

A Study of Selected Epidemiological Poems about the Interactions of Human Nature in the New Normal World

Atheer Makki Abd Ali Al-Jasim

Atheermakki@hilla-unc.edu.iq

Al-Hillah University College, English Language Department, Babylon, Iraq

Haneen Kamil Shakeer

Al-Mustaqbal University College

Haneen.shakeer@student.uobabylon.edu.iq

Ahmed Kareem Mohsin Aljarelah

Ahmed.alyoosif@gmail.com

Al-Hillah University College, English Language Department, Babylon, Iraq

Abstract: Emerging patterns of behavior and relationships are now the norm in society due to the global spread of the Corona Virus sickness in the 21st century, which shocked people's sensitivities. The human-nature relationship is one area where interactions have changed. There have been reams written about the environmental impact of human activities, with some researchers attributing environmental problems to patriarchal societal conditioning and calling for the end of all dualisms (but especially the dualism between humans and the rest of nature). However, few accurately portray how people feel about the natural world in the post-industrial era. This paper uses eco-critical theory to analyze a selection of pandemic poems in the context of new forms of ecological engagement. The research finds that the chosen poets have portrayed the new normal as a panacea to the enduring environmental difficulties that have eluded many solutions over the last decades. It suggests exploring environmentally friendly adaptation discourse in the new everyday world. It is crucial for spreading awareness about the need for environmental sustainability and encouraging research into the relationship between content and form in eco-critical discourse.

Keywords:

Introduction

The term "new normal" is shorthand for coming to terms with out-of-the-ordinary events and making the required adaptations for living with them. The 2019 Corona Virus Disease, also known as COVID-19, first appeared in 2020 and has since spread rapidly over the globe. Since experts believe it can be spread by personal contact, affected nations worldwide have taken drastic measures to contain the disease, including partial and entire lockdowns. One year after the first cases of the COVID-19 pandemic were reported, many people found themselves adjusting to a "new normal" that included working from home and home-schooling their children, as well as lockdowns, quarantines, and the requirement to wear protective masks and shields in public (Jeff Corpuz, 2021). Over time, the economic effects of these tactics to discourage participation in the workforce, public life, and interpersonal interactions became counterproductive. As it became clear that the virus would not be eradicated as rapidly as it had emerged, many countries gradually began to ease the lockdown restrictions and enable business interactions under regulated terms. Many academics and social scientists have coined the phrase "the new normal" to describe how people's lives have shifted in response to the virus. Scholars have portrayed some of the environmental, social, emotional, and psychological effects of this evolving social code through literature.

Scholars have coined the term "social commitment function" to describe how the literature of any given culture responds to that culture's dominant social, political, or economic norms. Writers "frequently showed concerns for the convolutions that beset their civilizations," as Chinyere Nwahunanya puts it, and "writing has always mirrored society in every period and clime" (125). To a similar extent, Onyemaechi Udumukwu argues that "the commitment function in literature provides specific knowledge effects that assist man in reconstructing nature, understanding himself, and his situation" (16). So, naturally, there have been a lot of literary responses to the Corona Virus Pandemic. Many researchers have tried to pin down the problems that have persisted beyond the pandemic's height. The new normal and its potential effects on people and the

natural world are a significant concern. All aspects of human existence, both bodily and emotional, are intrinsically tied to our place in the natural world (Pabitra Baral, 2020). As a result, if humans change their ways of doing things, nature will unavoidably change how it interacts with humans. Regarding the bond between humans and the natural world, improvements in both directions will be welcomed. This research focuses on the various attempts by academics to portray the character of changes to the human nature relationship encountered in the new everyday world.

Theoretical and Conceptual Reviews

Ecocriticism is a cross-disciplinary theoretical framework emphasizing awareness-raising and calling attention to human activities that undermine and threaten environmental life-support systems to foster environmental sustainability. It is a wide-ranging trend that connects people in literary and environmental communities. Lawrence Buell, Cheryll Glotfelty, Simon C. Estok, Harold Fromm, William Howarth, William Rueckert, Michael P. Branch, and Glen Love are among the primary proponents of Ecocriticism as a critical method. Ecocriticism can be done in several ways. Ecocriticism, feminism, postcolonialism, bioregionalism, and writings on nature and the environment. Comparable to other critical theories, Ecocriticism emerged from a historical and social development in western societies. Natural philosophy and in-depth ecology were foundational to the initial principles. Newer methods, such as social justice, have emerged due to scholars expanding the scope of this idea (Shamara Riley, 1992; Val Plumwood, 1993). Scholars are emphasizing the need to recognize the mutual reliance on human and nonhuman nature call for eliminating dualisms. Humans are just other animals in their eyes. Hence nature is beyond their control (Val Plumwood, 1993; Daniel Wilks, 2008). Artistic expressions that honor nature and address environmental concerns, such as the human-nature relationship, have a home in nature literature and deep ecology. Postcolonial Ecocriticism, eco-feminism, feminist Ecocriticism, eco-Marxism, eco-philosophy, literature on toxicity, virtual environment, and urban nature all made their way into the spotlight. Scholars who take an eco-feminist stance within Ecocriticism argue that binaries between sexes, nature and culture, science and magic, and between men and women perpetuate patriarchal power structures and stymie calls for more equitable social and ecological conditions.

Green politics has taken center stage in international conferences and discussions in recent years, drawing attention to environmental problems like climate change, acid rain, wildfires across the Western Hemisphere, and oil spills and gas flaring in areas of Africa. Because of industrialization, more factories, careless mining, oil exploration, and technological progress, non-human forms of life are being abused and corrupted at an alarming rate, the ozone layer is being depleted, and many species are being driven to extinction. There has been a rush of mainstream literature highlighting environmental issues due to green campaigners trying to get people to pay more attention to them. Destabilizing acts like these have been widely discussed in academic circles worldwide for the past three decades.

The new normal, as described by Suprpto et al., includes "restricting the number of crowds, limiting the distance, having to wear masks everywhere," and "being tested for temperature in every office, mall, and school" (419). They claim that these good values and characteristics, which make for better societies, should not only be engrafted in the new regular policies of nations but also promoted to become the lifestyle of people to help them become normal forever (424). Researchers have assessed the public's attitude toward literature in the aftermath of the pandemic's climax and when the globe returns to its usual routines. The outlook on the poetry written during the pandemic period reveals that many poems focus on the horror, death, and painful experiences that persisted as people experienced the deprivations of that time (Jeroen Dera, 2021). Dera believes that while poetry readers read more poems during the epidemic, many avoided poems about the crisis's consequences.

The literature-environment relationship is represented by numerous eco-sensitive academics who see environmental harm as a result of human actions. Human actions that have aided in technological progress are responsible for ecocide, ozone depletion, destruction of flora and wildlife, and other environmental red flags directly and indirectly. Since the pandemic began, people have been forced to change their habits and social interactions drastically. Poets have often portrayed the years following a pandemic as a time of renewal when the earth recovered from the wounds inflicted by human activity and people themselves healed by rejecting the nihilistic ideas that maintained environmental injustice. Others, such as Silvest and

Ganapathy, have shown the breadth of human suffering and the fortitude of the surviving. While scholars have looked at things like a readership, themes, and forms of pandemic poetry, they have yet to attempt an ecocritical interpretation of this developing genre. This ecocritical study will therefore evaluate how well some poems were written after COVID has captured the rhythm of human-nature interaction in the post-COVID norm.

Human-Nature Relations in Pandemic Poetry

Poets who write about pandemics capture the experience of living in a world where the spread of the Coronavirus has upended everyday interactions. Some poems about pandemics are gloomy, lamenting the fate of the helpless victims who have lost their health, friends, and freedom of movement. The fatal character and dynamics of the Coronavirus have been described in other pandemic poetry. Still, other poets illustrate how the epidemic and altered human lifestyles have recast traditional relationships with the natural world. Many of the poems included in this analysis fall into the third group.

For instance, Kristin Flyntz's poem "An Imagined Letter from COVID-19 to Humans" portrays the relationship between humans and nature before the pandemic as disorganized and aimless, prompting a call to halt all transportation, as well as all schooling, shopping, gatherings, and other human activities that put any strain on nature (ll. 1-12). "The firestorms that scorched the lungs of the earth" and "the fevered climates in Japan and India" are metaphors for human activities like bush burning, careless deployment of technology, gas flaring, and other activities have worsened global warming. The persona scolds humans for ignoring these warning signs (ll. 28-35). In addition, the persona threatens that, unless people lament the loss of their health, the heat that has scorched the land due to human activity will be transferred to their bodies and lungs (ll. 43-48). As a result, heat waves on Earth caused by human activities that are harmful to the environment will become the new normal, and so will fever, sickness, and breathing difficulties for humans. Further, the persona requests that humans:

To look up into the sky streaked with fewer planes and see it, To notice
its condition; clear, smoky, smoggy, rainy? How much do you need it to
be healthy so that you may also be healthy? To look at a tree, and see it,
to notice its condition: how does its health contribute to the health of the
sky, to the air you need to be healthy? (ll.53-60)

The persona urges people to use the sanity brought about by the new normal to reevaluate how they treat the environment, stressing the importance of doing so because of the close relationship between the well-being of the environment and that of the people who inhabit it. Assumed to be a hypothetical letter from COVID-19 to humans, the poem links the ills people have caused and their handling of the natural world.

Similarly, Catherine O'Meara's "In the Time of the Pandemic" emphasizes the positive effects of our current way of life on the natural world. The first four sentences perfectly encapsulate how humanity has adapted and reinvented itself in response to the limitations brought on by the pandemic. The character elaborates on why men and women "stayed home" and "began to think differently." In lines 5-8, we see how the limitations promoted healing among the people and ultimately led to a whole planet.

Allusions to deaths caused by the unrestrained spread of the Coronavirus, the anguish of losing loved ones and means of support, and the agony of coming to terms with the new normal are all there. However, the poem suggests that through these trials, people have experienced psychological and emotional healing that has led them to reimagine their place in the natural world.

Haroon Rashid, in his poem "We fell asleep," seems to back up Flyntz and O'Meara by pointing out how severe confinement has driven people away from once-bustling urban centers like Disney World, New York City and Mecca and back into their homes (ll. 1- 4). Furthermore, the persona claims power has been redefined as not exclusively human. Consequently, the character says wryly:

The world continues its life and it is beautiful It only puts humans in cages
I think it's sending us a message:
You're not necessary,
The air, earth, water, and sky without you are fine. (ll. 7-10)

Finally, the persona asserts that when humans "come back" (perhaps alluding to the new everyday world), they will need to reframe their perspectives on their relationships with the natural world from "masters" to

"guests" (ll. 11-12). The new normal, as the name suggests, is a different world in which the land and its people have been restored to health.

Alternatively, other poets portray the post-apocalyptic world as a place of healing, where humans have been condemned by nature for their destruction of the planet and are now more open to negotiating human-nature relations on ecologically sustainable terms. Noor Aisyah writes in her short poem "He Kills in the Silence" about how nature, in the form of a deadly virus, comes with unbridled ferocity to kill individuals and their systems without warning (ll. 1-6). Poetically, the world is being healed, as the poet expresses in lines 7-9. Birds are singing their hearts out, and the natural world is finally at peace, all thanks to the limits that have minimized human activity and allowed the healing process to take place (ll. 10-11). The character then laughs at the humans being punished for their environmental destruction. These ideas are expressed as: "In the meantime, people are trying to hide from him and avoid getting caught" (ll. 12-14). Poems depict the global pandemic and the new normal that has come to subdue human insurgents, make them acknowledge the power of nature, and maybe pave the way for environmental justice.

Similarly, the epidemic is portrayed as a good thing that normalized man's relationship with the environment in the poem "Mother Earth Had Enough" by Mahaletchumy Krishnamoorthy et al. The carelessness of humans for the natural world is emphasized in the opening stanza. The "fury" and "Mother Earth's ire" conveyed in stanza two likely respond to the recent wave of environmental destruction. In the view of the persona:

The corona virus came in the scale of a pandemic, It had so many
crowns it was just epic, COVID-19 spread as fast as fire, With the
vengeance that would befit Mother Earth's ire (ll. 5-8)

The ensuing stanzas expand on this idea, demonstrating that all it took was one virus to become Mother Earth's weapon and carry out the retribution she so much craved. To demonstrate that Mother Earth could no longer tolerate the mistreatment of non-human nature, all human activities and social contacts ceased, even the "shaking of hands or smiling at each other."

Geetha Davenci et al. "Letter .s to Corona" appears to be written by a man to the virus (possibly one who has been cured and reinvented by the entire pandemic experience), focusing on the beneficial effects of the pandemic on animal and plant life. Using this identity, we can infer that environmental justice has been restored as the new norm on Earth and that the pandemic has helped heal the planet. Specifically, the poet contends:

Because of you, we are staying with our family more than two months
Ozone's depletion and preservation miracle happened...The Holy river
Ganga which is cleansing all the sin Is pure now! It's all because of you
only (ll. 3-6)

At least nature was resurrected after being cleansed, the persona admits in paragraph 8. The persona, representing humanity, praises Corona as an "Angelic Devil" and begs for peaceful interactions with the creature because of its purifying effects on nature.

Asmaa Dhannoon suggests in "Nature's Revenge" that the earth, seeking vengeance for the widespread environmental injustice that had existed, sent humanity "an invisible virus" that rendered everyone, including the powerful, frightened and powerless (ll. 1-7). The destructive power of the virus, which leaves no one or no place unchanged, is further illustrated in lines 8-10. The character continues by saying that human acts, like pollution, have hampered peaceful relationships between humans and the natural world. However, that nature is now seeking revenge for the wrongs done to her. Therefore, humanity must pay by stopping all activities until it fully appreciates the need to treat the natural environment with respect. In the view of the persona:

If you wanna know why corona is here Well, we're all to be blamed.
We disrespect this earth, and we never feel ashamed I hope now
everyone realise, That this is the Mother Nature revenge (ll. 15-19)

The poet concludes with the wish that humanity will take note of Nature's fury and rethink its relationship with the natural world. The poet probably thinks the virus will calm down if people learn to live in harmony with Nature.

As a bonus, Anusha Alex et al. "Covid .s Lessons" poetry shows how powerless humans are in the face of the fatal virus. Lyrics 1–12 poke fun at human arrogance, which, before being infected by the virus, led people to believe that they were in charge and had the answers to every problem. More than that, the poem reveals man's humanity by emphasizing the extent to which his ego, pride, and authority have been damaged. In the view of the persona:

Corona is invisible to our naked eyes
Yet troubling the entire
humankind It taught us to value our lives
It made us to care for all at all times (ll. 17-20)

The poem shows how, in the post-apocalyptic world, man has changed for the better to advocate for fairness and justice. Thus, people in the post-apocalyptic future will not be destroying the planet for their amusement but will work toward a more equitable society and environmental stability.

Conclusions

Poetry from two anthologies written in the wake of the epidemic demonstrates how authors in the post-apocalyptic world try to make sense of the similarities and differences between the old and new worlds. The social commitment function of literature is strengthened by these associations, making them highly relevant. This research shows that all the poets surveyed blame human mistreatment of the natural world for the new regular's privations and pain. These poets have used the Coronavirus to express Mother Nature's wrath against humanity, adopting different presentation methods and stylistic quirks. It portrays man as a helpless and feeble creature in the face of nature's wrath. Poets argue that, after the arduous processes of the pandemic, people have remade themselves in the new everyday world to have better relationships with nature.

References

1. Aisyah, Nova Noor. "He Kills in the Silence" COVID-19 Pandemic Poems (Volume III) Edited by Silvest, Regin and Malini Ganapathy, Cape Comorin. 2020. p.14.
2. Alex, Anusha et al. "COVID Lessons" COVID-19 Pandemic Poems (Volume III) Edited by Silvest, Regin and Malini Ganapathy, Cape Comorin. 2020. p.30.
3. Baral, Pabitra. "Human Reconnection to Nature: An Ecopsychological Appeal in Corona Time Poetry", The Outlook Journal of English Studies, vol. 11, 2020. pp 24-41
4. Corpus, Jeff. "Adapting to the culture of 'new normal': an emerging response to COVID-19.
5. Journal of Public Health, vol. 34, no 2. 2021. Pp 344 - 345
6. Davenci, Geetha et al. "Letter to Corona" COVID-19 Pandemic Poems (Volume III) Edited by Silvest, Regin and Malini Ganapathy, Cape Comorin. 2020. p.24.
7. Dera, Jeroen. "Evaluating Poetry on COVID-19: Attitudes of Poetry Readers Towards Corona Poems" The Interdisciplinary Journal of Practice, Theory, Research and Education, vol. 34, no 2. 2021. pp. 74-94. DOI: 10.1080/088936752021.1899630
8. Dhannoon, Asmaa. "Nature's Revenge" COVID-19 Pandemic Poems (Volume III) Edited by Silvest, Regin and Malini Ganapathy, Cape Comorin. 2020. p.37.
9. Flyntz, Kristin. "An imagined letter from COVID-19" The pivot, University Press. 2021 Huggan, Graham and Helen Tiffin. Postcolonial eco-criticism. Routledge, 2010.
10. Krishnamoorthy, Mahaletchumy et al. "Mother Earth Had Enough" COVID-19 Pandemic Poems (Volume III) Edited by Silvest, Regin and Malini Ganapathy, Cape Comorin. 2020. p.23.
11. Nwahunanya, Chinyere. "The Relevance of Nigerian War Fiction", A harvest from tragedy: Critical Perspectives on Nigerian Civil War Literature, Edited by Chinyere Nwahunanya. Springfield, 2011, pp. 176-189.
12. O'Meara, Catherine. "In the time of the pandemic", The daily round. Online: www.dailyround.com. 2020
13. Plumwood, Val. Feminism and the mastery of nature. Routledge. 1993. Rashid, Haroon. "We fell asleep" Online: www.bharathvision.info. 2020
14. Riley, Shamara. "Ecology is a sistah's issue too: The politics of emergent Afrocentric ecowomanism", Ecofeminism and the Sacred, Edited by Carol J. Adams. Continuum, 1992, pp. 45-

65.

15. Silvest, Regin and Malini Ganapathy. COVID-19 Pandemic poems (Volume III) Cape Comorin. 2020.
16. Suprpto, Nadi et al. "The Pros and Cons of the New Normal Concept During COVID-19 Outbreak", Edutec Journal of Education and Technology. Vol. 4. No. 3. pp. 412-427
17. Wilks, Daniel. Seeking environmental justice. Rodopi. 2008.