

Hydro-Criticism, Symbolism and the Use of Water Imagery in Joe Ushie's Poetry

Elizabeth N. Eukora, PhD

Department of Languages,
Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences,
Nigerian Defence Academy, Kaduna.
08036007192

lizzyenukora@yahoo.com

&

Chinonso Okolo

Department of English,
Faculty of Arts,
University of Uyo.
08064689947;
okoloprincewill@gmail.com

Abstract

Joe Ushie, a strong voice of contemporary Nigerian poetry in English emerged in the late 1980s. He has written extensively on the environment, socio-political, cultural, economic and postcolonial predicaments of the contemporary Nigerian society. Scholars have analysed his preoccupations from the realities of contemporary society influenced by modern technology, capitalism and globalisation. However, Ushie's captivating inquiry into eco-criticism especially as it affects hydro-criticism with special reference to the use of imagery and symbolism of water bodies in his local environment, needs more critical focus. Hydro-criticism, an intellectual construct that captures and explores how human activities impact negatively on the ozone layer, which results into maritime and oceanic spin, whirl, turn, rise or growth in the sea level, is applied as a theoretical anchor to evaluate Ushie's deployment of water imagery and symbolism in dealing with and

two major interventions. The first one is how aqueous locations become sites of queer community and punishment while registering associations with the fluid female body, the second deals with how human and nonhuman intimacy is enabled by aqueous proximity (2).

Having highlighted the concept of hydro-criticism, it is expedient to go further and define the terms imagery and symbol as they are applied in this paper. The term imagery is used to describe and capture a mental picture of a representation or likeness of somebody or something seen, heard or produced. The *Merriam Webster's Encyclopedia of Literature*, defines imagery as the literal or figurative representation of objects, feelings or ideas. It specifically has to do with using a concrete or figurative diction by a writer or speaker to express or evoke special emotion, appeal or a train of intellectual associations as desired by the user or speaker. On this note, Egudu defines imagery as the creation of mental pictures by the use of words in the minds of the readers (9). Following Egudu's definition of imagery, Ngwokede fines it as the:

Tripartite typological delineation of imagery in modern scholarship into the literal, the figurative and the symbolic owes to the different linguistic modes of its realization. Therefore, the first type consists of images expressed in ordinary, everyday language; the second in figures of speech; and the third in symbolic words and expressions. Beyond manner of expression, the types are differentiated by the degrees of their referencing or representations of objects, events and situations in the real world (158).

Imagery is the signification or representation of objects and qualities of the sense of perception (Abrams, 129). The term, symbol on the other hand is applies to a word or a phrase which represents or stands for something else with a specific meaning. Symbolism helps the poet to bring out a secondary meaning to what he wants to express. Abrams concludes that:

A symbol is anything which signifies something else; in this sense, all words are symbols. In discussing literature, however, the term 'symbol' is applied only to a word or phrase that signifies an object or event which in its turn signifies something, or suggests a range of reference, beyond itself (358).

This paper therefore examines the symbolic use of water imagery in Joe Ushie's selected poems using hydro-criticism as a theoretical framework. The poet imaginatively adopts linguistic puns, metaphors, his local imagery and symbols of water bodies to make relevant comments on the despoliation of the environment and the turbulent or other occurrences of water bodies on human beings. Beyond these areas of Ushie's poetic engagements, water is generally a major concern of his preoccupation. Water essentially constitutes a major and significant element of human life and activity. Plants and animals also depend on water to survive. Again, over 75 percent of the land area or land mass in Akorshie, Bendi in the Obanliku Local Government Area of Cross River State, where Joe Ushie comes from; and the entire Earth surface is generally or largely covered by or made of water. Consequently, water plays a very vital role in the affairs of men all over the world. As a child, the poet grew up in his local environment surrounded by water. This in the form of seas, rivers, streams and water tributaries which understandably find expression in his poetry. Rivers such as Bekwang and Attlakua have acquired some form of symbolism or signification in the life of the poet which he often makes references to and use as symbols and images in his poetry in order to express or capture various emotions such as pain, loss, grief as well as happiness, joy or events/occasions. The use of these symbolic devices indexes do not just serve as rallying points for the poet or as an aesthetic value. They also function as the main component that enhances and concretizes his childhood experiences, memories and help to create rural consciousness or memories in his psychic which often reflect in his poems. Apart from playing and swimming in these rivers as a youth in his local environment which he enjoyed, he also gets inspiration and enjoy a touch of nature

from the rivers. It is not an overstatement to say that his poetic muse emanates mainly from the rivers and water bodies found in his village and its environs. One can safely conclude that Ushie is both an eco-conscious poet as well as a water-conscious poet. This is because every part of the rivers in his local environment, their banks, surrounding trees and even the sediments at the bottom of the rivers, all contribute to form part of his imaginative thoughts and consciousness. His local environment which includes the water and its bodies, formed part of his poetic consciousness.

Nature, Imagination and the Use of Water Symbols and Images

The use of water imagery as reflected in Ushie's poetry is on the main, conventional and serves as a reinforcement of his familiar traditional Bendi terrain and homeland. Thus, symbolic water imagery is an integral and functional component of Ushie's poetry which he deploys skillfully to render the right emotions in order to pass a message. Ushie's poetry also deals so much with issues associated with social injustice and the disillusionment of the contemporary society. This paper is necessitated by the paucity of critical enquiry into the aspect of the poet's imaginative use of water imagery and symbolism in his poems and on the contemporary Nigerian poetry as a whole. This paper is therefore significant because it fills the critical gap on the topic of eco-consciousness that deals with hydro-criticism and symbolism. Reacting to the paucity of scholars' attention in this area, Nnolim declares that we are not a sea-faring people or nation and so dealing with the expanses of these elements and features elude us. Thus, we see water in the form of streams, rivers, rainfall and ponds. He concludes that,

there is no imagery of water as a death-dealing agent in storms, at sea or in its terrors during a tsunami. This is part of our imaginative myopia or rather timidity because our lives are so confined to landmass (55).

Generally speaking, rivers, its surroundings, gods and goddesses are not only taken as sacred symbols by the Bendi people and the whole communities in the riverine area of Nigeria. The people deify them as their god, goddesses and totem symbols. As a result, their lifestyles and even occupations are largely tied and influenced by waters such as rivers, lakes and streams. Thus, Ushie's poetry recreates and reflects the realities of his traditional Bendi milieu and the fascinating imagery which emanate from water that draw the attention of the poet.

Since our focus in this study is on the symbolic use of imagery and conceptualization of water bodies in Ushie's poetry, it is therefore necessary to still give a little more attention to the use of symbols and why they can function also as an imagery in Ushie's poetry. Poetry usually expresses both a primary and a secondary meaning. It can also serve as anything from personal experiences to other issues relating to the society. A symbol can also function as either conventional or private object. Some of the conventional use of symbolic images of water include its association for baptism, rebirth and as a life sustainer. Also water serve as a purifier and washes away sin, guilt and represents life. It is also a potent symbol of regeneration and a vehicle and a medium for cleansing. Beyond these, a river can also symbolize fluidity and stream of life and even negativity or death. Against this background, Ngwoke affirms that water imagery serves as tools of creativity to writers which they use as a means of conveying messages and transportation of ideas (160). Just like in handling of most other images, the manipulation of water imagery depends to a large extent on the writer's background, his experiences, sensibility and the knowledge which he has acquired about water. As has been observed, Joe Ushie is very much committed and influenced by water; having been born and brought up in Bendi rural setting. Hence, Joe Ushie's drive to use water imagery is highly intrinsic and inseparable from the poet.

The symbolic use of water in Joe Ushie's poetry is more conventional than private. The images of water as used by the poet suggests a

universal meaning and ideas, especially when the ideas portray water as a life-giver, life-saver, a healer, a purifier, a curative agent and a medium to reach ancestral spirits or even as a conveyor of evil omen. These images can best be perceived through the senses of hearing, feeling, seeing and smell which is emotive. Ushie uses these forms of imagery to depict or describe a lot of hidden rustic meanings of espousal of the social, economic, religious and cultural life of the traditional Bendi people of Calabar, in the southern part of Nigeria. He writes mainly about nature, the environment and the culture of the Bendi people and associates with them with their village waters as we can see in most of his poems. To him, water represents life and is a life saving agent. Water is sometimes used as a desire or a quest for something which captures rural lifestyles or experiences as against that of city life or the so called modernity. Rivers like Bekwang and Attlakua found in the poet's locality typify this yawning as an example of strength, power and healing balm which the poet utilise to his advantage. These rivers are known by the people for being beautifully calm and sometimes for their therapeutic healing powers and strength. The poet sometimes uses these rivers to portray or represent hope, truth and in some cases to depict a mysterious encounter. The images and symbols of water as used in Ushie's poetry are sometimes meant to be associated with femininity or the gods and goddess from the environment which the poet embodies. This cultural totem, or attribute which the poet exhibits in his poetry is common with the people of the riverine area of Nigeria.

Water in Ushie's poetry is presented in the form of streams, rivers, ponds and tributaries. He also depicts water as an embodiment of leisure, freedom and recreation for the Bendi people and the entire community. It is also worth mentioning that life in the riverine Bendi community is that of water and people living in water. Thus, living in water and playing on, and around or inside it is part of the people's culture and social life especially for the younger generations or the youths. The surrounding stream and river terrains in Ushie's poetry in addition, serves as playgrounds or as recreation centers for the children and the

young at heart. They are also used for some other essential purposes, making the waters in the community acquire multiple value and symbols.

Thus, in many of his poems, Ushie captures how he had memorable and exciting childhood experiences of swimming with other children in the Bekwang and Attlakua rivers. He also shares the memory of climbing the trees that grow by the riverbanks and running around on the sandy beaches. As a boy then, when he was not learning about village lore, medicinal plants and herbs; or about the cotton trees from his grandfather farms, he would go to the Bekwang River to swim and engage in wild games and sporting activities. Ushie often recalls with excitement and striking clarity, details of his early childhood days in his village. Apart from drawing up symbols and images from the streams and rivers, the poet also paints a great deal of beautiful pictures and scenery of rainfall or the season. The true symbol of water in Ushie's poetry can be found in his past experience where rain represents images of regeneration and life. Rain in many respects has physical, emotional and spiritual connotations and leitmotifs. His obsession with rain (water) brings him life, joy and gaiety. Thus, to him, rain does not only herald joy and happiness; traditionally it also represents life, birth, purity, means of cleansing and it also functions as a means of washing away sins and regeneration.

Ushie portrays water as life sustainer and life giver in his poem, "The Sot" in *Popular Stand and Other Poems*. This poem written in 41 lines, captures the poet persona depicting water as a source of life and its sustainer. The poet uses the visual and tactile imagery to portray the effects of water and its impacts on him. This reveals his passion about water as it gives life to all members of his rural community. His love for the local streams and rivers is indispensable as reiterated in this poem. The rivers and streams that are in his village are not just important elements of nature; they also function as natural channels through which the poet is brought into existence. The rivers energize, reinvigorate and

sustain him even as an adult. In stanza one of this poem, the poet uses visual and auditory imagery a great deal to convey his message and make meaning. These images vividly capture his inclination and attachment to water:

Drink-drenched like foam in water
The drunk, rising from the roadside bush
Swears to beat up all damned fools jeering
At him as if he were drunk (37).

In the lines above, the poet presents water as a source of vitality and strength. As a character in this poem, the poet is strengthened and encouraged by the water's ability to intoxicate him. The potency of water in Ushie's poetry is not just for refreshing or to quench taste; it has the ability to intoxicate and get him fortified to face various challenges and stress of life. At a closer look at the poem, one sees the poet creating an imagery of water as a death trap and death-giving agent. In Ushie's poetry generally, streams and rivers manifest their intoxicating powers through some harmful creatures that inhabit them. The following words relate to the audio-visual imagery which help to capture his message: 'drink-drenched', 'rising', 'swears', 'jeering'.

In addition, Ushie's "A trip home" reveals another dimension of the use of water symbol. The soothing and healing powers of the stream are here reinstated and re-emphasized. According to Ngwoke (2017), water is presented here as a healing agent which is medicinal and soothing. In traditional African society, water played and is still playing a medicinal role because it serves as a healing balmand serves as alife giver and sustainer (167). The poet persona in "A Trip home", line15 in *Popular stand and other poems* refers to the Attlakua River as 'soothing streams' implying that it heals, soothes, and mitigates pain and suffering. Attlakua River is also a metaphor of a stream where freedom and entrapment are entrenched and embodied. As a youth, the poet's curiosity pushed him to dive deep into the river bed to take a glance "at the glittering peaceful home of the tilapia" ("A Trip home" 18). Suddenly an image of acliff

appeared in his mind as he rowed deep into the stream, and then then the cliff sent shivers down his spine. The stream is seen as shining clearly among the hills which now awakes curiosity in him.

The welcoming and tranquil scenic environment of the Attlakua River is inviting, tempting and hard to resist by the poet. The fishermen can no longer withstand the desire to fish and so they take out their fishing nets and dive deep into the river bed to fish. But the supernatural event which they witnessed in the depth of the river changed their perspectives and drive of the once safe and tranquil environment to a fearful and now abused water brought about by the despoliation of the once pristine environment of the old. Thus, the poet remarks that the "rivulets are left nude, devoid of essence" as he sets out for a pleasurable adventure. What is meant to be an escapade, turns out to be "a panic-stricken glare" as he presently perceives nature as "scattered or killed" even the "faithful Attlakua"; ("A Trip home", 70). A state of melancholy sets in his heart even as the stream remains quiet and calm. Here, both freedom and entrapment are clearly recaptured and embodied in the river. The poet is now desolate and displeased with the stream he once perceived as peaceful and beautiful. His focus here is also directed to the horrifying experiences which water can bring. The poet makes use of antithesis. First, he warns his readers to stay clear of death by water while exhibiting the calmness that begs to be rowed on by the poet only to end up in a frightening stream of expedition.

Again "Shadows" in *Lambs at the Shrine* is a clear manifestation of how dull and meaningless life can be in times of drought in modern society. It depicts the heat emanating from the scorching sun and its reflection on the Bekwang River. Sadness engulfs him as the poet falls into mourning for the river that is heated up and depleted by the sun. The scorching effect of the sun brings the poet down to his knees. In a direct and strict observation, the poet expresses his encounter with the Bekwang River. He remembers the gaiety expressed by the river and "how each floating shadow/danced on this theatre, somersaulted, wriggled/ to out-dance the

poet draws attention and shows the condition of the river and the constant beaming of the sun on its surface which is excruciatingly hot and harmful to both humans and the environment. By this portrayal, the poet continues to draw his readers' attention to the sustaining power of the Bekwang River. By visualizing this looming scorching sun on the river and the natural environment, the persona makes further effort to express concerns about the state of the river and its effects on humanity. This goes in consonance with the views of the poet in the poem 'A trip home' as discussed above. In this poem the poet shows that water is traditionally used for purification and regeneration. The same case is represented in "Climate Change". In this poem, Ushie represents and captures water in the form of flood that ravages and destroys the environment all over the globe and consequently human existence. His concern is the effects of the damages done to humanity by flood all through the year and all over the world.

With reference to the destructive effects of flood on people and the environment generally, the poet shows very vividly how flood scriptnaked human efforts and material gifts into the ocean. Human beings are indicted for being a major cause of such natural mishaps and so the poet satirically refers to humans as "hewman" because they are devoid of all essence of humanity. Humankind cut and chop off every tree they see around and use them to build mega cities and industries thereby leaving the environment bare and unprotected causing more environmental degradation. The river flows first as a narrow stream but later it gathers into flood having met with other water droppings from the rains. This water cannot pass through the little water channels or gullies because there are too many obstructions caused by piles of straw and other forms of debris thrown into it by people. Thus flood is portrayed as ravaging agent in order to teach people some lessons. In so doing the poet again presents water as a symbol of destruction, danger and negative phenomenon. It represents a death-trap and a medium through which everything is transported and taken to the land of the dead. The poet in his poems show that water appears as both a life-giving and

death-bringing element depending on how society perceives and directs it.

Furthermore, 'Bekwang River' in *Popularstand and other poems* Ushie as an eco-conscious poet, creates hydro-critical imagery as seen in these lines:

We watch your hesitant flow
...Noiselessly weaving unto
Your thread like beads,
Those villages of Bantus... (35)

The scenery of "Bekwang River" is presented as peaceful and calm. It flows through a particular pathway by moving in different phases through the hill, down, over and through the land. This process of peaceful water flow and its setting is captured by Brutsaert (2005) thus;

When atmospheric water vapour condenses and precipitates overland, initially it moistens the surface and some amount of it is stored as interception, which later evaporates. As precipitation continues, part of it may flow over the surface in the form of overland flow or surface runoff, and part of it may enter into the soil as infiltration". (2)

This surface runoff soon tends to collect locally, either in puddles or in small ponds as depression storage, gullies or in larger channels where it continues as stream flowing which will ultimately capture the attention of the poet in the lines of the poem above in "Bekwang River" (35). In this instance he writes that "Noiselessly weaving unto/Your thread like beads". The poet try to show that water from Bekwang River infiltrates and flows rapidly through the nearby surface soil layers to exit through the adjacent streams or it may percolate more slowly through the profile to join the groundwater. This will sooner or later seep out into the natural river system, lakes and other open water bodies. In hydrological parlance, this part that gathers water together for dispatch is called the

other, all in same float” (“Shadows” 9 – 11). The effect of the scorching sun is brought to bear on the poet and the whole environment. It keeps its gaze constantly on the river and its surrounding features like on the trees, leaves and straw. Hence the sun is both an embodiment and a conveyor of death to all elements of nature, both on human and in the area. Thus the poet creates a condition of uncertainty on the river and its surrounding natural environment. Despite the effect of the sun on the Bekwang River, the resilience nature of the river is reinstated as we are told that:

Even now, Bekwang runs still and if this
Drought tearing its head will spare her
She will run still as that theatre on which
Fleeting leaves, straws or dead wood would
Emerge, dance, dance dizzily, briskly and terminate like
Ash down its course, often leaving no trace
On this great universal River. (47).

The poet creates a picture of resilience in the Bekwang River and so there is an air of optimism in poet and in the serene environment. Hence the poet assures us that when he dies, if the river does not dry up because of the heat that emanates from the sun; if the drought will spare the River, “there will be another I/ perched here in unison with these leaves” (“Shadows”, 27 – 29). The poet also touches on the theme of death and reincarnation which is cultural. Having been born and bred in the traditional African culture. The poet is an ardent believer in transmigration and rebirth imbedded in traditional African religion. This is what informs his believe that when the 'sun sets' in, and the drought does not dry up the river, “there will be another I/perched here in unison with these leaves”. In other words, the poet presents water as home to the spirits and the ancestors; the environment is a welcoming dwelling place for the spirits. Most of the Bendi gods, goddesses and ancestors are believed to inhabit waters just like the mermaid and so it may not be out of place to think that this is what informs the poet to say

that he “perched here in unison with these leaves”. Many of Ushie's poems portray that the poet as using phenomenal water imagery. The exploration of water imagery in Ushie's poetry is connected to ancestral spirits. It also conveys an eloquent testimony to the poet's rootedness in the traditional religion of his traditional Bendi people. His concern and connectedness to Bekwang River is always symbolic and cultural. It affirms the fact that water is an essential commodity for human life and existence because nobody can think of life or existence without water. In the poet's present and future world he wants to align with water for his existence and continuity of life because water gives and sustains life. It is not only in the present world of the poet that the essence of water is shown; water still remains an essential value even when the poet returns as an reincarnated soul or when he is brought back to life. From the poet's opinion and tone, it is clear that he rebukes people who do not regard or have any value for water. Thus, in today's despoiled environment because of modernity and lifestyle, it is regrettable that water symbolises an element of destruction and death. The poet reminds us that it is not only water that has lost its sense of value and function; but that humanity has become beastly and less humane and even more destructive and deadly. He believes that the human positive emotion has been subdued or removed and replaced by the desire for wealth and temporary pleasures such that man has neglected his source as life giver and sustainer. The poem “Shadows” brings out this connotation clearly from its title. This means that man can be said to have abandoned nature, his source of life and is chasing shadows which makes it more artificial and vain.

He goes further to show that water is a resource for human and national development, sustenance and reliance. Human beings are captured in this poem as mere reflection of shadows without substantive value if they do not have water which is the source of life. Thus human beings are “shadows” and no shadow outlives its source of life. By implication, Ushie further maintains his deep love and passion for water and the elements associated with it. Right from the beginning of this poem, the

... And time, too, for the hills to regain
Lost crowns of groves.
O when the sun goes on holidays
In the kingdom of the clouds
And locks and bolts her doors,
And sky begins to test its trumpets
We know it's time for the rains

Time for hot-tempered floods
To bleach the skin of mother Earth ...

... And time, too, for the farmer's fingers
To fix in womb of earth
The seed against tomorrow

... O season when rills and rivulets
Regain lost weight
... How they thrill for free
... That comes trumpeting. (58)

His "Rain season" is set at the beginning of the rains. As an eco-poet, Ushie often situate his poems as the works of nature, like rivers, hills, plants and vegetation. In this instance, it is the rain which the poet refers to as 'the trumpets of the sky'. The poet address and acknowledge the enormous powers of the rain to regenerate anything found along its path as well as its destructive effects on human beings and on the environment. In the order of seasonal changes, the raining season comes after the dry season which is when "the sun goes on holidays". The dry season heralds the coming of the rains which is the wet season of the year that renders nature wet and revives it by giving it a new lease of life. Consequently, the rain plays a significant role as carrier, renewal, preserver and re-creator within the context of the changing seasons. The raining season is accompanied by what the poet calls the "moody days" which makes the weather gloomy.

Beyond and above the consideration of a real and natural phenomenon which actually occurs on a yearly basis, the raining season also serves, not only as an inspiration to the poet, it also acts as a symbol of joy, happiness, emotional rebirth for him and his creative vision. Apart from being the poet's source of inspiration, the rains and the season serve as cleanser which is well known for their "cleansing into the sea/Dry season's arrears of sin". The rains serve the poet in many capacities and respects. He uses the rain as an imaginative tool of poetic creation and also as a means of passing his ideas and messages to his readers. One of such devices is the heavy wind which the poet address as the "brisk-muscled winds". The heavy elements such as the winds have the tendency of blowing off debris brought during the dry season which will eventually pave the way for the "chandeliers of flowers" to "decorate the world of the forests". The rain has a great potential and is valuable to the poet. It waters the drought-stricken 'hills to regain/ Lost crown of groves' and to make the entire earth regain its new life even as it rejuvenates the poet and makes him more productive and alive. The rain influences everything on earth and at all levels including the surface of the earth and the sea bodies. This means that no part of the universe is totally free from its influence and the power of rains or water bodies.

Rain in Ushie's poetry acquires both destructive and constructive powers. On the earth's surface, the rain through its flooding activities washes away landscapes and "leave raw wounds" on the earth surface. The surface of the land and the surrounding area of the sea that is washed off by the flood cause rill and gully erosion in the environment. It is on this note that Kramer (2005) observes that sometimes the flowing of water over loose soil washes away the soil. This forms small grooves on the ground. When many rills come together, they form a wider and deeper groove (10). Over the years these grooves increase in size and become gullies which carry large amount of water and eroded materials down the hill. This action of washing away the earth surface is for the good of nature as the poet reveals that the essence of this is for Mother Earth "to be dressed in radiant green". This is the beauty of nature.

river basin or the watershed. According to Mimikou, Baltas and Tsihrintzis (2016), “the boundary line along a topographic ridge separating two adjacent basins is called the drainage surface or stream order” (7). It is this river divide that Ushie refers to as 'thread like beads' in the lines of the poem “Bekwang River” from *Popular Stand and other poems*.

In “Urban blues”, the poet is engrossed with the movement of water as it “creep uphill”. As the water moves, it picks sediments from the sides and bottom of the waterway or channel. Over time, this movement makes the channel to move deeper and wider as it carries the sediments down the stream. As it moves along the sediments scrape into the bottom of the river. This scraping action is what the poet calls “squatting” in *Hill songs*:

Dawn, and they creep uphill,
From the rate-free stream
Squatting with the town
In the stream the tilapia flies
Unregulated

... I am a leaf
Floating on a sea (30)

Similarly “Climate change” in *Yawns and Belches*, the power of the water to erode and wear out is also highlighted. Sometimes this water does a lot of damages to the places where people live. Rivers may not be able to carry away all the water gathered from a heavy downpour or from the melting snow and also rivers overflow and flood the land as can be seen from the poem. Floods can wash away the surrounding soil of a river and at times they carry even human beings; leading to the cause of the loss of many lives and putting the lives of many people in danger. Right from ancient times to this 21st century society, people have tried to control the damaging effects of flood in their areas. Ushie however

captures his own view of the destructive effect of flood in the following words:

In the stretch of virgin forests and fertile minds, which mercantile greed
Balkanized into arrows and bows of mutual hate, we had prayed for cold
To calm the boiling tempers of the tropics, and for floods to cleanse
Them of the many seasons of blood of the innocent, crime and grin.
(18)

It is obvious that the effect of flood is welcomed and approved of by the poet. In this case, the flood does not only wash away the earth surface, it also cleanses the community of its accumulated evil deeds through the shedding of innocent blood and washing away of crimes and grime. In his own view, flood gets rid of pollutants from the environment and returns sanity and sanctity to the land. The poet goes further to describe of the actions of the cloud by articulating harmonious precipitated changes of the raining season. This is apparent in the poem “Rain season” in *A Reign of Locusts* where the poet's memory of the raining season is vividly captured thus:

When the sun goes on holidays
In the kingdom of the clouds
... We know it's time for the rains

... It's time for sullen moody days
... Time, too, for cleansing into sea
Dry season's arrears of sin

It's time for brisk-muscled winds to
Break tree trunks and brandish ...
Time when chandeliers of flowers
Decorate the world of the forests

especially in this era of globalization and global warming of the 21 century society.

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- *Lambs at the Shrine*. Kraft Books Limited. 2018.
- *Popular Stand and Other Poems*. Kraft Books Limited, 2018.
- (Ed). *Tsunami Blues and Other Poems*. Kraft Books Limited, 2018.
- Wienkiel, Laura. *English Language Notes*. Duke University Press, 2019.
- *Yawns and Belches*. Kraft Books Limited, 2018.

Another area which the rain demonstrates is its destructive power in carrying away through flood of people's houses and property. On the other hand, being the planting and harvesting season as the poet observes, the season heralds the sowing of seed into the "womb of earth/ the seed against tomorrow". During this period, almost everything on earth goes green and regains its vitality and strength; even the 'rills and rivulets/ Regain lost weight' at this bountiful period of the year. Having totally submitted himself to the influence and control of the rain, the poet charges all to "thrill for free" over the course of nature. His poetry becomes a form of incantation to the raining season.

Similarly in *Lambs at the shrine*, "Tropical rain" presents water as a cleansing agent and a source of hope for the living:

... Fear not the balding trees
Nor our soil turning to stone;
It will surely rain again
Where the dry season has overstayed.

... for, the tropics' seasonal downpour has
missed our land for too many seasons now
and dirt, oh, these dirt's breeding deaths,
have climbed higher than our healing hills
and no broom, however new, can do the task
.....

Fear not the balding trees
Nor our soil turning to stone;
It will surely rain here again
Where the dry season has overstayed (26)

The lines above presents rain as a sustainer, preserver and restorer of hope. The poet captures the land in despair because of a long period of drought. Having experienced a long period of drought, the trees are 'balding' and have withered as a result of lack drought and the effects of

the scorching sun. The soil itself becomes very dry, tauten and solid. The only thing that can ameliorate the situation is the coming of the rains which is long awaited and overdue because the land has been starved of food, nourishment and cleanliness. Lack of water, because of drought has made the land putrid thereby "breeding deaths". No other form of cleaning agent can take away the stench in the land except the water in form of rain which is a cleaner. Here, the poet reiterates the cleansing and purifying potential of water. Water is therefore represented as a symbol of purity, peace and harmony. The poet is optimistic for there is a ray of hope for the "balding trees" and the "soil turning stone" for it is certain that "it will surely rain again". All hope is raised towards the raining season because it will surely make "the streets glitter again" and revive the entire dry land and trees back to life. From the tone of the poet, water restores both hope and life; even the "dead woods embrace sunrays again". The poet is resolute in his beckoning on the rain for it is only by heralding the rain that his "heart knows peace". As an advocate of environmental peace, the poet has a duty to speak hope and optimism in the land for he is so sure that "it will rain here again".

Conclusion

Joe Ushie has clearly and consistently established himself as an eco-conscious poet who is guided by his concern for nature, the environment, culture and postcolonial intrigues especially as it relates to his homeland, Nigeria and the world as a whole. Using the aesthetics of figurative language of imagery and symbolism of water bodies, the poet is able to establish the link between his poetry and his place of birth in order to express the effects of nature on him and the environment; by bringing out the ambivalent quality and nature of water which serves as both constructive and destructive element. These features affect his emotions and feelings and at the same time the poet uses them to pass valid messages to his readers about environmental degradation. The end result of environmental poetry, is not just for aesthetics, it assists and serves in creating awareness and in building a sustainable society

Christianity, Islamism, Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism etc; these religions all point to the same Supreme Being, and the common teaching of all religions is the golden rule: treat others as you would want to be treated yourself (Melanie Pinola, Seven Important Lessons from World Religion Everyone Should Know) yet they engage in murderous religious bickering.

Since culture is people's way of life; other people's culture is other people's way of same life therefore it should be admired and respected. It is mere lack of wisdom that causes cultural discord since there is only one absolute truth and this truth is at the nucleus of philosophies, arts, civilization, ethos, music, and literature of the whole universe. All these have their meeting points at the absolute truth. Emeka Nwabueze confirms that "culture no doubt may vary but that is only at the peripheral (or marginal) level; the underlying principle that establishes every society is similar, if not the same" (9). It is only wisdom that can make one understand this. Therefore, at the background of all cultural discords, are material interests, greed, and hunger for superiority. A wise man needs not think that another people's culture is inferior. In food consumption for instance; people eat the kind of food that grows in their soil. Everybody should know that feeding is feeding; it does not matter the kind of food one eats or when one eats it. American food is not superior to Nigerian food if both serve the same purpose – to quench hunger and nourish the body. A wise man only admires and respects other people and tolerates (or corrects in a peaceful way) the aspect he fails to understand or do not synchronize with his own. People are expected to be open minded toward other people's cultures and by respecting them one is at the same time respecting the owner of such culture. But most of the time what is seen is bloated ego caused by the feeling that other people's culture is inferior.

However, the main essence of culture is to unite people through the same cultural values such as beliefs, traditions, and expectations. Scholars classify culture in different ways, but the basic types of culture are

material culture; which include physical things created by the society and non-material; culture which include intangible things produced by the society. In Igbo land for instance, examples are social roles, ethics, beliefs, and language. Other scholars hold that there are other ways of classifying culture; such as: high culture, popular, and subculture. Ifeoma Nwosu Okeke is of the view that:

High culture...usually refers to cultural creations that have a particular high status...Regarded by arbiters of cultural taste as epitome of the highest level of human creativity. It is usually of high sophistication... popular culture comprises those cultural creations and activities that are shared mostly by the masses. It refers to the unsophisticated... sub-culture refers to culture within another culture (261-262).

When two groups, whose members are culturally diverse meet, they need to adopt a common set of social norms and conventions. This may involve people of different cultures including different religious groups, traditional values or people of different national origins who have different ways of interpreting the world. This type of international experience is called inter culture. Again, every society has her prevailing culture, therefore, a visitor or a minor group must balance his culture with the already existing culture of the society socially and psychologically, this is acculturation. Acculturation as a process of social, psychological and cultural change that stems from balancing of two cultures while adapting to the prevailing culture of the society in which an individual adopts, acquires, and adjusts to a new cultural environment (Acculturation, Wikipedia). In this view it is expected that in acculturation individuals from dissimilar beliefs are obliged to integrate themselves into a novel or more prevalent culture by engaging in the aspect of that more dominant culture, such as their customs and rituals but still hold onto their original cultural values and traditions.

As custodians (people who take it upon themselves to preserve the general ways of their peoples' lives by exploiting them in their creative