

## Western Impunity and African Complicity in Alice Walker's Possessing the Secret of Joy

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### Abstract

Exploitation of Africa's rainforest resources, as depicted in Alice Walker's *Possessing the Secret of Joy*, is quite unnerving. But this eco-ethical issue, deeply etched within the novel's fabrics, is often obscured by the equally despicable human debacle of female genital mutilation; thereby diverting the attention of readers/critics from the moral implications of the ecologic injustices in the novel. Thus, from a bio-centred perspective, this paper, an ecocritical analysis of the Western culture of impunity, apropos their treatment of the African ecosystem, examines the factors that engender connivance by Africans, and the retributive consequences of the objectionable exploitation of that African commune. It concludes that Humanity's anthropocentric zeal for discovery and advancement in medicine and other sciences need not result in the obnoxious destruction of other species in an ecosystem, as this only incurs upon humanity retributive consequences, such as the HIV and AIDS pandemic, vividly depicted in the novel, though as an entirely African tribulation.

**Keywords:** Ecological degradation, African Complicity, Alice Walker

### 1. Introduction

The impunity with which the West engages the African ecosystem and the complicity of Africans, as depicted in Alice Walker's 1992 novel, *Possessing the Secret of Joy*, has very grave and quite unnerving ecological implications. Yet these are issues that have, apparently, not received their due attention from many readers and critics of the text. From the earliest date of its publication to date, available discourses on the novel reveal considerable attention from various other perspectives – Marxist, Feminist, Existentialist, Archetypal, Colonial, Post-colonial and even psychoanalytical points of view. Vijay Songire and Kamalakar Gaikwad (2015), from an existentialist cum feminist examination of the novel, for instance, posit that “the women face the problem of existence due to the practice of female genital mutilation ...”; a condition, which, they argue, exposes the existentialist crisis of women in the novel's African setting. Janette Turner Hospital (1992), from a modernist's perspective, reads the novel as a “telling of suffering and the breaking of taboos”, positing that “when taboos are broken, new forms and modes of discourse must evolve to contain that which has previously been unspeakable”; both echoing anthropocentric anxieties, yet devoid of any alarm over ecological taboos – the unguarded and atrocious decimation of the natural balance of the African rainforest ecosystem. Still from an anthropocentric stance, Geneva Cobb Moore (2000) reads the work as an explicit appropriation of “Carl Jung's archetypal patterns of ego, the shadow, the anima/animus, and the self in a psychological process that promises individual harmony and wholeness for those who earnestly seek self-knowledge and well-being”. Similarly, from a psychoanalytical point of view, Ikenna Dieke (1999) traces the cathartic effect of Tashi's introspective journey that unravels the mystery of her psychological breakdown; a journey from the doctor, Freud's disciple, to Jung's home country of Switzerland. And although, from a self-avowed ecofeminist posture, Abirami.V and M. Leelavathi (2015) posit that “*Possessing the Secret of Joy* is a clear conceptualization of Walker's ecofeminist stance ...” their paper shuns the ecocritical ethics of attacking the ecologically degrading consequences of the actions of the Western owned pharmaceutical company on the African ecosystem, with the complicity of their African stooges. Yet, vividly portrayed in the novel are these ‘deep’ ecological issues of willful destruction of the pristine African eco-balance; an issue which clearly predates the birth of ecocriticism as a field of literary Studies.

Ecocriticism, as a literary concept, is believed to have its earliest beginnings in the works of such scholars as William Rueckert, Lynn White Jr., William Howarth, and a host of other essays and criticisms that form the body of literature in *The Ecocritical Reader, Landmarks in Literary Ecology*, edited by Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm. As early as 1976, recognizing the interconnectivity of all things – nature and humanity – Rueckert (1996) identifies, among others, a work of literature as an energy stockpile, which, “unlike fossil fuels ... cannot be used up, and thereby launches ecocriticism by “applying ecological concepts to the reading, teaching, and writing about literature”, contributory, as he says to “keeping the human community from destroying the natural community, and with it the human community”. Similarly, contending that “Ecocriticism seeks to redirect humanistic ideology, not spurning the natural sciences but using their ideas to sustain viable reading”, Howarth (1996) identifies an ecocritic as “a person who judges the merits and faults of writings that depict the effects of culture upon nature, with a view towards celebrating nature, berating its despoilers, and reversing their harm.” And apparently to sum up the various ideas, Glotfelty (1996), defining ecocriticism

simply as a “study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment” contends that “just as feminist criticism examines language and literature from a gender conscious perspective, and Marxist criticism brings awareness of modes of production and economic class to its reading of texts, ecocriticism takes an earth-centered approach to literary studies.”

Although these theorists fail to establish a consensus view regarding method or rubrics by which readers/critics may arrive at a conclusion, art itself thriving on individualism rather than communalism, through the basic literary method of thematic analysis of the ecologically relevant portions of the text, this study promises to make a significant contribution to the study of place, nature and culture in imaginative literature. Hence, adopting the ecocritical ideology of studying Walker’s novel – *Possessing the Secret of Joy*, from its ecological merits, this paper tackles the following environmental and ethical issues: the impunity of the West, represented by the “pharmaceutical company”, towards a destruction of the pristine African ecosystem; the complicity of some of the African characters themselves in the destruction of the African ecological balance, as well as consequences of the degradation, and factors that engender complicity by the Africans. These call for examination, most importantly because of the need to open up more ecocritical discussions of this novel, which has become a major text in many of Africa’s university’s departments of English and Literary Studies.

The relevance of this exploration lies equally in its representation of an Afro-centric perspective to literary ecologism; for notwithstanding earlier dissenting voices against ecocriticism from some quarters, environmental consciousness and writings have steadily continued to pave their way into the chronicles of African literature. Like the Euro-American advocates of ecocriticism, African writers and critics, though still largely from colonial and postcolonial anthropocentric and activist perspectives, have equally demonstrated biocentric consciousness. With greater apprehensions over degradations of the African environment, mostly through the activities of natural resources prospecting multinational Western corporations in Nigeria’s Niger Delta, for instance, the writers, Tanure Ojaide, Isidore Okpewho, Kaine Agary, and Helon Habila, to name but a few, have in their various literary representations explored themes of ecological degradation, responding particularly to the adverse impacts of technology on the pristine cultures of the Niger Delta.

Writing on the “ecology of justice”, Ojaide (2012) notes that “as a result of the close connection between native peoples and their land for subsistence, they tend to suffer more when their environment is polluted ... Land is important for the cultural and economic survival of the people. Polluting and desecrating that land therefore go against their cultural and economic survival”. As the agro-terrestrial and aquatic economies of the place get replaced by the economy of fossil fuel exploitation, with its attendant devastation of earth, water and air, and with the displacement of the local people through their loss of farmlands, fishing waters, and hunting forests to the machines, ecocriticism in the place turns to ecoactivism, with even more devastating consequences, as vividly portrayed in Okpewho and Habila’s ecocritical novels, *Tides* and *Oil on Water* respectively. This moral provocative stance, inherently anthropocentric though, retains the ecocritical justice and stress of the survival of all organisms and strongly contradicts the earlier outright rejection of the theory by some other African writers.

William Slaymaker (2007), in his article “Ecoing the other(s): The Call of Global Green and Black African Responses” clearly reveal negative responses to ecocriticism by some Africans. According to him, “there is good cause to worry that environmentalism and ecologism are new forms of dominating discourses issuing from Western or First World centers. And the suspicion that environmentalism in all its various shades of green ... is a white thing is borne out by the explosive growth of research and participation in it by white scholars in and out of Africa”. Preposterous as view may sound, it continues to gain more grounds. Molly Nichols (2015), in her review of Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin’s recent work, *Postcolonial Ecocriticism: Literature, Animals, Environment*, succinctly attributes rejection of ecocriticism, by some postcolonial authors, to ecocriticism’s earth-centredness and concern, primarily “with animal rights and environmental conservation, emphasising natural purity and belonging”, and reiterates further the view of postcolonial thinkers that “social issues are so grave for human beings that they need to be addressed first, before putting energy toward nonhuman beings”. Yet in a world fraught with ecologic woes, Africans cannot but forge ahead in an attempt to ameliorate damages on her ecosystems through the globalizing effects of science and technological cultures.

A study of Walker’s *Possessing the Secret of Joy*, from an ecocritical perspective, therefore, becomes an imperative owing to its vivid portrayments of the impacts of culture on nature.

## 2. Western Impunity

The impunity with which the West destroys the African ecosystem is largely comprehended, in the novel, *possessing the secret of Joy*, through a study of its characters, characterisation and geographical setting. Through the faceless individuals, simply shielded from any responsibility by the institution “pharmaceutical company”; the freedom to guiltlessly exploit the resources of the pristine setting is put underway. They are faceless, shielded from punishment and positioned indefinitely for action, in spite of the enormity of their offence against nature. In offering the local African boys “positions” in their factory (p. 263), motivating them with money and the

promise of more meat, and equipping them with guns to kill as many of the monkeys and chimpanzees as possible, the company, described as: “German or Dutch”, Americans, “Australians and New Zealanders. Hearty fellows, always enthusiastic, as if they were on the track of a cure for all mankind” (p. 265), is poised to rid the pristine African rain forest of a significant component of her species, thereby violating the ecological harmony of the place. The company encourages the ignorant African boys to kill, even the male monkeys and chimpanzees, which as, Hartford recounts, are not needed. “Only the females and the babies were wanted ... With the help of only a few males, the females were forced to breed. This they did in cages hardly large enough for the act of mating” (p. 264).

With impunity the “pharmaceutical company” encourage the youths to kill, that they may have more meat to eat, and to sell. The company, in addition, subjects the animals to treatments, intolerable, even for animals. For by capturing the animals and forcing them to breed under the condition described above, the company destroys, in addition, the natural freedom the animals enjoyed in their natural forest habitat. But then, this action of “the pharmaceutical company” supports the anthropocentric dominance of the Western thought that makes it easy for them to exploit, with impunity, nature’s silence (Manes 1996); to degrade and to devastate in the process of establishing dominance over nature, considered dumb in the consciousness of the West.

One of the novel’s epigraphs: “When the axe came into the forest, the trees said the handle is one of us”, presages its ecological concern, while the other “There are those who believe Black people possess the secret of joy and that it is this that will sustain them through any spiritual or moral or physical devastation” signify appositely the notion of freedom, of license, to violate with impunity Africa’s human and forest resources, as though they were made to be actually spiritually, morally and physically devastated. This notion apparently bequeathed the West, first through the era of slavery, and through their colonial hegemonic experiences over Africa, accords them the privilege to deal with the African ecosystem as they please. The Adam/Hartford episode, buried deeply in the text, illustrates most pithily this impunity motif, laced with deception, and supported by Africa’s incomprehensible ignorance.

Hartford, under the illusion of becoming a medical scholar and doctor, accepts, from the Western “pharmaceutical company”, the job of hunting and decapitating African monkeys and chimpanzees, whose kidneys are to be used in the production of vaccine. Hartford’s illusion, engendered by appearance: “They always wore white, so that they looked like the doctors we saw in films and on TV” (p. 263), underscores, moreover, the other concept of exploitation of innocence often attributed to the relationship of the West to Africans, a condition that, in addition, predisposes the former to exploit the latter with impunity. Furthermore, with financial decoy and the promise of technological and political power, the African surrenders to the whims of the Western pharmaceutical company. Hartford recounts his experience with the foreigners: “We had always hunted monkeys and chimpanzees, they reminded us ... Only now there would be money, and, of course, often there would be meat. Both to eat and to sell ... We loved our guns...” (p. 263). Thus, enticed with money, the African boys, oblivious of the consequences of their exploitation of the forest resources destroy, at the behest of the Western imperialist power, the African rainforest monkeys and chimpanzees.

The imperialist “pharmaceutical company” perniciously and surreptitiously exploits, as a prelude, the African ignorance, with their capricious promise of wealth. Their success in this initial endeavour then imbues them with the sense of freedom from any unpleasant consequences that may arise from the mass decapitation of monkeys and chimpanzees, including their careless handling of the vaccines and the subsequent outbreak upon the same Africans of the HIV AIDS pandemic. The Africans have had their monetary gratification. They have been educated in the act of using the gun, no less than the knife, for the job of taking other lives. As such, it is the Africans who must bear the retributive of consequences of the failed Western pharmaceutical company’s experiment with monkey and chimpanzee kidneys, vaccines and polio, discussed in detail, in the concluding part of this paper.

To the Western thought, whether their experiment fails or succeeds, they lose nothing. They have travelled from so far away, left their safe environment “to work in Africa”. The Africans provide the resource, they provide the labour and eventually form the population upon which the experimental vaccine is tested. And such is the treachery of the pharmaceutical company that with their actions, their facelessness and a sense of detachment, they seem to hypothesize that the African should be blamed for the degradation of their pristine ecosystem; or perhaps, their greed for foreign currency should. Such impunity!

Hartford’s conjecture: “They did not see you when they looked ... we felt we did not exist to them ...” (p.263), further conveys the sense of detachment from the exploited that makes exploitation very convenient and the exploiter mentally free from any sense of responsibility. Hartford describes his employers as “Hearty fellows, always enthusiastic; as if they were on the track of a cure for all mankind” (p.265), further emphasizing the anthropocentric stance of the West, the culture of reducibility of nature, other than themselves, to objects of exploitation.

Indeed, in the African ecosystem of Walker’s novel, as in reality, nature is silent only in the consciousness of the Western “pharmaceutical company”. To the African, the forest and the animals are alive,

and as much active as the humans. Hartford recounts: "I grew to identify, and sometimes mimic, chimp and monkey behavior ... If we captured his mate or child, he would often follow so closely and with such disregard for his own safety it was easy to shoot him" (p.263). Besides, the Leopard and the Panther narratives (p. 3 – 5) present the reader with a vision of the African world where other organisms, especially animals are accorded respects close to those of the humans.

In the rainforest, the monkeys and chimpanzees speak most volubly, to the Africans, who should understand them; but these "pharmaceutical company" people have become machines; numbed and festered by greed, they have become heartless. But for Hartford's later remorse, these people have perniciously imbued their African stooges with the same numbness of spirit that enables them to destroy, with impunity, nature, other than self. The anthropocentric feeling of superiority by the exploiters affords them the freedom to take advantage of, and to degrade, with equanimity, a nature that they, in their consciousness, have rendered non-existent.

Greed and the sophistication of modern technologies are portrayed to imbue persons generally with the unfeeling attribute that alienates them from their true nature. The use, earlier on, by Hartford, of the exclusively human pronouns: 'his', 'he', 'him', 'who' for the male/father chimpanzee, and 'child' for the chimp's offspring, signifies a biocentric perception of the African, which raises the animal (and, by extension, nature other than humans) to that 'lofty' position hitherto occupied by humans, and conversely, reduces humans to "the humbler status of homo sapiens: one species among millions of other beautiful, terrible, fascinating – and signifying – forms" (Manes, 1996).

The Africans are furthermore portrayed as either too poor or too greedy to resist temptations from the West. Clearly, the "pharmaceutical company" tempts the African boys with money and with that which naturally and legitimately they already possess. They possess their primordial ecologic instincts, necessary for survival, long before the Western intrusion. As though the Africans were not entitled to their meat in their own natural habitat, in much the same way that the lions, snakes, hawks and other creatures were, these people tempt them with "more meat" and they fall for it. But the real baits are the money, the guns, and promise of power. The greed inherent in all humans, which, less ignorance of the Western guiles would have checked, renders Hartford and the other African boys susceptible to the Western deception. As such they kill, not merely for meat, but destroy massively in order to gratify the whims of their foreign masters, thereby rendering them accomplices in the degradation of their own ecosystem.

### 3. Complicity and Factors that engender Complicity

That Africans have always been accomplices in all the ills visited upon them, through their association with the West is a debatable issue of studies in Africa's slavery, colonial and neo-colonial experiences (Mazrui and Mutunga 2004)). But in the literary exploration of this issue, in Walker's *Possessing the Secret of Joy*, ignorance and poverty are two of the prominent factors that engender African complicity in the degradation of the ecosystem. Hartford expresses an initial joy at being offered, with the other "local boys, "positions" in the Western owned factory (p.263).

At first I was in the rainforest, hunting with the other boys ... We trapped and dragged back to the factory more monkeys and chimps than I'd even thought there were ... If we captured his mate or child, he would often follow so closely and with such disregard for his own safety it was easy to shoot him. This we often did, laughing (p. 263).

Greed for "positions", by the Africans, is thus portrayed as yet another factor that engenders unwholesome exploitation of the mammalian resources. But this enthusiasm does not last long. "I had smiled jauntily, myself, the first year I worked for them ... But soon I could not smile. I stood knee-deep in monkey heads, torsos ..." (p.265) is a clear indication of the uncritical and ignorant mindset of the Africans, of Walker's imagination, that makes them vulnerable to the full consequences of their uninformed actions. "Small boys with knives were trained to make the slit ... and haul the kidneys out. It was on these kidneys the men in white coats grew their precious "cultures" (p.265).

That the "Small boys", African boys, are equipped with knives to cut open monkeys and chimpanzees, while their parents, guardians of the African heritage, by inference, turn their eyes the other way, or simply await joyously at home, for the money and the power the boys would bring home from the foreigners; ultimately makes the adults, African leaders, accomplices as well. Complicity, moreover, are the so called African 'intellectuals' of the novel, with their capricious and appalling conjectures in the face of Western orchestrated reduction of the African to objects of experimentation and humiliation.

Olivia notes, concerning the victims of HIV AIDS, that the illiterate Africans, ignorant of the source of their sickness, endure in "dumb patience, as they wait for death" (250), resigned as it were to the "assigned role of the African: to suffer, to die, and not know why" (p.250). Hence, this category of Africans is the architect of their subjugated, degraded state. In choosing "to suffer, to die and not know why", they too have become accomplices, no less, in the tragedy that befalls them. But even more unnerving is the complicit position of the African "scholars and intellectuals", victims also of the HIV AIDS scourge, as here portrayed in Olivia's account.

Adam spends most of his time talking with the students, the intellectuals. He tells them he has heard that people in neighbouring [African] country were first infected by scientists who injected them with a contaminated vaccine against polio. The vaccine had been made from cultures taken from the kidneys of the green monkey. The vaccine, though presumably a prophylactic against polio had not been purified and carried with it the immune deficiency virus that causes AIDS (p.251).

The above piece of privileged information is one that would have provoked, in proactive minds, a radical approach to the African question, vis-à-vis the Western destructively hegemonic hold on her. But this is not the case. Rather, one reads that:

One dying student disagrees with this. That's not the story I heard, he says. I heard Africans caught AIDS not from the green monkey's kidney but from his teeth. There are helpless derisive snorts at this modern version of the dog-bites-man story. The intellectuals conclude it must have been experiments like the one conducted on black men in Alabama, who were injected with the virus that causes syphilis, then studied as they sickened and died. The kind of experiment that would not have been hazarded on Europeans or white American subjects (p.250).

The above excerpt, regrettably though, clearly echoes the typical argument some Nigerian intellectuals, and the not so intellectual, engage in on the mass media, during public debates, in market places, at squares, in motor parks and in other social and intellectual gatherings, regarding burning issues of economic mismanagement, national insecurity, political and religious motivated mass murders, ritual killings and judicial impudence, while the master-minders of those offences walk freely and impudently away, determined to commit, with impunity, worse offences, in the future. And Olivia, echoing the mind of her creator, concludes the discourse as follows: "That they [the African intellectuals] die holding this belief, that an African life is made for experiments, and is expendable, is almost more than I can bear" (p.251).

Although the above conjectures are from the perceived imaginations of the author, the assumptions call for very deep reflections of the ecological truths of African forest and other natural endowments and the extent of their exploitation by Africans and non-Africans alike.

#### 4. Retributive Consequences

In tracing the "Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis", Lynn White Jr. (1996) presages the retributive consequences of modern science and technological advancements thus:

When the first cannons were fired in the early fourteenth century, they affected ecology by sending workers scampering to the forests and mountains for more potash, sulfur, iron ore, and charcoal, with some resulting erosion and deforestation ... our present combustion of fossil fuels threatens to change the chemistry of the globe's atmosphere as a whole, with consequences which we are only beginning to guess (p.5)

This warning dates back to 1967, when that paper was first published. Half a century down the line, the world battles with more severe consequences of the exploitation of nature's resources, including "oil spills, lead and asbestos poisoning, toxic waste contamination, extinction of species at an unprecedented rate ... a growing hole in the ozone layer ... global warming, acid rain, loss of topsoil, destruction of tropical rain forest ... famines, droughts, floods, hurricanes ..." (Glotfelty 1996). But these are at global and material levels. Undertaking a psychological or mental analysis of these consequences, one only needs to examine Hartford's trauma, and by inference, the traumas of the HIV AIDS patients, in the novel's colony and discover that the apparent retributive consequences of the degradation of the African ecosystem are entirely borne by the Africans themselves.

Nature, consistently a blind judge, visits humanity's modern culture of exploitation with debilitating consequences, proving that "we can't do as we wish without paying a price" (Evernden 1996, p.93). Interestingly, however, in Walker's *Possessing the Secret of Joy*, the retributive consequences of the degradation of the African biotic enclave are borne, not by the Western master-minders of the degradation, but, entirely, by the ignorant Africans, who die in their numbers, without knowing why they are dying. Commenting on the dilemma of the African AIDS victims, Olivia notes that they, "in dumb patience, as they wait for death" p.(250), die without knowing why.

"*Father, hear my confession*" (p.261) begins the grief-stricken voice of the African on his death-bed, rattled, no less by his conscience, than by the AIDS scourge. But, unlike the Western exploiters, with their freedom from blame, their self-righteousness, the African is humbled by pain and agony to a point of submission and acceptance of blame. The African accomplice thus sees the need to confess. That "Hartford – whose African name was perhaps lost forever – medical student and killer of monkeys and chimps, was dead" (p.266), speaks of the finality of the price which the African pays in full. Hartford, like the other youths, dies young, goes through a slow tortuous death from HIV AIDS, and in that religious allusion, he, fully purged of his evil, exits peacefully this sorrowful world with the final words: "*Father, thank you for hearing my confession*" (p.266). Adam partakes

a little of this sorrow, as he witnesses Hartford's remorseful confession and painful death.

As Hartford's voice became barely audible, a whispery rasp, an unbidden glimpse of what he was describing invaded my mind. I closed my eyes tightly to banish the sight ... I felt as if a whole other world of grief and disaster had just been dropped on my soul. I groaned in my agony, almost exactly as he had done ...

As if he'd waited until certain he had transmitted the full horror of his existence to someone who could still feel, Hartford began to breathe the shallow, rustling wheeze everyone on the AIDS floor knew so well ... I sat where I was until an hour after the death rattle began, Hartford – whose African name was perhaps lost forever – medical student and killer of monkeys and chimps, was dead (p.265 – 266).

Like Hartford, the African accomplice, who loses all, Africa is constantly on the losing end. As Olivia points out “It is bitter to watch them die: [Africa's] future doctors, dentists, carpenters, and engineers... fathers and mothers. Teachers. Dancers, singers ...” (p.250). But nowhere in the novel is it suggested that the “pharmaceutical company” loses anything. Hartford loses his dignity, loses his dream of becoming a medical scholar and doctor, loses his African name and finally loses his life; pays the supreme price, for his complicity. And because the West loses nothing, in her exploitation of the African ecosystem, she does not hesitate to do worse.

The pious side of the West, symbolized by the Missionary – Adam and the others – empathize with the victims, but invariably strut away, unhurt, to their now cozy and protected communes of Europe and America, some of the best places in the world, where they satisfy their consciences by ensuring that Adam's African wife, Tashi, gets the best medical treatment and recuperates ‘before her own death’, not from the HIV AIDS scourge though.

The animals die, but their fluids, their blood remains; they stick on the Africans, and afterwards wreak vengeance.

## 5. Conclusion

Western science and technological advancements engenders resolutely establishment of the culture of invading the peripheral world, such as Africa, intent on exploiting her natural resources, but destroying, in the process, the pristine eco-balance of the place and endangering her biotic diversity and sustainability. Employing the characters of the nonchalant pharmaceutical company, Walker apparently questions the anthropocentric audacity of the West towards the dastardly destruction of natural species, in the expectation of a remedy for a single ailment afflicting humanity; an endeavor, which significantly creates imbalance in the natural ecosystem. Similarly, she decries the complicity of Africans in the destructive process; a complicity which she portrays as deserving of the tragic consequences of HIV and AIDS pandemic, as they are borne entirely by Africans. The underlying ecological significance is thus founded in the voluble, yet silent assertion that if the cure of a malady afflicting a species requires the destruction of other species, such a cure should be discarded, and an alternative, ecologically friendly ways be sought. Ingrained, furthermore, in the novel's plot, is this ecological truth: for every ill inflicted on the environment, nature has a way of inflicting commensurate damages in return. Finally, portrayed in the novel is one more modern environmental truth:

“Everywhere some people go they wreck the land ... But this is the land of people who've stayed home. Mountains ... the magnificent Alps, make a wonderful fence ... There were cows and, as we descended closer to the ground, white clover and yellow wild-flowers ... We looked out the window at the chalet houses, the acres of grapes, the family plots of corn. Gardens everywhere” (p.37 – 38).

This reflection on the beautiful view of Switzerland, “the land of people who've stayed home” is easily contrasted with the African ecosystem which constitutes the exploited, devastated, harsh and unwelcoming. Yet, the exploited could become the envy of the world if Africans themselves would challenge every act of exploitation by foreigners among them, as well as other Africans willing to be used as tools for exploitation. Using the basic literary elements of plot, scenes, character and characterisation, Walker has played her part in exposing some of the ecological evils plaguing Africa. But greater awareness remains to be created through class discussion of these issues, as similar exploitation occurs in various other African settings. Nigeria's Niger Delta, with its ecological degradations arising from fossil fuel exploitation is one other issue, which literature has done fairly well to expose. Literature, as an authentic tool for culture dissemination, remains thus, the best tool for us, in arts and humanities, to continue to propagate this consciousness.

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