the chief mourner, is a co-victim "her" (line 6), "your" (lines 7,8,9,10,11) and the "you" of line 11) support this. These pronouns can all be seen as Possessor as they occur in the text while the items, "earth", "homestead', "voice", "siblings', "soil", 'soul", "song" and 'sons" are the Possessed. The relationship between the single Actor, "you" and the Goal elements in the poem is, hence, like that between a deceased group and the collective chief mourner.

In order to effect the deletion of the Actor-as-perpetrator from the text, the choice of the passive form has been imposed on the process elements; hence, apart from the last line which is in the active voice, the rest of the material processes take the passive voice. In terms of transitivity relations, therefore, the ultimate logical subject who perpetrates the atrocities against Giokoo and her children, that is, the murderer-military authority, is left unmentioned in the texts. This is achieved, as we noted, through the anchoring of the melancholy between the "chief mourner" (Giokoo) and her son-victims (Saro-Wiwa and others), and through the choice of the passive voice instead of the active, both strategies which enable the deletion of the ultimate military perpetrator of the murders.

"Giokoo" As An Exchange

From the interpersonal perspective, that is, the text as an exchange, the poem can be looked at as an interaction between an unnamed voice who, for convenience, we will simply call the poet-persona and a present-in-the-text but non-responding Giokoo. Giokoo is the name of that community in Ogoni land where four notable persons were killed in disturbances on May 21, 1994, and which resulted in the arrest and hanging of Ken Saro-Wiwa and his eight fellow Ogoni men by Sani Abacha's military regime. The poet begins the first stanza of the two-stanza poem calling or invoking Giokoo; having drawn his addressee's attention he devotes the rest of the stanza to recounting to Giokoo what has befallen her earth, her homestead, her life, her light and her voice. But employing the skill of a frenzied orator, he concentrates on the effect on Giokoo without mentioning the assailant's name as we saw in the consistent absence of the Actor-as-perpetrator.

The role of the poet-persona as one who sympathises with, and spurs his co-participant in the speech event into action becomes clearer in the first line of the second stanza where he changes to the evocative interrogative, "Where are your siblings, Giokoo?" followed with a re-listing of the losses suffered by Giokoo. The interaction ends on a sad, solemn note as if, at this point, the poet-addresser has joined his addressee, Giokoo, in weeping over the "sons" being "harvested" from the "cross": "Your song solemn and solitary/as you harvest your sons from the cross" (lines 10-11). The device of personifying Giokoo as a participant in a verbal exchange gives the inanimate name the attributes of a

grandsire whose lineage, land and soul are faced with extinction.

"Giokoo" As Message

Beside the meaning potential as explored from the ideational and interpersonal dimensions, the textual structure of "giokoo" also emphasises the role and significance of Giokoo as symbol of the Ogoni's agonies. "Giokoo" occurs as a vocative element twice in the text and is represented as *Theme* by such pronouns as "yours" (lines 2, 7, 8, 9, 1, 11), "You" (line 11), and "her" (lines 3 and 6). In all, "Giokoo" and its pronoun forms occur in *Thematic* positions ten times, thus underlying Halliday's view that the Theme is "that which is the concern of the message" and occurs at "the point of embarkation of the clause" (34). From the three levels of meaning, therefore, "Giokoo", and hence the atrocities suffered by her sons, soul and land, constitute the central issue of the poem. This position seems strengthened by Ken Saro-Wiwa's own words as follows: "*To the Ogoni, the land on which they lived and the rivers which surrounded them were very important. They not only provided sustenance in abundance, they were also a spiritual inheritance. The land is a god and is worshiped as such" (cited by Apter in Na'Allah, 124).*

From the psychoanalytic point of view, the intertextual allusion to The Holy Bible's "cross" and the central symbol of Giokoo as 'the great mother' are significant. According to this view, "the anima is the primordial image of woman in man [and it] appears in dreams, visions and fantasies as in literature and myth in the form of the mother, the loved one, the goddess..." (Azuonye in Okpewho and Osofisan, 37). This seems to aptly explain why in a moment of national stress and tragedy such as was suffered by the Ogoni, a concerned male writer should invoke that image in the form of "Giokoo", as mother of the land and mother of the murdered "sons".

Psychoanalytic critics also maintain that the "cross" symbolises sacrifice. The allusion to 'cross" in the poem therefore shows the murdered activists as sacrificial lambs. Mowah offers us further clarification of this: "*...the idea of sacrifice is archetypal, in societies it is the need to slough off the old for the new... In religion, sacrifice appears a propitiation of guilt" (10).* In our present context, we would therefore see the murdered persons collectively as a sacrifice that would usher in a new life for the Ogoni community and others similarly violated in the country. The next text is Remi Raji's "Deadlines" (75), which is explored as an exchange.

Remi Raji's "Deadlines" As an Interpersonal Discourse

Unlike Ajayi's "giokoo" which reflects environmental features, Remi Raji's "Deadlines" tends to narrow its focus to the immediate situation of the actual killing of Ken Saro-Wiwa and his fellow Ogoni men. The interpersonal

meaning potential of the poem is our focus in the analysis. The text follows:

"Deadlines"

Now that	you slapped	my land	1
Residue	Mood	Residue	
With a mascara of mourning			2
Residue			
Now that	you fed	your beast	3
Residue	Mood	Residue	
With the flesh of suckling birds			4
Residue			
Now that	you filled	your tongue	5
Residue	Mood	Residue	
With darts of denials and lies			6
Residue			
Now that	you killed	laughter	7
Residue	Mood	Residue	
Like a cruel coward			8
Residue			
How	do you console	me now	9
Residue	Mood	Residue	
gleeful orator at funeral rites			10
Residue			
suckling lice in your throat			11
Residue			
thorns in the very palm			12
Residue			
of your handshake...			13
Residue			
Why	do you	console me now	14
Residue	Mood	Residue	
Septic balm on festering sore			15
Residue			
how	do you	console a mother	16
Residue	Mood	Residue	
bereaved by the talons of a tiger?			17

Residue

The poem is divided into two sections. The first section comprises four stanzas, each stanza being a two-line dependent clause. Each of the stanzas represents one block of injuries suffered by the speaking voice so that the whole of the first part of the poem reads like a continuous piling up of atrocities

committed and injustice suffered. As an interactive discourse, we again assume the speaker to be the poet or poet-persona addressing a non-responding, exophoric "you". Therefore, the poet represents the affected (Goal or object) of the mounting acts of brutality and falsehood of the first part of the poem represented by "my" in "my land" (line 1). The entire poem is, hence, the addresser's verbal tantrum as a reaction to the injuries inflicted on him by the addressee, the exophoric "you" of the poem.

The fact that these atrocities committed, from the perpetrator's point of view, are past and, perhaps, even forgotten, is reflected in the use of the past forms. "killed", "slapped", "fed". On the other hand, the adverb "Now" in clause-initial compound subordinators, "Now that", is used to show the "still-present" or 'still-here" effect of the atrocities and the lies on the poet-victim. These past and present verb forms co-exist within the same lines of the poem but contrast to stress the line dividing assailant's from victim's perceptions of the same state of affairs in the same society. In a way, too, this contrast represents the difference between the time the acts were perpetrated and the poet-addresser's response, which must come only now when the dust seems to have settled. And this comes in the form of words or poetry, not brutal actions as a form of retaliation. Beyond this, the persona's enumeration of his misfortunes helps us in discerning the atrocious character of his co-participant in the speech event. That is, the addressee has "slapped" (his) land/with a mascara of mourning", "fed (his) beast/with the flesh of suckling birds", "killed laughter", etc; and, after all this, he has "filled (his) tongue/with darts of denials and lies".

In the second part of the poem, the fifth stanza, the poet fires three questions at his cruel assailant: "How do you console me now" (line 9), "Why do you console me now" (line 14) and "how do you console a mother/bereaved by the talons of a tiger?" (line 17). The first two questions are followed with uncomplimentary cognomens in the form of vocatives, 'gleeful orator at funeral rites...", "septic balm on festering sore"; this device helps in building upon the negative and destructive traits of the addressee as portrayed in the first part of the poem. In a way, these appositive phrases functioning as vocatives can also serve as the refrain to the questions they follow. And this invokes the oral nature and narrative immediacy of the text. This, then, would re-define the poet's role as a representative of a group who, in this case, should constitute the chorus and observers of the confrontation of the monstrous predator by the violated accuser. Again, in the last two lines, the poet transforms symbolically into "mother" while the evil one becomes the "tiger" whose "talons" have inflicted bereavement on the woman. This re-echoes the sense of "mother" as we had explicated from a psychoanalytic perspective in Babatunde Ajayi's "Giokoo".

Although theoretically, interpersonal meaning and textual

cohesion/lexical analysis are different operations, a tangential explication of textually cohesive features in the poem is necessary here as it helps to illuminate the interpersonal meaning of the text. For instance, "mother" as in line 16 re-echoes "my land" as both expressions suggest or imply guardianship; and these in turn collocate with "suckling birds" (line 4) while "tiger" features as an apt image of predator. We are therefore able to see the poet-persona in the discourse as spokesperson for the land, for the "suckling birds" and "taloned" children of "mother".

In our analysis of the first part of the poem, we had noted the contrast in time reference in the compound subordinators. "Now that", and the consistent past form of the verbs "slapped", "killed", etc. In the second part of the poem, the Mood element changes to a consistent simple (or habitual) present, "do you" (lines 9, 14, 16) instead of the past forms of the earlier section. This maintenance of the present tense here further suggests that although the addressee had rounded off his atrocities in the past, the effect is still on the victim.

Finally, we can interpret Raji's "Deadlines" as an address by a representative voice of the oppressed against the cruel, cowardly and liar-predator in the poem. This functional component has thus yielded much insight into the meaning potential of the poem. As with "Giokoo", "Deadlines" inheres the psychoanalytic archetypes of "the child" and "mother" while "tiger" features as "the demon". There is also in this poem the shared phenomenon of the dispossessed mother (lines 16-17) with the "tiger" being the dispossessor.

The last poem which responds mainly to the Niger Delta peculiar environmental problems is Ibiwari Ikiriko's "Under Pressure", which is analysed from Halliday's function of the clause as an exchange. The text of the poem, taken from his collection, *Oily Tears of the Niger* and the analysis follow.

Ibiwari Ikiriko's "Under Pressure" As Exchange Under Pressure

[Here is] /	DANGER!				1
Mood	Residue				
[Here is] /	High Pressure oil pipe line - /	[You should] keep off!			2
Mood	Residue		Mood		
[You] Don't	/	anchor!			3
Mood		Residue			
[Here is] /	DEATH !				4
Mood	Residue				
[Here is] /	High tension gas pipe line -	[You should] /	Keep clear!		5
Mood		Residue	Mood	Residue	
[There should be] /	No fishing !				6

Mood	Residue				
[Here is a] /	WARNING !				7
Mood	Residue				
[Here are]/	High pressure pipes -	[You should] /	Keep away !		8
Mood	Residue	Mood	Residue		
[There should be] /	No berthing !				9
Mood	Residue				
Trespassers will be /	Compressed				10
Mood	Residue				
[Trespassers will be] /	Roasted.	[Trespassers will be/	Melted		11
Mood		Residue	Mood		
Residue					
O	what a full tide of pressure				12
Vocative	Goal				
Brim	they	over our land and persons			13
Process	Actor	Range (Ikiriko, 51)			

In his explanation of the function of the clause as exchange, Haliday says that "... the clause is also organized as an interactive event involving speaker, or writer, and audience... If you say something to me with the aim of getting me to do something for you, such as 'Kiss me!' or "Get out of my daylight!', or to give you some object, as in 'Pass the salt!', the exchange commodity is strictly non-verbal: What is being demanded is an object or an action, and language is brought in to help the process along" (68). Ikiriko's "Under Pressure" as seen above is thus an exchange between a physically absent addresser and an unnamed exophoric addressee.

It should be noticed, however, that the text of the poem as presented by its writer is outside the square brackets, and it dispenses with the elements "Subjects" and "Finite operator" which, in Halliday's model, constitute the Mood of the clause. This is characteristic of imperative sentences. There is therefore the problem of determining what the Mood elements should be since, in this case, it is not a recoverable deletion. In arriving at the Mood elements in the square brackets, we were guided by Halliday's distinction between jussive and optative imperatives. According to him, the jussive type means 'ordering' (Halliday, 87). The consistent use of the exclamation sign with the commands thus places them in the 'ordering' category, and modal auxiliaries that function in this category include "must", "have to", "shall", "should" (see, for example, Ou[illegible] et al). This was how we arrived at the selection of the Mood elements in square brackets.

Also, our preference of the demonstrative pronoun "Here" to "There" is informed by the degree of proximity to the scene of the exchange by the

addressee. Given the nature of the imperatives, it is understood that the addressee is right at the scene of the exchange, from where s/he is being ordered to keep away, keep off or keep clear.

In the text, the elements of Mood with the demonstrative pronouns. "Here is" or "Here are", are six, and they have the following as Residue: "DANGER!" (line 1), "High pressure oil pipe line" (line 2), "DEATH!" (line 4), "high tension gas pipe line" (line 5), "WARNING!" (line 7), "High pressure pipes" (line 8). The single words, "DEATH", "DANGER", "WARNING!", and the longer phrases, "High pressure oil pipe line", "High tension gas pipe line" and "High pressure pipes" are all co-hyponyms that can be subsumed under "DANDER!" as the hyper-ordinate term.

Thus, from the referent of "Danger!" can come death if the addressee does not heed the commands at the scene of the speech event. And, in order to avoid the danger in this environment of the exchange, there is a warning. Similarly, there are the three longer sequences with a syntactically parallel structure: "High pressure...", "High tension...", "High pressure...", all of which portend death if the addressee does not comply with the commands in the text. These commands most of which constitute the Residue in their clauses, include "Keep off!" (line 2), "Don't anchor!" (line 3), "Keep clear!" (line 5), "No fishing!" (line 6), "Keep away!" (line 8), "No berthing!" (line 9). But if the addressee flouts any of these instructions, s/he "will be compressed. / Roasted. Melted" (lines 10-11). In other words, death awaits anyone who flouts any of these orders. To understand the reality, the trauma and tension of living in this kind of environment, we shall lean on Ken Saro-Wiwa's outcry that "...I live in the middle of death" (as cited in Na'Allah, 341). In a later publication, Wiwa's son, Ken Wiwa, reports, "A recent World Bank report indicated that conditions in the Niger Delta made significant contributions to global warming and the rise in respiratory diseases among the people" (49).

Like Ken Saro-Wiwa and Ken Wiwa, Ibiwari Ikiriko concludes "Under Pressure" on a note of sorrow and desperation in its last two lines:

O what a full tide of pressure
Brim they over our land and persons (lines 12-13).

Notice also the various emphases and meanings achieved through graphological devices. For example, besides the last two stanzas, every other imperative in the text is ended with an exclamation mark to realise a shouting pitch, and this, by implication portrays the psychological harassment of the people in their own environment. There is also the capitalisation of the three single words, "DANGER!", "DEATH!" and "WARNING!" This gives the words visual prominence and makes them difficult to be missed by anyone in the environment, in addition to the perlocutionary effect of indicating the

loudness of the addresser's voice. Then, there is the italicisation of "trespassers" to suggest the irony of the "natives" being labelled as "trespassers" in their own land by outsiders. In the end, we find a people and a land really "under pressure" as the title of the poem suggests.

The remaining two poems seem to focus on Nigeria's environmental decay which agency is traceable to non-oil-related natural causes. The first is M.S.C. Okolo's "Receding Olives" while the second is Nnimmo Bassey's "burnt river". Both poems are studied from the textual perspective.

A Textual Analysis of M.S.C. Okolo's "Receding Olives"

"Receding Olives"

When was the last time // 1
Theme
I trod pure green// 2
Rheme
and exalted in the innocent fragrance of undiluted air? // 3
Rheme
Was it 1900 // 4
Theme 1 Theme 2 Rheme
before the world wars // 5
Theme Rheme
before the nuclear wars // 6
Theme Rheme
and atomic bombs shook the earth? // 7
Rheme
Or 1950 // 8
Text Theme Rheme
before locomotives choked the streets // 9
Theme Rheme
and industries gathered smog in smug exhibition? // 10
Rheme
When was the last time... // 11
Theme
Was it before the air flights clogged the sky // 12
Theme Rheme
and toxic matter found its way to the waters? // 13
Rheme
When was it really? // 14
Theme Rheme
How far is the end? // 15
Theme Rheme

When will the awesome bottom of heaven collapse // 16
Theme Rheme
and its distance to earth be blurred? // 17
Rheme
... when? // 18
Theme
This millennium? // 19
Theme
next millennium? // 20
Theme
which millennium? // 21
Theme
Tarry awhile // 22
Theme Rheme
receding olives 23
Theme
tarry awhile // 24
Theme Rheme

In analysing, "Receding Olives", it is pertinent to remind ourselves of Halliday's proposal for the textual function of a clause. According to him: "*In English, as in many other languages, the clause is organized as a message by having a special status assigned to one part of it. One element in the clause is enunciated as the Theme; this then combines with the remainder so that the two parts together constitute a message" (38).* Halliday further identifies "that element which comes in first position in the clause" as the Theme while the remainder of the clause is labeled the Rheme (see also Haynes, 154). A Theme can be marked or unmarked. The unmarked Theme occurs where the clause follows the order of Subject, Predicator, Complement, Adjunct. Any other ordering of elements which deviates from this order yields a marked Theme. Also, certain structural elements such as conjunctions and relatives may appear in clause-initial position, followed with a lexical or content word. In such a case, the structural element is labelled Textual Theme while the first lexical word or word group is considered the Topical Theme.

The display of "Receding Olives" above shows that all the Themes of the poem are functional elements of time. This establishes *time* as the major concern of the poet. Secondly, all the Themes are interrogatives seeking information to questions introduced by "When" or "how far". These two elements of time appear as the super-ordinate Theme around which the rest of the theme-elements and the Rhemes revolve. These other elements are "(was it) before" (lines 5, 6, 8, 9, 12) and "was it" (line 4).

In addition to elements of time being the only Themes of the poem..

there are certain special strategies employed by the poet to emphasise time as the major concern of the text. This manifests in lines 19, 20 and 21 in which the sequences, "This millennium,? "next millennium?" and "Which millennium?" are specially marked Themes. To understand this strategy, it is necessary to note that two of these sequences should, ordinarily, belong with the Rheme component of the clause. This way, the clauses would read: "(Will it be) this millennium?" (Will it be) next millennium?" and then the third, which is a Theme with the Rheme dropped, would read: "which millennium [will it be]?" But the element, "Will it be" is consistently dropped from these clauses thus increasing the prominence and significance of the noun phrases left as residue (lines 19-21).

Following Halliday's position that "A message consists of a Theme combined with a Rheme" (39), we now look at how the various Rhemes of the text develop the Themes. In the first clause, the Rheme, "I trod pure green/ and exalted in the innocent fragrance of undiluted air" (lines 2-3), for instance, completes the Theme, "When was the last time". In the second stanza, the poet wonders whether it was "1900", which preceded "the world wars" and the "nuclear wars/and [was before] atomic bombs shook the earth?" The additional questions emphasise time as the turning point for the anti-earth, anti-environment events that have thus far threatened the earth and man. Other Rhemes in the poem continue this exposition from line 8 as '1950", a date that preceded another chain of man-contrived, anti-environment devices. These devices are "locomotives [which] chocked the streets" (line 9), "industries [which] gathered smog in smug exhibition" (line 10), "the air flights [which] clogged the sky" (line 12), and the 'toxic matter [which] found its way to the waters" (line 13).

This chain of details supplied by the Rhemes combines the many time elements as Themes to advance the poem's overall concern as a text that expresses grave anxiety about man's environment. The anxiety thus becomes the sole concern of the clauses in lines 15 to 21, all of which raise the single question of "when will the end come for the earth and man?" In this case, therefore, time becomes only a parameter for assessing the phased degradation of the environment. This connection between the environment as the real concern of the poem and time as the axis on which the phases of environment-unfriendly acts have been, and are still revolving, seems clarified by Riffatere's view that:

> *Almost everyone would agree that poetry does not express ideas or designate facts directly and for their own sake, as we do when we use language for practical purposes. Rather, poetry expresses something by saying something else (in*

Hrushovski).

It is in this sense that the poet uses the device of time to advance her theme of grave fear about the earth's ecological system and about the future of man. In spatio-temporal terms, this concern is reminiscent of the dominant theme of 19th century European Romantic poets as represented by William Blake, William Wordsworth, Percy Bysshe Shelley and others who reacted to the ecological vandalisation brought about by Europe's industrial revolution.

In the present case, the poet's similar critical attitude to man's inventions as agents of the destruction of, and threat to, the earth and humankind is further evidenced in such terms as "nuclear" weapons (line 6), "atomic bombs" (line 7), "locomotives" (line 9) "industries (line 10), etc, man-made contrivances. Interestingly, man's apparent helplessness and loss of control in the reversal of the trend of environmental degradation and pollution is symbolised by the occurrence of just a single human pronoun, in lower case, "i", in the first stanza of the poem. After this, human pronouns dry up in the rest of the poem, and what takes over is a series of questions expressing the poet's morbid fear for the future.

However, the poet seems to have some hope that the ultimate apocalypse for man and the environment can be delayed. This manifests in her appeal to the "receding olives" to "tarry awhile" (lines 22 and 24). This plea, by implication, is to man since man is presented in the text as the sole agent of the ecological exfoliation. Nevertheless, this does not seem strong enough to deflect the poem's central message as a warning against man's imminent and certain self-destruction through environmental despoliation. The title of the poem tends to strengthen this argument. The modifier, "receding" in "Receding Olives" depicts an on-going process which may be accelerated or slow(ed), while the noun head "Olives" is a romantic representation of the beauty of the natural ecological system.

In his *Psychology and African Literature*, Frank Uche Mowah paraphrases Carl Gustav Jung as saying that "*The secret of artistic creation and of the effectiveness of art can be discovered only when man has returned to that 'state of participation mystique' in which the human existence matters more than the individual weal and woe" (2).* Elsewhere, Jung names "death" among the several archetypes he identifies as primordial to, and recurring in, man's history. M.S.C. Okolo's "Receding Olives" can thus be seen from this psychoanalytic point of view as an expression of man's fear of death, in this case, the fear of such communal death as will result from the "collapse" of heaven's "awesome bottom" (line 16). The poet, therefore, finds in the "receding olives" an equative of the receding, in time, of the self and humankind.

This concern for the human race has been observed to be the focus of the Romantic poet, William Wordsworth. According to Damrosch, et al:

> ...it is misleading to call Wordsworth a 'nature poet', if we mean by that a poet whose main concern lies in recording the details of nature for their own sake. Wordsworth is interested in nature as it affects, guides, and nourishes the human mind. For Wordsworth, to think of nature apart from what it means, or can mean, to humanity is a virtual contradiction (426).

This concern over the environment as shield for man is also replicated in Nnimmo Bassey's "burnt river" which is also analysed as a message.

A Textual Analysis of Nnimmo Bassey's "burnt river".

"burnt river"

Outraged and scandalized //				1
Theme				
Mankind	stares helpless//			2
Theme	Rheme			
As	the rivers of our existence			3
Text Theme	Topical Theme			
Are plied with pollutants //				4
Rheme				
And	burnt to ashes //			5
Text Theme	Rheme			
Deep in the jungles of our treasury				6
Theme				
We	behold nothing but mere trees //			7
Theme	Rheme			
The hatred of nature				8
Theme				
Is the beginning of factories //				9
Rheme				
We	trade our trees for a kobo //			10
Theme	Rheme			
A rubber plantation	is equal to a forest //			11
Theme	Rheme			
Forget	the species	forget	the herbs//	12
Theme	Rheme	Theme	Rheme	
Forget	the bushmeat and	damn	the lake//	13
Theme	Rheme	Theme	Rheme	
Were	the trees	like Okomu all mowed //		14
Theme 1	Theme 2	Rheme		
After	bagging his twenty pieces of naira			15

Text		Theme		
Where, pray,		the branch for		16
Theme		Rheme		
Judas to take the last swing //				17
Rheme				
Outraged, //		scandalized //		18
Theme		Rheme		
Bulldozed, //		torched by arsonists //		19
Theme	Theme	Rheme		
We		stand aghast//		20
Theme	Rheme			
As		our world	is fried //	21
TextTheme		Top Theme	Rheme	

In line with our framework of *Theme* and *Rheme* the Thematic structure of the above poem is presented as follows:

LINE	THEME
	STANZA I
1	marked outraged and scandalized
2	unmarked mankind
3	Textual As
4	Topical rivers of our existence
5	Textual And
	STANZA II
6	marked deep in the jungle of our treasury
7	unmarked We
8	Thematic Equative The hatred of nature
	STANZA III
9	unmarked We
10	unmarked A rubber plantation
11	Imperative (I want you to)
12	Imperative (I want you to)
13	Textual and
14	Imperative (I want you to)
	STANZA IV
15	Textual were
16	Topical trees
17	unmarked Where
	STANZA V
18	marked outraged, scandalized
19	marked Bulldozed, torched

20	unmarked We
21	Textual As
22	Topical our world.

The poem displays a total of 22 occurrences of Theme. Of this number, 13 relate directly either to man or to human emotion. These instances are "outraged and scandalized" (line 1), "mankind" (line 2), "Deep in the jungle of our treasury" (line 6), "We" (line 7), "The hatred of nature" (line 8), "we" (line 10). [I want you to] (4 times in lines 12-13), "outraged, scandalized, bulldozed, torched" (lines 18 and 19), "we" (line 20), "our world" (line 21). On the other hand, connectives such as "as" (line 3), "and" (line 5), "and were" (line 14), "and where" (line 16) as Textual Themes occur in six places in the poem. Also, non-human phenomena such as "rivers" (line 3), "A rubber plantation" (line 11), and "trees" (line 14) feature as Theme only three times in the entire poem.

This clear dominance of human-centered Theme elements shows that the poet's primary concern is with man and not just the environment. Thus, although the poem has a non-human feature, "river", both in its title and elsewhere in the body of the text, its structural or Thematic organisation reveals that the environment enjoys some focus only to the extent that its despoliation affects man most negatively. This argument is further supported by even the nature and function of the few non-human elements as Theme, and the nature of the Rheme of some of the clauses. In "the rivers of our existence" (line 3) for example, we see that though "rivers" is the topical Theme, it is post-modified by the prepositional phrase, 'of our existence', which places prominence on our (man's) existence rather than on the life of the river per se. Similarly, where the word, "trees", occurs as topical Theme (line 4), the need for its existence is immediately hooked to man's need of it, "...pray, the branch for/Judas to take the last swing?" Also, in lines 12 and 13, the poet urges the reader, most satirically and sarcastically, to forget the species, the herbs, the bushmeat and "damn the lake". The satirical force of these imperatives as speech acts comes out more clearly when we realise that being poetic, they are not such acts whose execution can be ascertained through the normal happiness or felicity conditions. Richard Ohmann seems to validate this observation in his assertion that *"The contract between poet and reader or hearer does not put the poet behind the various statements, rejoinders, laments, promises, or whatever, that he seemingly voices. His word is not his bond, in just this same way" (in Freeman, D.C., 367).*

In "burnt river" therefore, the poet satirises man's ruining of himself as he destroys his own environment for immediate monetary gain. This idea of suicide is strengthened by the intertextual reference to Judas in the Bible who, after betraying his master, Jesus the Christ, ended up taking his own life. Man's

thoughtless destruction of his shield the environment finds its echoes in the poet's rather simple presentation of the grave process of suicide which he describes as "the last swing". It can thus be summarised that the text develops through an interplay of themes the need to protect the environment as man's shield, and then by implication, the second and ultimate theme of man's protection of himself. This mutual development of themes in poetry has been acknowledged by Stankiewicz in his postulation that "*In poetry, ..., themes are frequently developed and interpreted by means of other themes, even if the transitions between are often blurred. Within a single work the basic theme may alternate with rival themes, and their hierarchic relationship may be quite complex (In Sebeok, 72)*. Again, although the poet does not specify who is responsible for the ecological unclothing of man, the text's ideological inclination as revealed in such terms as "treasury", "factories", "bulldozed", "kobo" and "pollutants" suggests that the "arsonists" are the rich and powerful members of the society who are fired by mercantile greed. While these plunder the environment, the rest of the population "stare helpless", are 'outraged and scandalized", or they "stand aghast".

This, of course, has been the situation in Nigeria where oil companies, cheered on by dictatorial neo-colonial, military, and neo-military regimes, have been ravaging the oil-rich lands and peoples of the country's Niger Delta while the rest of the people look on helplessly and aghast. What is worth noting, however, is the poet's failure to name directly the "pyromaniacs" as even the human pronouns in the text are those of collective inclusiveness, embracing both the assailants and the human victims. These pronouns feature in lines 2,3, 7, 10, 20 and 21 of the text. As with "Receding Olives", "burnt river' can be interpreted psychoanalytically as an expression of man's primordial fear of "death". Again, in this case, it is the possible collective death of humankind rather than of the individual that is the poet's concern. This is supported in the poem by the collective or plural pronouns as we have noted in the text.

Conclusion

This study has been situated within the broad theoretical field of Ecocriticism, and the analysis has been shaped by M. A. K. Halliday's three metafunctional planks of clause as Representation, as Exchange and as Text. The paper examines five poems, which are, in turn, split into two: those whose concern with the environment is of a general nature, and those which focus on the peculiar situation of Nigeria's Niger Delta, where ecological problems arise from the exploration for, and exploitation of crude oil. Besides isolating the content value of the poems, which replicates literature's historical reaction to the destruction of the non-human nature serving as humankind's shield, the analyses reveal one common stylistic strategy among the poets. This is the

reliance on linguistic devices in order to stay outside the orbit of harm in a climate of a murderous military dictatorship characteristically intolerant of arguments. This strategy involves the dropping of the logical subject from some of the poems, the preference of the passive to active voice and the reliance on predator-animals like the tiger as symbols of the military authorities. It is necessary that Nigerian ecocritics go beyond the Niger Delta, for instance, to other parts of the world similarly endowed with the oil resource to synergise with the eco-literature of such lands in order to widen the scope and understanding of this challenge to the human environment as a universal phenomenon.

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