



AN ECO-LINGUISTIC READING OF  
J. P. CLARK'S 'NIGHT RAIN' AND 'HOME FROM HIROSHIMA'

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**Abstract:**

If there is any problem facing man today in all the continents of the world, it is the problem of climate change. There is a growing call for man to protect nature and the atmosphere. The major call is that man should go green in order to protect our natural environment. In all of these calls, it is rare to find the roles language and creative writings can play in solving the problem of climate change. It is on this basis, therefore, that this study presents an eco-linguistic reading of two of J. P. Clark's poems 'Night Rain' and 'Home from Hiroshima' with a view to highlighting the effects of climate change and possible solutions in the poems. Using the eco-linguistic approach to the present study, we conclude that life as presented in the language of the two poems under scrutiny is not meaningful and comfortable if the environment of the ozone layer is continuously depleted thereby causing natural disasters like flooding, earth quakes and tsunamis which JP Clark captures in 'Night Rain' and 'Home from Hiroshima.'

**Keywords:** eco-linguistic, nature, J. P. Clark, ecology, environment

**1. Introduction**

Creative writings in most cases mirror the society that produce them. That is why there is usually a connection between the society and the creative works produced therein. According to Berthoff Warren (1981), "... literature itself has its own purpose and determinants... never wholly autonomous it draws its prime motives from deep within the common culture, the life experience of its producers in their time... but it never speaks for the totality of that culture." (46) As it were, every writer decides where to tell the stories from but all in connection to the society. Some writers may write to correct the perceived errors in the present society others may write to tell stories of what happened in the past and other responsibilities which the writer is troubled with.

One of the responsibilities of writers is that of creating awareness on different issues that tend to reduce our humanity. One area few writers like J. P. Clark have excelled in the

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aspect of their responsibility to the society is the call for caution against climate change and the deteriorating effects of man's activities against the environment. The main problem here is that in the study of Clark's poems, little or no efforts have been devoted to his contributions towards fighting global warming and preserving the nature.

In studying literary texts, there is a gradual shift from looking at the traditional ways of focusing of themes, subject matter, and other literary techniques which aid in the development of the text. The attention is shifting gradually to how the creative writings contribute to the development of the contemporary society. In this angle, we are looking at how literature is aimed at problem solving in the modern world. Contemporary problems like terrorism, human trafficking, poverty, the rising cases of infant and maternal mortality rate, global warming and others can be solved through creative writings. It is on this basis, therefore, that this study presents an ecolinguistic reading of two of J. P. Clark's poems '*Night Rain*' and '*Home from Hiroshima*' with a view to highlighting the effects of climate change and possible solutions through the use of language in the two poems.

## 2. Literature Review

Ogundokun Sikiru (2013) focused on the representations of nature in J. P. Clark's "night rain." The study established the link between the environment which man leaves and literature. This study examined J. P. Clark's "*Night Rain*" as a product of the relationship between literature and the environment, and the representation of nature, which make up the environment in a literary work. Using Eco-criticism as the theoretical framework for the study, Ogundokun (2013) concludes that our lives are not meaningful except they are situated in the cultural context of our environment. Hence, the study and understanding of culture in relation to the environment through literature will help us in solving the challenges of the 21st century.

Yeibo Ebi (2012) paid attention to the figurative language and their stylistic functions in J. P. Clark's poems. The study recognizes the fact that greater emphasis has been paid to Clark's poems mainly on the literary features with less attention on the role figurative language plays in foregrounding stylistic functions in the texts, which is very crucial for a comprehensive description and interpretation of the poet's idiolect. At the end, Yeibo (2012) concludes that figuration is a significant feature of poetry, and that Clark deliberately in poems like '*Night Rain*' deployed this device to effectively encode the meaning of the texts under study and also achieve aesthetic value, in relation to context of situation and textual function.

Daniel Iyabode (2008) studied J. P. Clark poems as a 'weeping poet.' In the instance of the study Clark in most of his poems is seen as being empathic to the various problems which man is facing. For example, in '*Night Rain*', the poet shows interest in how the poor fight the lack of good homes. This goes a long way to corroborate what was observed by Romanus Egudu (1999) that Clark-Bekederemok's "*interest is in the problems of human beings everywhere*" (Egudu 34). This portrays Clark as a humanist poet who reaches for the good of others.

### 3. Eco Linguistics

The term eco linguistics means different things to different persons as the field is relatively trying to be stable and expand its various aspects. The definition of eco linguistics is heavily dependent of the side of the divide the linguist is and the linguist intend to do with the theory at that moment. However, there seems to be a consensus that the field of eco linguistics has to do with language and the environment (cf Fill Alwin and Muhahauster, Peter 2000 and Arran Stibbe, 2014). According to Stibbe (2014), *"the multiplicity of approaches in eco linguistics arises from the differing understanding of the concept of 'ecology' from a very broad concept of that of the relationship and interaction between different things in the environment to narrow concepts such as related to environmentalism"* (Stibbe, 8).

For the purpose of the present study, we are going to use the second approach of eco linguistics and its frames as enunciated by Steffensen and Fill as regards studying ecology and language. The first approach borders on or sees eco linguistics as the interactions languages have within an environment which to me seems like a study in social linguistics. This is also known as symbolic ecology. It tends to uncover the how different languages survive in an environment.

The second approach we would adopt is the one that sees eco linguistics as the relationship or interrelationship that exists between man and his environment which is made manifest in the language. That is to say, the nature of the relationship between man and his environment can easily be seen in the nature of language (meaning implied) used by man as regards the environment and in turn, how the environment has also reacted to man words and actions. As it were, if the relationship is cordial, it would be revealed in the language used. If it is otherwise, the language would reveal it also. So, in the present study, we intend to look at the relationship between man and nature through the eyes of the personae in the two poems of Clark, *'Night Rain'* and *'Home from Hiroshima'*.

Before moving to the analysis, we would briefly look at the third and the fourth approach which Steffensen Sune and Fill Alwin provide. The third approach is known as the cognitive ecology which places emphasis on how the cognitive ability of organisms affect the environment and how they adapt to the environment. According to Steffensen and Fill (2014), *"the cognitive approach is mainly applied in the United States to show how man's behavior and activities are mainly organized and constrained by the forces of nature or eco system"*. So, it studies how man is shaped by the environment. What happens to man and how he relates is mainly dependent on what the environment has done to him. The problem with this approach is the over reliance on cognition and psychology which appears to be too metalistic and abstract based to fully account for what happens in real life situations.

The last approach briefly is the natural ecology approach. This approach is concerned with the relationship that exists between language and its biological and physical environment. According to Steffensen and Fill (2014), *"language is dependent on the natural habitat of language users and that reason warrants considering the natural ecology of language."* This approach draws mainly from the postulations of Sapir. This does not capture the essence of the present study; hence we are not going to use it.

#### 4. The relationship between man and his environment in Clark's 'Night Rain'

The poem 'Night Rain' captures the feeling of a child personae towards rain falling at night in a local and poor riverine community. Rain and how it falls is a natural phenomenon which man feels. It could be a soothing relief after a long hot period. It could also come as an agent of destruction for man. From the personae, we see that the night rain which is an agent of nature being destructive to man due to how man has handled the other aspects of the environment.

From the poem and language use we know fully that though there is a strong or cordial relationship between man and nature, nature comes with destruction because the relationship has not been properly managed. We see the destruction in lines 17, 20 and 21 where the personae says:

*"Fruits showered forth in the wind/Them on string as they break/In wooden bowls and earthenware"*

For the first line, rain and nature destroys the food which man eats as the rain pushes them to fall off and break. This actually by extension has led to food shortage, hunger and starvation as there are cases of flood which is a product of rain washing farm lands and food storage facilities away. Due to this, one can easily agree that what the personae presents looking at the language inclined to destruction is a tensed situation between man and nature.

This is not just about man alone. Even the animals are not spared from the destructions which nature brings through rain fall. The poem says:

*"That wet of wings may not fly/bedraggled up on the iroko, they stand/emptied of hearts/Therefore will not stir, no not/even at dawn."*

We see that the effects of the destruction are enormous as it brings heart breaks, inactivity and weaknesses. These are happening because man has not properly taken of nature as rain falls are becoming more intense because of global warming which has increased in the last few years due to the industrialization and technological advancement of man. In the Niger Delta, the exploration of oil and gas has brought a lot of adverse effects on man and nature in the environment. There is a continuous gas flaring and oil spillage in the region. Nature has not received this happily. The relationship has been strained and man bears the consequences through destruction of fruits, food properties of man.

Man, also suffers psychological trauma as the mother of the personae has to wake up from sleep in order to make some savings of the things being destroyed by nature. She does it at a great discomfort because no one like being woken up at that moment for a job like that. Also, it seems it only applies to the personae's mother due to her experience as a full man. For the child voice which is innocent the destructions of the rain is not of a problem to him as it can be said that he has not gained the consciousness of a full blown man to feel the effects of the strained relationship between man and nature. We know the trauma and discomfort the adult mother suffers as against the worriless in in the child voice in the lines below:

*"Mother is busy deploying/About our roomlet and floor/Although it is dark."*

This can be contrasted with the child's voice in the last line:

*"We will settle to our sleep of the innocent and free"*

The adult personae has contributed to the straining of the relationship with nature through dangerous activities as common as bush burning. As such, she must bear the consequences of losing sleep to save products from being destroyed by the night rain. On the other hand, the child who has done anything settle to sleep at night because it means no harm to him. This means that if we are not guilty of causing global warming to cause destructive rain, we would have nothing to fear from nature as the relationship would be cordial following the approach of Steffensen and Fill (2014).

### **5. The relationship between man and his environment in Clark's 'Home from Hiroshima'**

The poem contains the total breakdown in the relationship that exists between man and nature. This is evident in the dictatorial nature of man against nature. Here, we see the US President decreeing the destruction of nature in sending nuclear bomb to Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Man has been this unjust to nature that it takes action without considering the consequences it would have on nature. The language in the poem is that man in the quest to achieve peace, growth and development takes certain decisions that destroys the ozone layer leading to the full change of the natural circle.

In the instance of the poem, the Second World War was ravaging the world and a country like Japan was a principle of ally of Germany. America as a nation was not affected by the war as it was not part of any of the sides to the war. America uninvited wanted to promote peace in the world and they felt the best way to achieve this was dealing a heavy blow to one of the principle actors hence the use of the nuclear bomb in Hiroshima and Nagasaki in Japan. It indeed ended the war, but its effects are still evident in the gene mutation of the inhabitants of the nation. According to the personae:

*"And now will live/ By peace. Yet in the city/And field, from coast to coast/The hail/of plumes, plucked, scattered free/from the original breed."*

Things have indeed changed since the peace was achieved in that region, but the consequential effects have been grave. Everything about nature, the cities, the field, the coast and the lofty green plumes have all been destroyed and changed from the original circle of life. Man is also affected by this as the genetic makeup of many Japanese were seriously altered as can be seen in their faces.

The truth which most persons do not wish to accept is the fact that nature would always fight back especially if the relationship with man is not cordial in line with the approach of Steffensen and Fill. The personae in the poem 'Home from Hiroshima' says:

*"Till vengeance is/Thiers and likely/ At its own instance."*

It is for nature to take real vengeance on man through the act of punishing man through global warming, negative genetic changes and natural disasters like earthquakes, hurricanes, acid rains, desertification and others. The last line of the poem is more declarative on how the industrialized nature of man is fighting nature. The poet says: *"The wild west wreck the world."* The west here refers to the western countries of Europe and America where technology that are not nature friendly has taken over nature to make life more comfortable for man. The sad thing is that it has not stopped. Nature is still being destroyed. The truth remains that man must look inwards in its action against nature. Nature cannot speak for one to hear but we only hear through negative natural happenings and when this happens, it is usually a pile up of years of man's neglect to nature. This is the main point which Clark presents in the poem.

## 6. Findings

From our analysis, we found out that:

1. Man is apprehensive about nature because of the previous evil which man has committed against it. This means that if we are not guilty of causing global warming to cause destructive rain, we would have nothing to fear from nature as the relationship would be cordial. This is evident from the adult mother who becomes sleepless due to the night rain while the innocent child enjoys the sleep.
2. The destruction of nature has not stopped and the anger of nature would not stop too, the earlier man stops the earlier nature would stop.

## 7. Conclusion

What we have done in this study is to carry out an eco-linguist reading of Clark's *'Night Rain'* and *'Home from Hiroshima.'* The study is of the opinion that the language in the two poems reflects the break down in the relationship between man and nature. The main culprit here is man. Nature is not seating back. It is fighting back seriously through global warming, flooding, and genetic changes.

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