

In the novel *Oil on Water* by Helon Habila, the author shows images of the oil-polluted water in Nigeria—produced by British oil companies—through the lens of the main character, Rufus. The passage on page 37, beginning with, “We got Zaq into...” and ending with “as if for the first time”, describes the environment through diction to suggest that humanity is steered by nature. For example, Habila states, “we drifted almost aimlessly on the opaque, misty water”. The terms ‘drifted’ and ‘aimless’ seem to suggest that the characters have no sense of control towards the direction they are going in. Similarly, the water is described as ‘opaque’ and ‘misty’ further emphasizing that destinations in these polluted waters are unclear and that the water chooses an uncertain purpose to travelers. In addition, Habila describes the water in three juxtaposing images. The first, a snake, ‘twisting and fast, and slippery, poisonous’. Secondly, an old jute rope, ‘frayed and wobbly and breaking into jagged feathery ends’. The third, an arrow, ‘straight and unerring’. These three images convey that the water is dynamic and reiterate the uncertainty that these waters create for the people traveling upon them. Likewise, the three images symbolize the relationship people have with the environment. The snake described as ‘poisonous’, suggests that the water poses a threat to the people embarking these waters. Similarly, a rope is manmade, suggesting that the waters instability may have been caused by humanity, a reference to the oil-pollution. The comparison of the water as an arrow is the only pure good-natured description of the water that the author provides. Additionally, this is all suggestive to the idea that nature ultimately determines and drives humanity. Moreover, the author’s images of the water counter the human belief that we are in control of our destination. The novel itself shows us that nature is the determinant of humanity. Thus, the mistreatment of the environment, as in the novel with oil-polluted water, shows that the environment is a reflection of ourselves and that the

consequences of our actions are bound to have a reciprocal perpetual effect. Environmentally unfriendly or not.