

Human, Earth and Fauna; Negotiating Man's Bond with Nature in *Son of the Native Soil* by S.A. Ambanasom and *the Buffalo Rider* by Nsahlai Athanasius

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Abstract: The world is suffering from ecological problems like global warming, deforestation, desertification, wildfires, pollution, soil erosion and the extinction of some species of living things. This research scrutinizes the ecological perspectives in Shadrach Ambanasom's *Son of the Native Soil* and Nsahlai Athanasius's *The Buffalo Rider*. It attempts to provide an answer to the question: How do Shadrach Ambanasom and Nsahlai Athanasius project the human – nature dynamics in *Son of the Native Soil* and *The Buffalo Rider* respectively? The corresponding hypothesis is that mankind's relationship with nature is variedly conflicting and friendly for different reasons. Using Second Wave Ecocriticism as propounded by Lawrence Buell as the analytical lens, the paper concludes that the interaction between human beings and nature is two-fold; with instances in which nature is cherished and protected by man; but also, situations in which it is destroyed by humans in a manner that is not sustainable. This shows that Cameroonian writers, in consideration of the country's cultural and ecological specificities, represent different dimensions of man's interactions with nature in their novels; offering their readers both glimpses of the ecological realities of the areas, and prospects on how man should relate with the flora and fauna for the sustainable interest of all parties.

Keywords: Nature, Environment, Cameroon Literature, Destruction, Protection, Vision.

INTRODUCTION

Many regions worldwide are confronting pressing ecological problems - pollution, global warming, deforestation, desertification, and the extinction of species (Danlami 2020). These threats have intensified to such a degree that, unless decisive and urgent action is taken, the conditions that sustain human life on Earth will face imminent peril (ibid). Glotfelty and Fromm (1996) also echoes this by stating that: "We have reached the age of environmental limits, a time when the consequences of human actions are damaging the planet's basic support system. We are there. Either we change our ways or we face global catastrophe, destroying much beauty or exterminating countless fellow species in our headlong race to apocalypse [...] If we are not part of the solution, we're part of the problem" (xx-xxi). Humans must therefore act to alleviate and, where possible, reverse these harms, for everyone has a stake in the outcome. Individuals from diverse backgrounds, including novelists, have offered varied interpretations of the ecological crisis. This study examines how Shadrach A. Ambanasom and Nsahlai Athanasius depict the human-nature relationship in *Son*

of the Native Soil and *The Buffalo Rider*, respectively. It is driven by the central question: how is the relationship between humans and the natural world constructed in these two texts? The titles, invoking the "soil" and the "buffalo," signal ecological contexts that frame each narrative. We hypothesize that human-nature cohabitation in these works operates on multiple levels - harmony, conflict, and reciprocal benefit. The analysis is situated within Second Wave Ecocriticism, a theoretical approach that emerged in the late 1990s and emphasizes contemporary environmental concerns rather than the pastoral idealization characteristic of First Wave Ecocriticism. Buell (2005) defines Second Wave Ecocriticism as: "Critical of scientific metanarrative, open to constructivist approaches to literature, interested in rural and urban natures, and concerned with issues of race, class, gender and environmental justice" (93). This definition is re-echoed by Garrard (2012) who characterizes Second Wave Ecocriticism as: "Linked to social ecological movements and maintains a more sceptical relationship with the natural sciences. It engages with issues of race, gender, class, and environmental justice, and critiques the anthropocentric

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assumptions of earlier ecocritical work” (87). In addition to this, in showing its difference from First Wave Ecocriticism, Nuri (2020) posits that Second Wave Ecocriticism represents: “A shift from the early Anglo-American focus on pastoral life or wilderness in literature to urban or built landscapes and sociocentric issues like environmental justice, eco-imperialism, multi-ethnicity, eco-feminism, bioregionalism, and postcolonial ecocriticism” (259). From these theoretical perspectives, Second Wave Ecocriticism is relevant in this work as the novels concerned are not set in the wilderness, urban dimensions are evoked and the analysis link the ecosystem to other domains like culture, politics, economy and tradition. This paper is divided into two parts which chronologically focus on the conflicting relationship between man and nature; and the harmony between the two.

Part One: The Conflicting Relationship Between Man and Nature

This part examines the manner in which the cohabitation between man and nature is disharmonious; with focus on the various ways in which man harms nature. It begins by exploring how man maltreats the fauna and follows up on how he mistreats the flora in *Son of The Native Soil* by Shadrach A Ambanasom and *The Buffalo Rider* by Nsahlai Athanasius.

1.1. The Ill-Treatment of the Fauna

The relationship between humans and animals in both texts is fraught, shaped by cultural practices, culinary traditions, economic pressures, and inherited customs. In *Son of the Native Soil*, the narrator exposes patterns of animal mistreatment through symbolic objects fashioned from animal parts and hides. At Anyajuh’s death, for example, the account reveals that elements of the dance regalia, most notably the talking drum, are constructed from animal hide, underscoring how everyday ritual objects materialize the fraught human-animal bond. “Among the instruments were the playing drum, the calling drum, gongs, rattles, and horns [...] Some dancers wore skull caps with red feathers dangling from them” (Ambanasom 1999:101). This affirms or concurs that man is killing animals for wool, skin or leather, fur or horns for traditional purposes as indicated by Yasir Arafath (2021). This is the case with the drum used in passing across messages for traditional issues as stated that:

Embuta gripped his crutches and moved hurriedly towards his calling drum. When he got to the shed of the drum, he lowered himself onto the stool in front of the ndek, and then placed his crutches aside. From the drum he quickly fished out two beating sticks with which to delivered mournful message to all of Dudum. The first beat was the signal tone for an obituary which he struck five times before proceeding to the message proper... Kiri-kwim- kiri- kwim- Kiri-kwim- Kiri-kwim- Kiri-kwim (Ambanasom 1999: 193).

The Dudum people use animal body parts in their ritual practices. Horns function as trumpets in traditional dances, and when paired with the tonal qualities of the talking drum - whose membrane is likewise fashioned from animal hide - the resulting musical ensemble completes the indigenous soundscape, producing moments of communal uplift during funeral ceremonies.

Similarly, in *The Buffalo Rider*, humans kill animals such as elephants to repurpose their tusks as megaphones or trumpets for rapid wartime communication, as the text notes: “They sent the message signalling battle on their megaphone made from an elephant tusk and all the men worthy of the name were galvanized for action” (Athanasius 2008: 14). By foregrounding this instrument of communication, Athanasius underscores that the tusk is obtained only after the animal has been slain. Once the tusk is sounded, the warriors assemble at the palace to prepare for combat: “All Mfuh Kov members abandoned whatever it was they were doing and within the twinkle of an eye, all rallied like one man in the Mfuh house at Menguh” (Athanasius 2008:14). Through simile, the author conveys the collective spirit that the sound evokes. Later, in chapter two, the narrator describes Baa Tanle’s cutlass as suspended by a cord woven from animal hide: “Baa Tanle’s cutlass was in a scabbard that hung diagonally across his broad chest from the right shoulder down to the left hip by means of a thick rope woven from stripes of animal hides.” In these instances animals are killed for their hides and tusks, which are then instrumentalized for human ends, with little regard for the ecological significance of those creatures.

The texts depict a fraught relationship between humans and animals, revealed through stylistic devices such as proverbs, similes, metaphors, and idiomatic expressions, particularly at Anyajou’s death: “Many large cooking pots had been borrowed from other families, and lots of animals had been slaughtered. The air in the village was heavy with the appetising smell of roasted meat. Their husbands spent so much in terms of cash, goats, pigs, fowls and gun powder” (Ambanasom 1999:99). Through enumeration, Ambanasom catalogues the species slaughtered for a single communal feast, signaling the scale of animal loss occasioned by human ritual consumption. The plural forms - ‘goats’, ‘pigs’, and ‘fowls’ - underscore their abundance and the casualness of their destruction. Such killings suggest a lack of care for animal life and a readiness to sacrifice nonhuman beings for human ends. Neba’s remark - “I mean that you’re surely after a little bird. Well, have you seen the birds? ‘Is it around? Show it to me and I’ll bring it down with my catapult. Achamba added’ One risks catching the mole by the snout, and it will slip away” (Ambanasom 1999:92-93) - deploys metaphor to reveal how animals are used as pejorative comparisons, exposing a cultural tendency to devalue them. By likening Enchunjei to a “little bird” or a mole that must

be seized where it cannot escape, the speakers reduce living creatures to targets, implying that killing them is trivial. Ambanasom thereby urges readers to reflect on the moral imperative to protect animals regardless of size or perceived worth. When Neba chides Achamba with the rhetorical question “You still prowl around with the sensitive horns of a snail” (Ambanasom 1999:96), the simile again diminishes the snail’s worth and condemns sensitivity as weakness, reinforcing an attitude that disparages vulnerable life. In a parallel gesture, Nsahlai Athanasius dramatizes the strained human–animal relation by portraying a buffalo that loses its way and becomes the object of an intense human hunt, pursued with all the force and military might of the men of Nso. The narrator states:

What shocked people most about this buffalo was that it seemed to have a head of stone. That head defied the ferocious fire of great men like Paa Tangwah, the most experienced hunter in Vekovi village whose weapon was a high precision, deadly, doubled-barreled gun. It was a most dangerous tool that had already been used to kill at least six elephants and dozens of leopards, hyenas and baboons. (Athanasius 2008:17)

Athanasius employs metaphor when he likens the buffalo’s head to a “stone,” signaling its apparent resistance to human force even as hunters remain determined to kill it regardless of its speed or aggression. The men deploy their finest guns and the most renowned hunters of Vekovi, driven by a deep-seated aversion to the animal world and a desire that these creatures “not to live for the protection of human beings.” By describing the weapons as “dangerous tools,” Athanasius underscores both the lethality of the arms used against the buffalo and the broader intensity of human violence directed at wildlife, noting how many animals such implements have already eliminated in the Nsoh community. This enumeration makes clear that, at that historical moment, the animal kingdom in Nsoh was imperiled by human presence and by a concerted effort to occupy and dominate the animals’ habitats.

The fraught relationship between humans and the nonhuman world is further revealed through practices of bribery and corruption, a central theme in *Son of the Native Soil*. *Anti-Bribery and Corruption (2024)* defines corruption as “a dishonest or fraudulent behaviour by those in position of power typically involving bribery. Bribery is defined as offering, giving, or receiving anything of value with the intent of inducing or rewarding someone for acting.” That villagers transport animals to bribe the D.O. exposes how little intrinsic value they ascribe to these creatures: animals are treated not as integral members of an ecosystem but as expendable gifts or commodities. Amnat Phra (2018: 912) captures this anthropocentric stance: “Human-centered ethical concepts hold the key assumption believing that human is the center of value. Human is the only thing that has ethical value. Other natural

environments have no ethical value. The concept of relationship between human and environment is in a mechanical and power of relationship separated from each other decisively.” This perspective underscores the need to recognize nature’s intrinsic worth to strengthen the broader ecosystem. In chapter thirteen of *Son of the Native Soil*, Ubeno accuses Achamba of bribing the D.O. with livestock: “Achamba has bribed the D.O. Who is surrounded with cows, goats and pigs.” Ultimately, Abaago and Chief Umeitoh dispatch people to present similar animals to Achamba for the same purpose, seeking to mitigate punishment for their attack on the Anjong people. Such episodes illustrate the trivialization of animal life, showing that animals may be repurposed at will to serve human ends.

The animals at Chief Akaya’s palace make a morning clamor that signals another day of human imposition upon them. Thus, at dawn the pigs grunt while birds not kept by the chief “warbled in joy” at the new day. “A pig grunting in its sty, while in their pen goats bleated, Cocks crowed repeatedly; dogs barked and birds warbled in joy. In the midst of this, animals chorus could be heard” (Ambanasom 1999:13). Through this enumeration Ambanasom stages a domestic chorus that simultaneously reveals the animals’ discomfort with their constrained lives; the narrator’s choice to describe the birds as “warbled in joy” suggests their relative freedom from human control. Later that morning, when Unyo’s child goes to feed the pig and her basket falls into the sty, Apuya is beaten by her mother for contaminating the unclean pig enclosure, an episode that further exposes the fraught and punitive dynamics of human - animal relations in the household. The narrator states thus:

How did you hold it, you weakling? How did you hold my basket? You can only eat. Come and show me how you held it before the pig seized it from your dead hands. The child was already trembling from the force of her words. But she pulled him roughly by the ear and stood him on the stone to demonstrate: the frighten child, in a stooping position with both arms stretched out re-enacted the scene that cost him tears that early morning. Had he known how much anger was boiling in his mother’s breast, he would not have come to perform that dumb show. For just as he was faithfully re-enacting the role of the generous feeder, the angry mother landed on his back a blow whose force nearly sent him to join the basket in the horrible mess bellow. (Ambanasom 1999: 14)

The morning clamour at Chief Akaya’s palace - pigs grunting, goats bleating, cocks crowing, dogs barking, and birds “warbling in joy” - signals the daily imposition of human control over animal life: “A pig grunting in its sty, while in their pen goats bleated, Cocks crowed repeatedly; dogs barked and birds warbled in joy. In the midst of this, animals chorus could be heard” (Ambanasom 1999:13). Ambanasom’s enumeration

stages a domestic chorus that reveals the animals' constrained existence; the narrator's description of the birds as "warbled in joy" subtly contrasts those free from the chief's custody with the confined livestock. When Unyo's child drops a basket into the pigsty and is subsequently beaten, the episode exposes the household's punitive attitude toward both child and animal and underscores the family's indifference to the pig's squalid conditions. Apuya's cries reverberate through the compound, prompting Akaya to leap from bed in alarm at the thought that a child might have fallen into the filthy enclosure: "Apuya raised a much louder cry which sent other women and children hurrying to the spot [...] The wailing of the boy reached Ebito's hut; Akaya jumped out of bed with a start and rushed out. The first thought that came to his mind was that someone might have fallen into the Fence" (Ambanasom 1999:14). His fear confirms how hazardous and neglected the sty is, yet the family's complacency persists. In a related register, Embuta and Asoja deride the Akan people's eagerness for war by likening it to an antelope hunt, thereby trivializing animal life and exposing a broader cultural disregard: "He laughs to hear them talk excitedly as if they are preparing for an antelope hunt. They had better Know with what they are flirting. They should come and see war here on my leg...this is what they are after Embuta concluded, still looking at his leg" (Ambanasom 1999:19). For Embuta, the antelope's vulnerability renders its killing insignificant, a comparison that further reveals how animals are devalued in the face of human conflict.

The Anjong community's practice of imposing livestock fines on offenders reveals a cultural hierarchy that places instrumental value above intrinsic worth in nonhuman life. For example, in Chief Akaya's palace three men are required to make restitution in animals: "The three men were taken to Akaya's palace where each was fined two goats, a cock and a jug of raffia wine" (Ambanasom 1999:88). Treating goats and fowls as currency for social transgression underscores how domestic creatures are primarily understood as resources or tools for human ends rather than as beings deserving moral consideration in their own right.

Human beings have long subjected members of the animal kingdom to mistreatment for a variety of motives, and contemporary society remains replete with accounts of such cruelty. Despite legal frameworks and welfare measures intended to protect animals, abusive practices persist across many contexts. Because animals and other nonhuman organisms are indispensable components of ecosystems that sustain and shape human life, their persecution for reasons such as entertainment, ritual practice, subsistence, land protection, urban expansion, and agricultural production is particularly troubling (Yasir Arafath 2021). Frequently, humans attack wildlife either in the name of self-defence or to secure arable land, a dynamic vividly dramatized in *The Buffalo Rider*. In chapter one the aged buffalo returns to

her ancestral route—the old animal track or the animal highway—only to discover that urbanization and farming have already encroached upon the corridor. The novel's opening evokes the biodiversity of Nso before human settlement and stages the ensuing struggle between people and animals as a consequence of habitat loss. The narrator juxtaposes the precolonial richness of the land with the invasive presence of mankind, reminding readers that human survival is bound to ecological interdependence and that the loss of any ecological component, including fauna, produces irreversible effects. Transforming animal highways into homes and farms exemplifies how human expansion displaces and endangers wildlife, often motivated by fear for crops and offspring rather than by any regard for the animals' intrinsic value. In this dimension, the narrator indicates that:

It was at this point in time that, ignorance of the changes that had taken place along the animal pathway, the buffalo entered Vekovi. No one had taken the pains to inform the old buffalo that man had encroached upon the usual path the old animal track. And the buffalo could never have imagined that man had transformed the animal highway into farms and human homes and would not tolerate any trespass. (Athanasius 2008:10)

By calling the animal track a "highway," Athanasius deliberately asserts the animals' prior claim to that route. Framed this way, it should not strike humans as natural or acceptable to appropriate a space that belongs to another species—one that is neither inferior nor fundamentally different from them. In the passage, human settlement and agricultural expansion have usurped the animal highway, and the settlers refuse to tolerate any animal trespass on what they now regard as their territory. It is therefore tragic that an old buffalo can no longer move or rest in peace on the land of her birth. One of the central abuses the novel exposes is precisely this invasion of animal corridors by humans, a violation that later escalates into an outright campaign against the buffalo: "In the thick of the cries and palpable confusion, mfuh kov or the men's blew the trumpet of war. They sent the message signaling battle on their megaphone made from an elephant tusk and all the men worthy of the name were galvanized for action" (Athanasius 2008:14). The episode thus reveals a stark anthropocentrism in which animals are met with organized, violent hostility.

In *Son of the Native Soil*, Ambanasom presents the hunting session of a squirrel that will help bring back peace in the Dudum land after the Akan people brutalized the Anjong women farming on the Ukob land. The main concern is on the great hunters of the land as Ambanasom calls them. They are the leaders of this activity because they have been hunting for long and with their hunting tactics, they are willing to hunt down the squirrels by all means; explaining why they are there with hunting dogs as the author says:

On the chosen day for the squirrel hunt, the two teams of hunters from Anjong and Akan were already at Iteubugi, a flora rich in its fauna, with particular reference to the squirrel and other smaller animals of the rodent family. Dim-Dim-Dim-Dim-Dim-Dim-Dim-Dim-Dim-Dim-Dim... The Dudum Falls were drumming away in the background as the men set the net in which the squirrel would be caught. Four men stood as guards behind the net while the others encircled the bush facing it. Dogs were set on animals' tracks. Though most squirrels in the area were tree-squirrels, occasionally one found squirrels that had come right down to the ground. (Ambanasom 1999:)

Here, the people are all surrounded with the aspects of the flora that permit them to have what the human mindset has been yearning for. It has been peace all along for the Anjong people while some elements in Akan have been promising their people victory when the fair judge the squirell will surely passed its judgment. Using the verb to hunt, Ambanasom is already passing a serious message to the audience about the oriented mind-sets of the Dudum people about hunting activities that always take away the lives of the helpless animals as he indicates thus:

The hunters blew their bugles, and others beat the bush. Clubs and stones were hurled at the tops of trees, and small tree branches with countless leaves were ripped off and sent flying to the ground. One of the stones landed on a squirrel's hoard of nuts and scattered them all over the place, but there was no squirrel in sight. The hunters clapped and yelled. The dogs, bedecked with bells fastened around their necks with a leather band, barked. But no squirrel appeared. The hunters untied the net and changed site. (Ambanasom 1999:42)

The community's relationship to the landscape is mediated through the flora that supplies what human desire demands. For the Anjong people life has been relatively peaceful, while factions within Akan promise triumph when, as they put it, the fair judge the squirrel's fate. By employing the verb "to hunt", Ambanasom signals the Dudum people's entrenched orientation toward hunting—an activity that routinely extinguishes the lives of vulnerable animals and normalizes violence against them. Through vivid description Ambanasom documents the ecological damage wrought by these hunting practices: hunters hurl stones that shatter treetops, tear away small branches, and send countless leaves fluttering to the ground; the same missiles demolish squirrel habitats, scattering nests across the forest and depriving the animals of places from which to launch again. Hunting dogs are set on the animal tracks to pursue prey beyond the reach of human strength, revealing a determination to achieve the hunters' ends regardless of cost. This behavior indicates that Dudum culture regards hunting as legitimate and unproblematic, without regard for its consequences for wildlife. The celebratory gunshots that follow the capture of a live

squirrel - two shots fired into the air - underscore the hunters' exhilaration at subduing another life. When Chief Akaya later promises Achamba a partridge for his wife's soup, "There's a little bush fowl here for your wife to prepare your soup with" (Ambanasom 1999:176), the exchange confirms that such birds are procured through hunting expeditions, whether by trap or catapult, and that these practices pose a clear threat to the animal kingdom.

The hunting activities in *The Buffalo Rider* are enormous as Athanasius through the various styles and themes shows mankind's anthropocentric nature. In chapter five, the running Buffalo on the animal highway cut up with a man whom Athanasius qualifies his screaming as that of a pig killed in a slaughtering house. This said man sees the Buffalo being chased by fellow men and is afraid after his drunkenness and he falls down and begins to shout and screamed like a big on a slaughter slab. Using simile, Athanasius compares the shouting of this man to that of the big on a slab to show the ill-treatment given to animals by humankind. Men are in constant search of pigs for the flesh and its fat as they belief they help in the body development. Comparing the screaming of this man to that of a big shows the pains pigs goes through when they are being killed by these said butchers. The narrator states thus:

Before the buffalo arrived at Kifom village, Baban had tanked enough palm wine and was feeling high and tipsy. His spirit was in fact on high gear and that is why he heaved insults and curses on all and sundry from a lone palm wine drinking spot close to the animal highway where he had spent a lonely afternoon. When shouts and cries of horror reached him, Baban rose to his trembling feet and staggered out of his drinking spot throwing more insults on everyone and everything around him as he moved to the cow track where he pulled down his trousers and directed his "private part" to pass water on the animal highway. When all of a sudden, he caught sight of a ferocious buffalo rushing towards him, he tried to run but got entangled in his ragged trousers and fell flat on his back, shouted and screamed like a pig on a slaughter slab. The buffalo gored and booted him before flying past. He kept on wriggling, screaming and sobbing as he had never done before (Athanasius 2008:36).

Baban's scream is likened to that of a pig on a slaughter slab, a comparison that exposes the intensity of animal suffering inflicted by humans even when killing serves personal interests. Human beings hunt and slaughter pigs driven by anthropocentric motives, and the animal kingdom endures violence born of these appetites. A parallel episode occurs when the MATAKI (Mantum, Tan, and Kifom villages) unleash a sustained assault on a hyena believed to embody the spirit of Pa Lungai: the villagers excavate a pit nearly ten metres deep and use a goat—whose life they regard as expendable—as bait to lure the predator. As the narrator observes, "The bleating and struggling goat attracted the

hungry and angry hyena, which had virtually gone on for days without food” (Athanasius 2008:51). Thereafter, “Bullets, spears, stones, and other weapons of death rained on the beast that lay still after a long shooting and pounding exercise. MATAKI had killed the hyena! Brovo!!” (Athanasius 2008:51). Through enumeration, Athanasius conveys the community’s desperate determination to exterminate the animal; the celebratory “Bravo!!” that follows the killing suggests communal approval of the hyena’s destruction. The hyena is then paraded as a trophy: “Dead, the hyena was pulled out of the pit at dawn by dozens of hefty men and displayed for all to behold.” Attributing the creature to the ghost of Pa Lungai both explains and intensifies the rationale for its elimination, revealing how cultural beliefs and collective violence converge to justify lethal action against wildlife. In this light, the narrator indicates that:

News about the killing of the hyena spread fast and wide but doubts were raised as to the assertion that the hyena was Mahlum Lungai himself in one of his gruesome missions on earth. Mahlum Lungai was a strong “medicine man” and a traditional doctor. He had no river in Nso when it came to magic and night power [...] It was even alleged that the host of bats and owls that usually filled the village skies at night skies were a ll Lungai’s spirits. (Athanasius 2008:P 52).

Considering Pa Lungai’s notorious reputation, everyone lived in fear of him, and that dread extended to the hyena and the free birds that inhabited the skies at that time. The MATAKI people kill the hyena because of deeply held superstitions and the belief that Lungai’s spirit persists long after his death. By identifying the hyena and certain birds with the spirit of Pa Lungai, the community marks these animals as objects of dread and as beings that should not coexist with humans. This metaphorical conflation of animal and ghost exposes a broader human disregard for nonhuman life and reflects an unfounded conviction of human superiority rooted in anthropocentrism. Crucially, the hyena’s extermination also reveals a refusal to recognize animals’ legitimate claim to space and peace: humans will not tolerate the presence of other species within what they consider their domain, and so they eliminate any perceived threat to their exclusive control.

1.2. Destruction of the Flora

Conflict between human groups exposes and intensifies their destructive attitude toward plant life. When Akan youths mount a surprise attack on the Anjong, Ambanasom depicts their advance as an ecological onslaught: “The raiders came like a swarm of locusts, destroying everything in their way, slashing down plantain stems, and butchering animals that they found” (Ambanasom 1999:62). The simile of locusts conveys not only the speed and violence of the raid but also its indiscriminate devastation of both flora and fauna; as the raiders pursue their human enemy, the landscape itself becomes collateral damage.

Ambanasom further exposes this instrumental view of vegetation through concrete description of domestic architecture and proverbs that reduce plants to mere resources. The narrator’s account of Embuta’s dwelling - “It was constructed out of sticks, bamboos and mud, and upon a circular mud-foundation, with a thatched roof” (Ambanasom 1999:34)—registers how building practices routinely consume living matter. The Dudum proverb - “A Dudum proverb says fast blazing wood soon burn itself out, but the slow smoldering log retains its fire much longer” (Ambanasom 1999:22) - metaphorically aligns human temperament with combustible timber, implying a cultural readiness to expend natural resources for immediate ends rather than steward them for longevity.

The ritualized destruction that accompanies Anyajuh’s funeral dramatizes this destructive appetite: “They took careful aim at plantain stems, and some really succeeded in bringing down bunches or leaves of plantains to the admiration of onlookers.” (Ambanasom 1999:101). The audience’s applause at the felling of plantain leaves reveals a communal pleasure in acts that denude and disable living plants. Across these scenes Ambanasom shows that human conflict and cultural practice frequently translate into the systematic degradation of vegetation, a pattern that undermines ecological resilience and betrays a profound disregard for the vegetal life that sustains human communities.

Athanasius, in *The Buffalo Rider*, illuminates the ecological cost of cultivation by depicting the felling of trees to make way for crops. While most farmers work the poorer, upper slopes of Bam, Pa Kintang ventures deeper into the interior to clear richer land for his own fields; in doing so he cuts down trees and other vegetation to secure a more profitable yield. “Most of the famers had cultivated the upper the upper and less fertile parts of Bam while Pa Kintang and his family had had a bountiful harvest” (Athanasius 2008:79). In pursuing his aims, this farmer-hunter devastates both flora and fauna: he sets lethal traps for wildlife and removes arboreal cover to favour his crops. Moreover, before the community kills the hyena believed to embody Pa Lungai’s spirit, they construct a deceptive pit covered with bamboo and other bush plants, fashioning a hut of bamboo and grass to lure the animal into a trap. The narrator states thus:

The trap that caught the hyena was a pit large and deep enough to swallow it up. Some people estimated that the depth of this pit was ten metres. Over the pit covered with bamboo and roofed with grass was a hut like structure built with bamboo and roofed with grass to look like a real hut. That hut had one wide door and at the extreme end directly opposite this door a healthy goat was tethered. The bleating and struggling goat attracted the hungry and angry hyena which had virtually gone on for days without food. (Athanasius 2008: 51)

Through vivid description, Athanasius exposes the destructive impulse of humans toward vegetation, showing how they ravage the landscape to satisfy narrow, self-interested ends. The felling of bamboo and the stripping of grass signal a broader failure of environmental stewardship: these actions reveal an absence of deliberate effort to nurture or sustain plant life. Placing a goat at the mouth of the pit further underscores this disregard; the animal is instrumentalized as bait because its life is deemed expendable, a demonstration of human presumptions of superiority over the nonhuman world. Ecological consequences follow: as Hamid et al. (2010) note, burning bushes endangers ecosystem health by increasing atmospheric carbon dioxide and contributing to acid rain.

In *The Buffalo Rider*, Pa Kintang and his family labour intensively and, when the rains arrive, their second planting in Bam yields abundant crops; to protect this success Pa Kintang keeps constant watch, burning wood each day to sustain his vigil. “From a distance, colons of thick smoke could be seen rising from the hut and hovering over the farm from day to day. His guard over the farm was so efficient that not even a grain corn was known to have been lost to swarms or birds and troupes of apes that combed the land and watched the farm with hungry eyes from a distance.” (Athanasius 2008:80) The hyperbolic image of columns of smoke makes plain that the wood is consumed for human ends, yet the resulting pollution inconveniences the entire ecosystem, humans included. Similarly, when Baa Tanle returns with the buffalo carcass and is lauded by the Fon as the greatest hunter in Nso, his elevation spurs other young men to seek the same renown; unable to reach some quarry, they resort to setting fires to flush out animals, thereby multiplying the harm to flora and fauna as highlighted thus:

The result was staggering as the beasts of the land were killed in their numbers every blessed day. That hunting season, bush fires were rampant and no blade of grass or leaf survived the conflagration. Colonies of bees and beetles and ants perished, leaving Mbar bare and ugly. Animals fled from one hill to another in search of hiding places. In their flight many met their death from well-armed hunters. (Athanasius 2008:132)

Athanasius, through vivid hyperbole, renders the devastation that bushfires inflict on vegetation, describing scenes in which not a single blade of grass remains—an image that underscores humanity’s abusive relationship with the plant world. Jamala et al., citing Stern (1976), note that bush burning emits major air pollutants—carbon monoxide, oxides of nitrogen, oxides of sulphur, particulates, and hydrocarbons—products of incomplete combustion of cellulose materials; these emissions imperil ecosystem health and human well-being alike. Oxides of sulphur and nitrogen are particularly hazardous, provoking respiratory disorders

marked by excessive bronchial mucus, as Jamala et al. (2012) observe. The practice of burning thus signals a profound indifference to the animals that shelter in these bushes and to the plants themselves, confirming that many human actions prioritize short-term gain—such as the social prestige conferred by a successful hunt—over the integrity of the natural world.

Athanasius further dramatizes this dynamic in *The Buffalo Rider*: after Pa Kintang’s second planting in Bam yields a rich harvest, he maintains a constant watch over his crops, burning wood daily to sustain his vigil. “From a distance, colons of thick smoke could be seen rising from the hut and hovering over the farm from day to day. His guard over the farm was so efficient that not even a grain corn was known to have been lost to swarms or birds and troupes of apes that combed the land and watched the farm with hungry eyes from a distance.” (Athanasius 2008:80) The hyperbolic image of columns of smoke makes clear that wood is consumed for human ends even as the resulting pollution degrades the wider ecosystem. Likewise, when Baa Tanle returns with the buffalo carcass and is exalted by the Fon as the greatest hunter in Nso, his elevation incites other young men to emulate him; unable to reach some quarry, they resort to setting fires to flush out animals, thereby multiplying harm to both flora and fauna. From these episodes emerges a pattern: cultural rewards for hunting and short-term agricultural gains drive practices - clearing, trapping, burning - that erode ecological balance.

Part Two: The Harmony Between Man and Nature

The two texts offer multiple moments in which human beings and the natural world coexist harmoniously, with people deliberately undertaking practices that protect and nurture the environment. This observation aligns with Danlami’s warning that “The environment in which man lives is degrading at a rapid speed and many stakeholders have put in efforts to try to prevent or reduce this environmental degradation because the ecosystem’s continuous existence is also vital for man’s survival on earth. Human action is directly responsible for this situation and he has to become more environmentally responsible or face his own doom with the destruction of the ecosystem” (Danlami 2020: 1). Read together, the narratives show not only the fragility of ecological balance but also the capacity of human communities to act as stewards rather than merely exploiters of fauna and flora. The following section therefore examines specific instances from both works in which people live in genuine harmony with animals and plants, highlighting practices that sustain biodiversity and reinforce the mutual dependence of human and nonhuman life.

2.1. Mankind’s Protection of Animals

The texts present multiple moments in which humans actively protect and nurture the natural world, demonstrating deliberate practices that sustain both flora and fauna. Ambanasom, in particular, depicts a traditional ethos of care for animals, a stance evident

from the opening scene in Chief Akaya's compound. The narrator enumerates the domestic creatures that populate the yard - goats, pigs, fowls, dogs, and birds greeting the new day - and thereby signals the chief's custodial role. As the narrator observes, "A pig was grunting in its sty, while in their pen, goats bleated, cocks crowed repeatedly; dogs barked, and birds warbled in joy. In the midst of this animal chorus could be heard voices of early risers, especially raffia-wine tappers" (Ambanasom 1999:1). This catalogue of sounds and species conveys not only abundance but also the attentive provisioning that makes such life possible: Chief Akaya ensures these animals are fed and sheltered, and their morning clamour registers their relative freedom within his compound.

The material arrangements of the compound - pigsties, goat huts, and a reserved section for fowls - further index a deliberate ethic of care. "At a good distance from the houses were a pigsty and a hut in which goats were kept. A section of the pen was also reserved for fowls" (Ambanasom 1999:23). These structures are not merely utilitarian; they symbolize a reciprocal relationship in which humans acknowledge animal needs and provide for them. The anecdote of the child whose basket is seized by a pig - "What has the pig done? ... 'It has seized the basket' ... 'The pig has taken away the food together with the basket'" (Ambanasom 1999:1)—while comic, also underscores the household's constant attention to animal feeding and welfare.

The concern for animal welfare in the text extends beyond Chief Akaya's household to the communal sphere. When Chief Umeitoh convenes a meeting after the Akan youths seize the Anjong hoes, Abaago reminds the assembly that many have abandoned personal tasks to attend because they bear responsibilities - animals to tend, raffia palms to tap, fowls to feed: "Mbe and the elders gathered here, there is no one who does not know why we are here now. Most of us have abandoned our personal tasks and businesses to come here. Many of us have our animals to cater for, raffia palms to tap and fowls to feed" (Ambanasom 1999:16). This enumeration underscores how integral animal husbandry is to everyday life and communal decision-making; livestock are not peripheral concerns but central obligations that shape priorities and actions.

Ambanasom also reveals a classificatory attitude toward nonhuman life, distinguishing "animals" from "fowls" in a way that reflects pragmatic judgments about care and management. The narrative notes that Ekunidy possessed "a herd of goats and three fattened pigs all ready, excluding fowls" (Ambanasom 1999:79), a detail that both valorizes livestock as economic and social assets and confirms the sustained investment required to rear them. Such particulars indicate that animals are valued not only for subsistence but also as markers of status and responsibility within the community.

Overall, these scenes portray a social world in which humans and animals coexist through routines of feeding, sheltering, and mutual dependence. While the texts record episodes of exploitation, they equally preserve a strong tradition of stewardship: households and communities organize their labour and deliberations around the care of animals, thereby maintaining intimate ties between human life and the faunal community.

Conflict is a central theme in *Son of the Native Soil*, manifesting as character-versus-character, character-versus-society, and character-versus-land tensions. The novel opens with Chief Akaya's reflections on the land dispute between Akan and Anjong, a contest over Ukob's fertile soil that foregrounds the communities' concern for natural resources. As Ayayi Adeyinka Theresa and Buhari Lateef Oluwafemi observe, traditional African methods of conflict resolution - mediation, adjudication, reconciliation, arbitration, and negotiation - aim principally to preserve harmony and remove root causes of dispute (2014:149). This principle is evident in the novel's portrayal of local institutions: the Council of Elders, attached to the palace and replicated in each village, convenes to deliberate and reach decisions grounded in collective wisdom, with the chief pronouncing the verdict after hearing all voices.

Chief Akaya's counsel following the seizure of the hoes exemplifies this ethos: "Some of you will term this cowardice or weakness. But it is not so. It takes courage to arrive at such a decision" (Ambanasom 1999:21). By framing restraint and dialogue as courageous, the chief privileges reconciliation over retaliation—"For, it is easier to start a war than to end it" (ibid)—and thereby seeks to sustain harmony between villages. When disputes exceed the Council's remit, the community resorts to extra-judicial, ritualized mechanisms: supernatural judges and ordeals are invoked to expose truth and secure impartial outcomes. The novel's use of the squirrel as an arbiter - "Squirrel, you are the last word when all else fails. You, the impartial judge that has passed judgement over countless cases since the days of Ngiekum. Squirrel, come to the help of Anjong..." (Ambanasom 1999:43) - illustrates a culturally embedded trust in neutral, nonhuman adjudicators whose decisions command acceptance and thus restore social equilibrium.

Athanasius in *The Buffalo Rider* likewise valorizes the faunal world, depicting a reciprocal and respectful relationship between humans and animals even as people make use of nature's resources. In chapter three the narrator details Baa Tanle's exceptional skill in taming and training animals, a portrait that signals mutuality rather than mere domination. As the text records, Baa Tanle "had spent the early part of his life taming and riding horses. He had grown up among the Fulanis and Mbororos and had had the singular privilege of acquiring sufficient knowledge and rare skills in taming and riding horses. Nevertheless, Baa Tanle did

not limit his taming and training of animals to horses. Cows and hunting dogs, he equally trained. He instilled into dogs special techniques of hunting different species of wildlife that flourished within and beyond Mbar” (Athanasius 2008:28). This enumeration of skills constructs an image of intimacy and competence: Baa Tanle’s close work with animals implies care, respect, and an ethic of stewardship.

The narrator amplifies this bond through hyperbolic and metaphorical language. Baa Tanle’s feat of riding two horses simultaneously - “To further demonstrate his supper skill in horse riding, Ba Tanle rode two horses at once, skipping from one horses back to the other interchangeably, as they ran at top speed” (Athanasius 2008:28) - serves as an exaggerated emblem of his mastery and attachment to these creatures. Likewise, likening his courage to that of a lion - “He was indeed as sensitive as a hound. He was an adult with a big heart and the courage of a lion.” (Athanasius 2008:20) - both celebrates a revered animal and signals the narrator’s admiration for the natural world. Such figurative language positions animals as worthy partners whose qualities are worthy of human emulation.

The Fulani herdsmen further exemplify a protective human–animal relationship. When Baa Tanle rides among flocks of sheep and cattle near a Fulani homestead, the text shows how the Fulanis provide food, shelter, and vigilant defence for their stock. Domestic animals—sheep and cows—require protection from predators such as lions and leopards, and the herdsmen’s readiness to respond to “daring footsteps or strange sounds” underscores a duty of care. Across these scenes Athanasius presents a social ecology in which training, tending, and guarding animals are expressions of respect and interdependence rather than mere exploitation. The narrator states as follows:

In flew on and suddenly broke into large flocks of sheep and cattle herds gathered near a Fulani family settlement consisting of a few grass huts. There was general stampede in all directions. The cows and bulls lost any form of control they might have ever had on their nerves and let go streams of urine from trembling and loose bladders. Cows mowed. Bulls bellowed. Sheep bleated. The Fulani herdsmen commonly known as *ganagos*, the brave keepers of those terror-stricken creatures, screamed and rushed out of their huts with their bows and poisoned arrows to neutralize the source of the danger. (Athanasius 2008:40)

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The narrator reinforces this bond through figurative language and striking images. Baa Tanle’s feat of riding two horses simultaneously - “To further demonstrate his supper skill in horse riding, Ba Tanle rode two horses at once, skipping from one horses back to the other interchangeably, as they ran at top speed” (Athanasius 2008:28) - functions as an amplified emblem of mastery and attachment to these creatures. Likewise, likening his courage to that of a lion - “He was indeed as sensitive as a hound. He was an adult with a big heart and the courage of a lion.” (Athanasius 2008:20) - both celebrates a revered animal and signals the narrator’s admiration for the natural world. Such figurative moves position animals as worthy partners whose qualities merit human emulation.

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2.2. Human’s Protection of the Flora

Athanasius repeatedly foregrounds human empathy for nonhuman life, using personification, pathos, and narrative detail to show how closely people identify with the animals around them. Through personification the narrator conveys the animals’ terror - so intense that their trembling causes involuntary urination - thereby implying that the herdsmen are the sole source of security for these creatures; describing the herdsmen as “brave” signals their readiness to do whatever is necessary to defend domestic stock. The fact that hunters poison arrows to repel threats further indicates a willingness to eliminate perceived enemies in order to secure the animals’ freedom, and thus the Fulani herdsmen are represented as valorizing and protecting their charges at considerable cost.

Athanasius also deploys mysticism to complicate human–animal bonds. Although Pa Lungai is

portrayed as wicked, he nonetheless keeps goats and sheep in his compound, which suggests an attachment to these animals. The text explains that “Before losing grip of thunder and lightning, he learnt a better lesson. Thunder and lightning that was sent to innocent people repeatedly returned to deal deadly blows on Lungai. On two such occasions, his goats and sheep were killed and his house was reduced to ashes. It was alleged that if he had dared to send it a third time his life would have been the price to pay” (Athanasius 2008:52). Faced with such reprisals, Lungai refrains from invoking destructive forces again, not least because their return would threaten the very animals he cherishes; the mention of his goats and sheep thus symbolizes the value he places on them and his desire to preserve a less hostile relation with nature.

Compassion also animates individual characters. When a buffalo’s hoof fatally strikes a tortoise, the narrator records the scene with vivid sympathy: “As the buffalo galloped down one of the steeps over-looking Bamoun villages, one of its hooves gave a most unfortunate tortoise that had been in its path a hard and deadly kick that sent the poor wise thing rolling down a deep valley like a rock” (Athanasius 2008:70). Pa Tanle’s reaction - “It was as if live coals were thrown all over his body.” - registers an immediate, visceral pity; he recognizes the tortoise’s calm, harmless life - “The tortoise had been quietly and peacefully feasting on young mushrooms... sheltering itself from the hot sun under a big mushroom that had spread out its cap like an umbrella” - and the injustice of its death. This pathos reveals a cultural prohibition against killing tortoises and a moral sensibility that identifies with the vulnerable.

A similar transformation occurs in Pa Kintang’s encounter with a wounded chimpanzee. After a hunting party wounds an old ape, the animal’s suffering - “It was rising and falling and groaning and screaming in pain as it rolled down the valley, leaving a long trail of blood behind it.” - provokes Pa Kintang’s compassion. Drawing closer, he sees the chimpanzee “lift its eyes full of tears and looked at him but never budged even as he prepared to shoot again. Fear took of him and instinctively he lifted his gun to fire but his heart sank and he stopped the act” (Athanasius 2008:83). The encounter so unsettles him that he abandons the hunt and returns to the village in silence, reflecting that if apes truly resemble humans, then killing them would be tantamount to cannibalism: “And if this awful idea were to be true then our people would never have hunted, killed and eaten apes from time immemorial, because we are not cannibals. Yes, only cannibals will kill and eat their own kind” (Athanasius 2008:85). Pa Kintang’s changes of heart - his refusal to shoot and his subsequent moral reflection - signals a nascent ethic of respect and restraint toward animals, and it suggests that intimate encounters with suffering can prompt humans to

reconsider practices of violence and to seek a more humane coexistence with the nonhuman world.

Ambanasom further elevates the status of the vegetal world by showing how plants are integral to social communication. The talking drum - crafted from tree trunk and animal skin - embodies this fusion of natural materials and human purpose; as the narrator describes Chief Akaya’s compound, “**The talking drum was a gigantic iroko trunk that had been skillfully fashioned by a great carver**” (Ambanasom 1999:23). The drum, born of wood and hide, functions as a technology of connection: its rhythms summon gatherings, transmit urgent news, and bind dispersed people into a single civic body. In *Son of the Native Soil* the drum’s summons convenes the community for the announcement of the squirrel’s judgment, for meetings at the fon’s palace, and, most poignantly, to receive word of Achamba’s death—news that, though delivered in the dead of night, spreads instantly because the drum carries it.

These scenes show that both novels portray human beings who undertake concrete practices to protect and sustain flora and fauna. Some of these actions are motivated by immediate human interests - security, subsistence, prestige - while others appear to be performed for the sake of the natural world itself. Ambanasom and Athanasius thus offer a complex vision of human-nature relations in which exploitation and stewardship coexist, and where cultural forms - proverbs, drums, ritual - mediate a continuing responsibility toward the living environment.

CONCLUSION

The Cameroonian Anglophone novels *Son of the Native Soil* by Shadrach Ambanasom and *The Buffalo Rider* by Nsahlai Athanasius resonate with pronounced ecological concerns. This study foregrounds how both authors deploy a rich repertoire of stylistic strategies such as metaphor, symbol, simile, rhetorical question, flashback, contrast, and proverb, alongside carefully chosen adjectives and phrasings to render human relations with the natural world. The environment is examined here through three interrelated dimensions: the abuse of fauna, the killing of animals, and the destruction of vegetation through tree-felling and bush burning. Although these practices are often motivated by nutritional, agricultural, traditional, cultural, political, and economic imperatives tied to human survival, the central issue that emerges is the sustainability of both human communities and the ecosystems on which they depend. Accordingly, the paper also documents practices that protect and renew the living world - tree planting, crop nursing, environmental cleaning, safeguarding ancestral trees, and tending domestic animals - showing how human agency can foster regeneration. By presenting a balanced account that attends to both conflictual and harmonious modes of human-nature interaction, the study demonstrates that Ambanasom and

Athanasius, attentive to Cameroon's cultural and ecological particularities, portray multiple facets of this relationship: they offer readers vivid glimpses of local ecological realities and suggest ways in which humans might relate to flora and fauna for mutual, long-term benefit. Finally, the paper contributes to debates on literature's role in environmental discourse by arguing that literary environmentalism must be contextualized: because each setting is distinctive and literary texts encode specific cultural, historical, political, economic, and ecological features, scholars and practitioners should draw on regional ecological literatures to deepen understanding of - and improve behaviour toward - local ecosystems.

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