

**ENVIRONMENTAL DEGRADATION IN NIYI OSUNDARE'S *THE EYE OF
THE EARTH.***

By

Emmanuel Oluwagbemileke OMONUSI

ART2004517

**DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH AND LITERATURE,
FACULTY OF ARTS,
UNIVERSITY OF BENIN.
BENIN CITY**

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**AN ORIGINAL ESSAY SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH AND
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CERTIFICATION

I certify that this study was carried out by OMONUSI Emmanuel Favour (MISS) in the department of English language and literature, University of Benin, under my supervision

Professor Felix. N. Ogoanah.

Project Supervisor.

Date

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to the All Supreme God, who has sustained me through my journey in the university

I also dedicate this project to my parents Mr. and Mrs. OMONUSI, who has been indomitable in supporting me financially, morally and spiritually throughout my stay in the university

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ABSTRACT

This essay studies the impacts of human activities on the decline of the environment and on nature in a bid to criticise the arbitrariness of the use of nature's resources. This essay also examines the beauty of nature to enhance the protection and preservation of nature. This essay discusses the relationship of man with his environment by highlighting the harmony nature possesses. Through the use of poetry, this essay elucidates on aspects that have been covered by authors, but not by poets, reflecting the importance of poetry on nature.

The method of research employed in this study is eco-criticism, and the primary data is Niyi Osundare's *The Eye of the Earth*, from which selected poems are used. The analysis of the selected poems shall undergo line by line analysis and exploring the literary devices that enhance the main purpose of this essay.

The results of the analysis are illustrations of nature decline as a result of human's irrational use, and therefore the beauty of nature is tampered with. These results give an opinion on how the environment should be treated, adding that the preservation of nature will improve the living standards of humanity.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1. Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study is to examine the theme of environmental degradation in Niyi Osundare's *The Eye of the Earth*. The study analyzes how Osundare presents nature's beauty while critiquing human activities that lead to environmental destruction. Additionally, the research will highlight the literary devices Osundare employs to convey his ecological message.

1.2. Background of Study

Environmental degradation is an issue affecting global ecosystems, and literature has played a significant role in raising awareness about its impact. In African literature, poets like Niyi Osundare have used their works to address the relationship between humans and nature. *The Eye of the Earth* is a significant poetic collection that juxtaposes the beauty of the natural world with the devastating effects of human exploitation. Through this work, Osundare advocates for environmental conservation and sustainable coexistence between man and nature.

1.3. Objectives of Study

1. To illustrate the relationship between man and nature.
2. To reflect the beauty of nature while criticising man's exploitation of the environment.
3. To explore the various literary devices that depicts both the beauty and decline of nature.

1.4. Statement of Problem

Despite increasing concerns about environmental degradation, many societies continue to engage in activities that harm the environment. Therefore, *The Eye of the Earth* serves as a medium for raising awareness and promoting ecological consciousness. This study, therefore, seeks to explore how Osundare portrays environmental destruction and advocates for sustainability through poetry.

1.5. Research Questions

1. How does Niyi Osundare depict man's involvement in environmental degradation?
2. In what ways does *The Eye of the Earth* explore the beauty of nature?
3. How does the poet use various literary devices illustrate the beauty and elements

1.6. Scope of Study:

This essay analyses and studies Niyi Osundare's *The Eye of the Earth* to portray the exploitation of nature, the causes and effects of such exploitations, to reflect the backlash of man's activities in their dealings with nature and environment. This text is particularly suitable for this study because it exemplifies African eco-poetry in creating environmental consciousness. Osundare's work serves as a reflection of environmental concerns within an African context, making it a relevant in examining ecological degradation through poetry.

1.7. Thesis Statement

This essay illustrates the beauty of nature while condemning human activities that contribute to environmental degradation using Niyi Osundare's *The Eye of the Earth*.

1.8. Operational Definition of Terms

Eco-criticism: This is the discipline of literature that focuses on ecology. It studies the relationship between man and his environment.

Environmental Degradation: The deterioration of the environment through deforestation, pollution, and depletion of natural resources.

Anthropocentrism: A concept that places humans at the center, often leading to environmental neglect.

CHAPTER TWO

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND AND REVIEW OF SCHOLARSHIP

2.1 Theoretical Background

Eco-criticism

According to Ann B. Dobie, Eco criticism was first presented as a method of literary criticism in the literary world through William Rueckert's *Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Eco-criticism* and has been a means to re-shape the behaviours of man between himself and other aspects of nature. Therefore, eco-criticism aims to solve the fundamental crisis between man and nature, stating that the exploitation of the environment is an act of man's segregation and seeks to nullify it. A clearer observation of nature and its function of eco-critics and eco-criticism is surrounding what is meant by the term "nature," the underlying ecological concepts, and the determination of if Eco-criticism should be a classified separately like class, gender, or race to enable eco-critics look into it. Eco-critics study humanity's view of the view of the wild, how it has been modified and developed overtime, and whether or not contemporary environmental challenges are theoretically discussed or portrayed in contemporary literature and popular

culture. Eco-critics also believe that other fields including psychology, philosophy, ethics, and history may have contributed to eco-criticism.

According to M. H. Abrams, the study of ecology examines how all types of plants and animals interact with one another and their natural environments (p, 71). He states that,

Eco criticism (or by an alternative name, environmental criticism) designates the critical writings which explore the relations between literature and the biological and physical environment, considered with an acute awareness of the devastation being wrought on that environment by human activities (p, 7).

Eco criticism is one of the newest terms among literary concepts and ideologies to enter the world of literature criticism and analysis. It is this idea that Simon E. Estok agrees to as been “very young.” As an ideology, it is saddled with the responsibility of determining the interrelationship between literature and the environment. Literature helps as a platform to study environmental crisis, which Cheryll Glotfelty, in *Introduction* has described as “literary studies in an age of environmental crisis” (xv). This asserts that certain methods of coexistence between man and nature (non-humans) can be employed to ensure that the relationship can be survived.

A study of Jonathan Bate's *Global Warming Criticism* to refer to Ecocriticism, places more emphasis on the study of climate. However, this focus on climate excludes all other domains of nature (environment). Furthermore, Kate Rigby's use of the term, "Global Warming Criticism", highlights that

Informed not only by meteorology and ecology, but also by the new science of non-linear dynamic systems popularised as "Chaos Theory," Global Warming Criticism presupposes a natural world which can no longer be thought of as passive, orderly and compliant, but which is rather volatile, unpredictable, and responsive to our interventions in ways that we can neither foresee nor control (p, 158).

Dobie states that according to Lawrence Buell, Eco-criticism is the integrated study of literature and the environment where all sciences work together to assess the environment and generate potential solution for the improving the contemporary environment issues (p, 239). Therefore, to him the unified framework of scientific inquiry in the investigation is the key component in the research. Despite its apparent clarity, this term has numerous nuances. One can ask "how will the study of literature benefit from the application of the sciences? A suitable answer could be that in the analysis of the environment, in such cases, the outcome of this analysis could then reveal to the literary artist and/or critic the extent of the degradation of man's natural habitation; as a result,

the artist and critic would become more sensitive, enabling them to theorize for humanity and thereby raise awareness regarding the maintenance, preservation, or protection of the environment. With reference to Glotfelty's definition, Buell also stated that any investigation into the connection between literature and the natural world must be carried out "in a spirit of commitment to environmentalist praxis" (p, 239). "Commitment to environmental praxis" asserts that enough attention must be paid in determining how to maintain environment, so its yield for man and nature can be increased. Lance Newman encapsulates in his definition of eco-criticism that the main goal of eco-criticism is to promote peaceful cohabitation between the human and nonhuman elements of nature and aid a transformation of human relationship with nature. Estok, cited by Dobie in an extension of Buell's statement asserts that Eco-criticism "takes a stand by its commitment to the natural world as an important thing rather than simply as an object of thematic study and by its commitment to making connections" (p, 239). In this context, "connections" refers to the relationship between people and nonhumans, or the other elements of nature, which ought to be mutually beneficial and symbiotic in every way. Dobie goes on to quote Camilo Gomides, who she says understands the social function of ecocriticism. According to her, Gomides talks about inspiring audiences to adhere to a set of rules that will last for generations (p, 239). This suggests that understanding of the need to preserve, protect, and nurture other natural elements needs to be reengineered. Additionally, according to Dobie, Estok expands eco-criticism to encompass the study of

any theory dedicated to bringing about change by examining the function in different aspects—thematic, artistic, social, and historical.

One of the most popular beliefs regarding eco-criticism is that it is an interdisciplinary field of study. As a conclusion to this part, Dobie stated that, the interest in exploring the relationship between literature and nature as a means of reviving a reader's consciousness of the nonhuman world and his or her duty to preserve it unites all of these viewpoints on the subject. They actively care about how human activity affects the environment and share the fundamental promise that everything is interconnected. Glotfelty says that the primary goal of eco-criticism is to increase consciousness.

Furthermore, it is important to note that eco-criticism has many different names, such as eco-poetics, environmental criticism, literary ecology, environmental literary criticism, green cultural studies, and, in a negative sense, compost structuralism. Separating eco-criticism into two categories, Dark Greens and Light Greens, while noting that the constant in this case is "green" and that the variables are "dark," which refers to those who believe in a complete return to nature, and "light," which indicates those who are less fervent in their commitment to the negative effects of human activity on the environment, are also equally important (P, 71–76). Glotfelty has outlined several trends that eco-criticism has adhered to hence the public's awareness of attitudes towards the natural environment is raised by starting with an interest in representations and analyses

of how nature is portrayed in literature. Practitioners examine how stereotypes distort reality and observe instances in which nature is disregarded or absent. There are occasions when they focus on a certain facet of nature, such a geographical area, the wilderness, or the mountains. The second phase consists of an attempt to resurrect and re-evaluate the neglected genre of nature literature. The increasing number of nature writing anthologies and ecologically conscious works published shows how much attention has been given to this attempt.

In order to address a wide range of issues, including the effects of anthropomorphism, the interaction between nature and civilisation, and more, the third stage, known as the theoretical one, draws on science, history, and philosophy. Oppermann claims that because environmental issues have become a crucial aspect of our lives, eco-criticism aims to identify points of agreement between humans and nonhumans in order to demonstrate how they can coexist in different ways. In its quest to establish a more ecologically aware stance in literary studies, ecocriticism tackles this issue.

There is a very important question which sums up the demand of eco-criticism on academics. The question which Glotfelty asked is - how then can we contribute to environmental restoration? (P, 2), and the question followed quickly at the foot of the observation: -work as usual seems unconscionably frivolous. If we are not part of the solution, we are part of the problem. (p, 2). Glotfelty, as presented by Oppermann,

although speaking to professors of literature, is actually addressing all human beings, and as culprits, humanity must retrace its steps, be remorseful for its actions or inaction, and pay restitution to the earth and ensure her continued existence. However, Oppermann warns that the contribution, so spoken about, should be well focused on the literary as well as on the ecological concepts, not privileging one over the other. The task of eco-criticism then is to formulate a conceptual foundation for the study of interconnections between literature and the environment. Hence, within this framework, eco-poets and eco-critics like Niyi Osundare, Richard Powers, and Margaret Atwood are mainly concerned with how literature transmits certain values contributing to ecological thinking. They state that the environmental crisis is a question that cannot be overlooked in literary studies.

2.2 Review of Related Scholarship

Niyi Osundare's *The Eye of the Earth* has received a lot of critical attention, from scholars where they have claimed that nature is either been exploited or being protected. Hence discussing Niyi Osundare's *Style and the New Poetic Revolution*, Nesther Nachafiya Alu declares that Osundare's

Works vividly convey his concept on the relationship between the oppressed Nigerian/African and the crop of leaders there. His works address a deluge of themes which include corruption, poverty, administrative mismanagement, and to a certain extent, the lingering effects of colonialism on the African continent (p, 62).

These are generally the perspectives from which the works of Osundare have been viewed by critics. All have looked at his work from the human-centred approach, but this is not the only orientation of the works of Niyi Osundare. The other thrust from which his poetry could be viewed is the fight for the environment, the effort to speak for the environment which although is heard, but is never understood until now. Osundare is therefore lending his voice to the seemingly dumb environment. One of the closest to the environmental criticism of Niyi Osundare's poetry can be found in Alu's assertion that,

The Eye of the Earth is very special, fashioned on his perception of man in Nature. The image of the poet here is more than an interpreter of a complex and rich tradition of his people, who share a collective philosophy. He celebrates the work culture of his people with special emphasis on their reverence for nature, defending the traditional myth on which the community lives together resisting collusion. The volume is seen as one of the fiercest indictments of modern economic culture of the

people and alien destructive forces. It takes a pictorial account of aggression on man and the earth which is the author's personal contribution to the problems of erosion and desertification (p, 70).

On Osundare's concern about the plight of the masses in his poetry, Alu states that,

Most importantly, the feature of his poetry is his defence of the speechless and oppressed citizens of the land. He appears involved and sympathetic to their unfortunate condition, be it in the rural or urban area. The theme runs through all his collection, cutting across various fields of human endeavour (p, 69).

It could be added that the speechless and oppressed in this situation include all the other elements and beings that make up the environment, the biotic elements. Osundare presents it thus:

And so when you have a country and a continent and a world where instead of that happening, politics is being used to entrench poverty and enrich a few, then problems are bound to rise. Poetry has become a tool for setting things right, for praising virtue... Genuine poetry raises political songs; political songs directly and indirectly. It tells kings about

the corpses which line their way to the throne. It tells the rich ones the skulls in their cupboard (Qtd in Alu, 69).

Another critic is Charles Bodunde. In his study entitled “Niyi Osundare and the Materialist Vision: A Study of *The Eye of the Earth*,” he observes that Ngara, another critic, paid attention to the earth as being the main concern of Osundare in this collection, in addition to the plight of the masses, the poor in the society: “Ngara makes references to Osundare’s defense of the peasants, his celebration of the earth and need to preserve it” (p, 82). This is one of the closest references by Bodunde to environmental interpretation of Osundare’s *The Eye of the Earth*. However, it is only a reference, as no further discussion especially in eco-critical terms, could be fathomed out of the discourse. Bodunde focuses on materialism, especially as it affects “the shift to the capitalist mode of production” (p, 82) from the agrarian subsistence method hitherto practised in Africa. Again, Bodunde tries to delineate *The Eye of the Earth* from the Romantic perspective. According to him,

A superficial reading of *The Eye of the Earth* suggests a near Romantic idealization of the organic and the meditative value of the green world with its forests, flowers and natural landscape. However, Osundare’s depiction of nature, symbolized in the metaphor of the earth, departs from the Romantic interpretation. Embodied in the typical Romantic epiphanic

naturism is nature's capacity to communicate to human instinct and hence provoke meditation. Nature is useful to the Romanticist in so far as it yields itself for imaginative purpose" (p, 82).

Further, according to Bodunde, "it should also be mentioned that it is Nature's materiality mediated by human activities that forms the basis of Osundare's treatment" (p, 85). This stands as an apt hint at the anthropocentric disposition of man. This is affirmed in Karl Marx's contention, according to Bodunde, "that nature which preceded human history ... is nature which today no longer exists anywhere" (p, 85). It may be reasonable to observe here that man has been largely, if not solely, responsible for the unfortunate situation.

Godwin Jeff Doki, in his article, *Niyi Osundare as a poet of nature* states, "Osundare is concerned both with reality and the connection between the individual and his environment. It is, therefore, not surprising that the entire volume is devoted to poems about man interacting with the physical aspects of nature" (p, 68). He further comments, "Returning back to his old theme of an egalitarian society and economic exploitation, Osundare states that when the gold is dug it should be used for the betterment of society and not to enrich a few kings and Princes" (p, 7). This means that the social gap should be bridged if not eradicated with the resources got from the rock. By this, Doki has

returned Osundare to the fold of the social crusaders and Marxism to which he belongs and which he professes.

In addition, Emma Ngumoha explores Osundare as a rain maker, “rain, the giver and sustainer of life” (p, 124). Furthermore, Ngumoha states, “the earth personifies the regenerative power of female sexuality, rainfall represents the flow of celestial creative energy whose force is patriarchal, logical and conventional... In *Rainfall*, ‘Heaven meets Earth, life burst forth in innumerable forms at every level of existence’” (p, 125). Therefore, the major concerns of Ngumoha in this article are the issues of the fertility of the earth, enhanced by the rain, as well as the pluvial aesthetics embedded in *The Eye of the Earth*. Ngumoha has also seen Osundare as an enchanter, a magician; and the earth as “the universal Genetrix and nurse” (p, 125). Virtually all the critics cited here are of the view that Niyi Osundare is “prominent among the younger generation of Nigerian poets” (p, 62).

Furthermore, Samson Dare asserts that,

Osundare is the clearest, loudest and most heard poetic voice from the Anglophone Africa today. A new generation poet, following the earlier established poets such as Okigbo, Soyinka and Clarke, Osundare has through enormous productivity, elegance of style, and currency and

consistency of thematic concern, succeeded in drawing attention to himself (p, 91).

One of the elements of style employed by Niyi Osundare in his works is the Proverb. According to Yomi Okunowo, “one immediate benefit of oral-written contact is the preservation of the tradition of the oral culture, both in its pastness‘ and progression into the future, serving as an attraction and bridge into the written format” (p, 1). It is this oral-written contact which has provided the fertile ground for the flourishing of the proverb in the literature from Africa. Okunowo also identifies parallelism as one of the stylistic elements employed by Osundare, although he does not discuss it adequately. As part of the elegance of style hinted at above, Osundare seeks a euphemistic way of presenting the otherwise offensive or traditionally restricted terms and material in his poetry, and he manages this technique very effectively, although with some lapses in the circumstances affecting women. Dare further states:

At any rate, Osundare seems to take advantage of this loophole in the traditional restriction in presenting and managing the otherwise offensive items. The fact explains the employment of such descriptive expressions as: The Okro penis/penis of Okro, earth breasts, and testicles of the ram... he fails to employ that same means to “cushion” the offensive effect of “cunt”, for example, in “the tireless cunt which swallows a log (p, 91).

The loophole discussed by Dare as the elements of style employed by Osundare include periphrasis, euphemism as well as the use of “sex organs of animals or in allegory with material things” (p, 91). This is on the occasion of Dare’s analysis of Osundare’s *Midlife*, *Waiting Laughter* and *The Eye of the Earth*. The above are some of the literary devices that have enriched Osundare’s poetry. According to Dare, —it may be noted, finally, that poets are not linguistic or stylistic outlaws or islands, although they enjoy an uncommon liberty in their linguistic choices, a situation made possible by that phenomenon called poetic license. The implication of this is that, although Osundare employs some deviant linguistic structures, he makes a great deal of effort to ensure that he conforms to the standard codes of the English language to the point that his writings become accessible to the average reader of his poetry.

Another scholar who has discussed Osundare’s style in poetry is Alu whose statement on Osundare’s *Moonsongs* is an apt description of Osundare’s style. He is noted to have employed so much the oral quality of African literature, and especially poetry, in his works. Alu states, “the strength of the book as observed by most of its reviews lies more in its form than content mainly because of the oral nature of its structure (p,71). Here, one may interject that while not denigrating form, content is the most important feature of the works of Osundare. Apart from structure, other features of African poetry are also employed by Osundare in his creativity, but this does not in any way demean the content of his works generally, and poetry in particular. He, like most

other African writers, is a socially committed poet who has employed a myriad of stylistic devices, some of which have been discussed above, in his poetry.

The review of the scholarship on the works of Niyi Osundare shows that the thematic preoccupations of the critics are based on the socio-economic and political conditions of the people. It has been shown that the themes isolated from Osundare's poetry by critics include oppression, protest, nature, rain-making, and sexual discourse. Also, numerous stylistic devices have been identified as contributing to the beauty and effectiveness of Osundare's poetry. Some of the stylistic elements are proverb, euphemism and the oral nature of African poetry.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

This essay adopts a qualitative approach that will involve a study of the primary text, Niyi Osundare's *The Eye of the Earth* and secondary sources such as articles, journals, E-books, the internet among others.

3.1. Method of Data Collection

The data sourced for this research includes the primary texts: Niyi Osundare's *The Eye of the Earth* as well as secondary materials such as articles. They have been selected due to their interconnected concepts that aid in the depiction of environmental degradation.

3.2. Method of Data Analysis

An analysis of the poet's approach will involve a focus on the themes and stylistic presentation. The theoretical background which is eco-criticism is adopted to further assist in the analysis and understanding of the texts. In the collection of poetry, *Earth, Forest Echoes, Harvest Call, The Rock Rose to Meet Me, Ours to Plough, not to Plunder and Our Earth will not Die* shall be used for this analysis. Also, lines and that reflect the topic of this essay shall be extracted and used in the study of this essay.

CHAPTER FOUR

ENVIRONMENTAL DEGRADATION IN NIYI OSUNDARE'S *THE EYE OF THE EARTH*

4.0. Introduction

The increasing deterioration of the natural environment due to human activities is a pressing global concern. African literature has responded to this crisis by reflecting on its implications for ecosystems and communities. Niyi Osundare's *The Eye of the Earth* serves as a poignant poetic exploration of environmental degradation. .

4.1. Man and the Decline of Nature

The imagery of cutting down trees suggests irreversible harm, framing deforestation as a loss not only for nature but also for humanity itself, while giving voice to the silenced natural world. *They Too Are the Earth* explores the connection between humans and nature. The poem establishes a similarity between the oppressed, including slaves, and the earth. Osundare writes, "they too are the earth / the swansong of beggars sprawled out / in brimming gutters." Here, the poet compares the suffering of the poor to a "swansong," suggesting that their lives are filled with hardship and neglect. By stating that these beggars "are the earth," Osundare implies that they are just as important as the land, despite being oppressed and silenced in society. Similarly, he describes "the sweat

and grime of millions / hewing wood and hurling water,” referring to laborers whose physical efforts sustain life but whose existence is often disregarded. The imagery of hard labor connects them to the natural elements they work with, reinforcing the bond between humans and nature.

Nature is both a source of wealth and a site of suffering. Osundare mentions “the distant groans of thousands buried alive / in hard, unfathomable mines” to illustrate how people suffer and even die while being used to extract resources from the earth. The phrase “gold dreams and blood banks” suggests that while some profit from gold and minerals, others pay for it with their lives. This contrast highlights the exploitation of both nature and human labor. The poet’s use of the word “groans” evokes a sense of pain, as though the earth itself is mourning alongside the suffering miners.

Additionally, the poem asserts that the destruction of the environment is caused by human greed. When Osundare writes, “are they of this earth / who fritter the forest and harry the hills,” he questions whether those who destroy nature truly belong to it. How humane is humanity when it destroys the environment? The verbs “fritter” and “harry” suggest reckless exploitation of natural resources without any concern for preservation. Humans are portrayed as the very agents of destruction for the nature that sustains them. Furthermore, when he asks, “are they of this earth / who live that earth may die,” he exposes the irony of those who exploit natural resources for personal gain while ignoring

the adverse effects on nature. This question challenges the reader to reflect on human responsibility toward the environment.

The opening lines of *Ours to Plough, Not to Plunder* establish the idea that the earth is meant for productive use rather than reckless destruction:

The earth is ours to plough and plant the hoe is her bristle the dibble her dimple. Out with mattocks and machetes bring calabash tray and rocking baskets let the sweat which swells earthroot relieve heavy heaps of their tuberous burdens. (p. 46)

The earth is described as a nurturing entity, while agricultural tools such as the hoe and the machete are depicted as agents that alter the earth's "dimple" and beauty. Nevertheless, the lines suggest that nature is willing to provide for humanity if approached with care and diligence. The reference to ploughing and planting signifies that responsible actions yield the most fruitful results when humans engage in sustainable farming rather than destructive activities. A distinction is drawn between traditional, responsible labor and the reckless tendencies of modern industrialization. The tools mentioned—mattocks, machetes, and baskets—represent sustainable, traditional farming methods compared to the more destructive machinery of modern technology. Additionally, the line "let the sweat which swells earthroot" demonstrates that the fertility

of nature depends on the hard work of humans. However, the phrase “tuberous burdens” suggests that nature offers its gifts freely only when treated with care.

Another important theme in the poem is the earth’s potential for abundance. The poet declares:

Let wheatfields raise their breadsome hands to the ripening sun let
legumes clothe the naked bosom of shivering mounds and swing its
headward breasts.

In the following lines, the poet advocates for the responsible use of nature’s resources:

Let water spring from earth’s unfathomed fountain let gold shine from her
deep unseeable mines Our earth is an unopened grainhouse, a bustling
barn in some far, uncharted jungle a distant gem in a rough unhappy dust.
(p. 46)

Water, a fundamental necessity for life, is presented as a gift of nature and should be used wisely. The mention of gold suggests that natural resources hold great value, but their extraction should be approached with caution and reverence. The phrase “unfathomed fountain” implies that nature is exploited because humans fail to recognize that, although abundant, its resources must be preserved. Toward the end of the poem, the

poet contrasts responsible cultivation with exploitation, warning against the reckless plundering of natural resources. The lines present the earth as a storehouse of potential riches, yet to be fully realized. The description of the earth as a “distant gem” suggests that its true value is often overlooked. The phrase “rough unhappy dust” may symbolize the consequences of neglect or misuse, hinting at the dangers of environmental degradation.

Lynched The lakes Slaughtered the seas Mauled the mountains
But our earth will not die... (p. 48)

These lines from *Our Earth Will Not Die* use vivid imagery and evocative language to highlight the destructive impact of human activities on nature while also asserting the resilience of the earth. The poet juxtaposes environmental devastation with a hopeful assertion that nature will endure despite human recklessness. One of the most striking aspects of the poem is its depiction of environmental degradation. The poet employs powerful verbs such as “lynched,” “slaughtered,” and “mauled” to describe humanity’s assault on nature. These words evoke a sense of violence, emphasizing the severity of ecological destruction.

A lake is killed by the arsenic urine

From the bladder of profit factories

A poisoned stream staggers down the hill

Coughing chaos in the sickly sea... (p. 48)

The ills of industrialization are depicted as factory waste pollutes lakes, poisons the sea, and causes forests to wither under acid rain. The absurdity of human exploitation is illustrated as the weeping willows “drip mercury tears” as if mourning their own destruction, while the seas “drink their hearts’ content.” The degradation of natural resources is demonstrated to result from continuous and arbitrary human use. The poem challenges the notion that nature is a passive entity, instead portraying it as a living being deeply affected by human actions. This personification creates a poignant emotional connection between the reader and nature, reinforcing the idea that the environment is not merely a backdrop but an active presence in human existence. Despite the grim portrayal of environmental harm, the poet offers a message of resilience. The recurring refrain, “But our earth will not die,” serves as a declaration of nature’s enduring strength. This repetition reinforces the belief that, despite human transgressions, the earth will heal and rejuvenate.

Our earth will see again

Eyes washed by a new rain

The westering sun will rise again

Resplendent like a new coin

The wind, unwound will play its tune

Trees twittering, grasses dancing;

Hillsides will rock with blooming harvests... (p, 49)

One dominant and interesting concept in this poem is nature long-lasting ability and resilience. The imagery in lines such as “eyes washed by a new rain” and “a jubilant thunder flings open the skygate,” conveys a sense of hope and restoration. In the beginning of this part, the music and background of the poem turns festive, illustrating the joy and life in the rebirth of nature. All what has been left to perish, the sun, our earth, the wind, all return with new vigour and strength. The structure of the poems also contributes to their impact. The transition from elegiac tones in the earlier stanzas to a more celebratory and uplifting mood towards the end mirrors the shift from destruction to renewal. Therefore, the interplay between despair and hope underscores the cyclical nature of life and the possibility of redemption through environmental consciousness and conservation efforts.

Furthermore, the mood of *Harvest call* shifts from celebrating nature's beauty to mourning its decline. This decline is caused by the absurd use of nature's resources. The poet repeatedly asks, "Where are they?" referring to the disappearance of the abundant harvests: "Where are they/the yam pyramids which challenged the sun in busy barns?" This sudden shift in tone expresses concern over environmental changes or the loss of traditional farming practices. The "yam pyramids" symbolize past prosperity, and their absence suggests that the natural world is no longer as bountiful as it once was. Despite this lament, the poem ends on a hopeful note: "Uncountable seeds lie sleeping in the womb of earth awaiting the quickening tap of our waking finger." The use of the phrase "sleeping seeds" implies that nature's potential is still present, waiting to be revived. The "waking finger" suggests human responsibility in restoring the land's former beauty. This final message encourages a renewed appreciation for nature and a commitment to preserving its richness.

4.2. The Beauty of Nature

Niyi Osundare eulogises the nature illustrating its beauty and uses. This is expressed in the first poem *Earth*. Earth is presented as both the beginning and the end, which encompasses everything on earth, living or dead. It provides sustenance for mankind and other entities. It is the "Temporary basement and lasting roof/ breadbasket and compost bed." The poem celebrates the richness and vitality of nature by depicting

its diverse elements through vivid imagery and metaphorical expressions. The phrase “first clayey coyness and last alluvial joy” highlights the transformative nature of the earth, from its raw, unformed state to its fertile and nurturing aspect. The references to “breadbasket and compost bed” further emphasize nature’s cycle of sustenance and renewal. The second stanza presents a striking contrast between solid and fluid elements: “Rocks and rivers / Muds and mountains.” This juxtaposition reflects the vastness and diversity of the natural world. The “Silence of the twilight sea” and “Echoes of the noonsome tide” capture the rhythmic flow of time, illustrating nature’s balance between stillness and movement. The poet uses celestial imagery, describing the “Milk of mellowing moon” and “Fire of tropical hearth” to depict the nurturing and powerful forces of nature. The final lines, “Spouse of the roving sky / Virgin of a thousand offsprings,” personify nature as both a partner to the sky and a source of endless life. This dual image portrays nature’s interconnectedness with the elements and its role in creation and regeneration.

Forest Echoes expresses an emotional connection between man and nature. This connection is described as “A green desire, perfumed memories / a leafy longing lure my wanderer feet / to this forest of a thousand wonders.” The imagery of smell further describes nostalgic feeling the poet develops in his fascination of the beauty of the forest. “leafy longing” is used to suggest that the persona has a deep connection with nature that it evokes his senses and his memories of the past. The metaphor “forest of a thousand

wonders” further emphasizes on beauty of nature. Another relationship in the description of nature’s beauty exists in the line “The rain have kept their time... (Earth has (finally) won the love of the sky).” The relationship discussed is that between the sky and the earth. The suggestion of this relationship is achieved through personification as the harmonious reunion, where the rain, representing the sky, nourishes the earth, reinforcing the theme of renewal.

Nature is also depicted as ever active that even “from the scarcity sun,” the “Trees bob” and the leaves grab.” The beauty of nature must survive, hence the the trees and leaves are not passive recipients of sunlight but “grab” and “bob,” suggesting determination to survive despite the limited sun. In addition, in showing the relationship in the interaction of natural forces, “Bouncing boughs interlock overhead / like wristwrestlers straining muscularly” employs the representation of human activities through the use. This struggle as depicted through personification and simile portrays the happy ambience that surrounds nature. Man’s use of stories, whether true or not, beautifies the existence of nature in literature. The forest floor is described as “the compost carpet of darkling forests / where terror grows on trembling leaves / natured by lore / nurtured by fairy truths.” Nature is described as possessing a dual nature, that while it reflects beauty, it is also filled with mysteries, making the beauty more interesting to be appreciated by man. Therefore, these myths and stories are meant to shape man’s perception of nature. Consequently, the death and birth of nature is considered inevitable

like all living elements. But, the essence of nature preservation is to achieve that even in its death, it contributes to the ecosystem. The juxtaposition of “coffin” and “cot” symbolizes this inevitability. Despite, the possible death of nature, it has impact on man. Similarly, the lines “every toemark on the footpath / every fingerprint on every bark / the ropy climbers flung breathlessly / from tree to tree” emphasize the lasting impact of every movement in nature, showing that every creature and plant contributes to the ecosystem.

Furthermore, the beauty of nature does not exist only in terms of ambience, it also exists in the survival and dominance in the natural order: “Behold, too, these preyers / in the cannibal calvary of the forest: / the iroko which swallows the shrub, / the hyena which harries the hare, / the elephant which tramples the grass.” The lines reveal the hierarchy of nature, where stronger beings consume or overpower the weaker ones. “Cannibal cavalry” suggests that predation involves violence as it is an essential part of nature. However, the poet reassures the reader with the lines “Tell them all the calm behind the claw / Tell them the sun / which succeeds the night.” It is notable that the poet discusses the beauty of nature through more than one method; the beauty of nature is reflected in both the bad side and the good side. Natural order which builds up the existence of nature cannot be done away with. Therefore while the poet may reflect the struggle and survival, he also reflects the concept of peace and renewal. The alliteration in “calm behind the claw” and “sun ... succeeds” strengthens the contrast between destruction and restoration. Hence, in the final section, the poem turns toward memory and reflection: “Memory, /

loud whisper of yester-voices / confluence of unbroken rivers / lower your horse of remembrance / Let me dismount.” Thus, memory is personified as a powerful, flowing force, much like a river that never ceases. The speaker wishes to “dismount” from this journey through remembrance, indicating a desire to momentarily step away from the weight of the past.

In *The Rock Rose to Meet Me*, there is a clear capture of nature through the portrayal of rocks, trees and other nature elements. By personifying these elements, nature is brought to existence.

The rocks rose to meet me

Like passionate lovers on long awaited tryst

The rock rose to meet me

Their peaks cradled in ageless mist (p, 12).

The poem is introduced with the personification of rocks as affectionate beings. The above lines describe the beauty and power of nature through this imagery of rocks presenting nature as a physical entity which can interact with the world. This interaction is depicted in a hug like fashion. This interaction immediately illustrate that the rocks as more than just lifeless stones; they are filled with warmth and energy. They are imbued with the beauty of nature. Furthermore, the poet emphasizes their grandeur and presence:

Tall rocks, short rocks
sharp rocks, round rocks
some with staid steps
of war-wise warriors
others with the gaysome gait
of pandering pilgrims (p, 14).

Different rocks formations mentioned reflect the diverse nature of nature, thus showcasing its beauty in various forms. The different rocks also possess various forms of interaction and approach to the persona. While some march with the form of a warrior, others tread slowly like “pilgrims.” The beauty of nature is reflected in this diversity. The phrase “eloquent in their deafening silence” demonstrates that, although the rocks do not possess human articulators, their presence communicates to man in a profound way. Hence, when nature is been exploited, its depreciation is a way of asking man to desist from their explorations which involve technology.

The poem also describes the harmonious relationship between the sky and the land. The sky responds to the presence of the rocks in a way that makes nature seem interconnected. The poet writes:

So saying...

The trees swaying their leafy heads

In the choreography of his moving lips

So saying, the sun lifted the wrinkle of clouds

From the face of a frowning sky (P, 12-13).

Elements of nature are described to possess emotions making the reader relate with nature easier. The use of personification in this part is to draw the reader and the poet towards noticing the beauty of nature as it expresses various emotions. Additionally, the poet describes the way sunlight reflects off the rocks: “balls of the winking sun,” suggesting that the sun’s rays dance on the surface of the rocks, making them appear as though they are winking or communicating with the sky. Such descriptions bring nature to life, reinforcing the idea that the earth and sky exist in a mutual, animated relationship. Trees also play a significant role in the poem’s depiction of nature. They are shown as responsive and engaged with the movement of the world around them: “The trees swaying their leafy heads / in the choreography of his moving lips” describing the trees as taking part in a dance, moving in harmony with the voice of the rocks. ²This personification further strengthens the idea that all elements of nature are alive and interconnected.

Oroole came next

His ancient voice tremulous

In the morning air

Harmattans here whip with the flaying fury

of a slavemaster..." (p, 13).

“Oroole” is the name of a rock in Ikere whom the poet acknowledges in his eulogy of natural elements. From the rocks, he moves on to describe the presence of the harmattan winds to illustrate that the ability of nature to be helpful to man can be contrasted with its destructive nature on man. This does not reduce the beauty of nature, but its destructive aspect enhances the importance and beauty of nature.

In addition, nature is presented as timeless. The poet presents nature as something that has existed far beyond human history, carrying the marks of the past. This is beautifully expressed in the lines: “I saw the invisible toe-marks of Esidálè / indelible on the spine-less column of rocks / unrubbable like a birthmark / older than God.” The lines suggest that the rocks hold ancient footprints that cannot be erased. The phrase “older than God” emphasizes the eternal nature of the earth, indicating that nature existed long before human civilization and will continue to exist long after. This description adds a sense of mystery and reverence to the natural world, making it seem sacred and powerful.

Similarly, *Harvestcall* reflects the connection between nature and man through a portrayal of a bountiful traditional landscape. This also illustrates the beauty of nature through imagery and traditional references. The poet uses rhythmic language and cultural symbolism to highlight the abundance and harmony found in nature. However, the poem also expresses sorrow for the decline of this natural wealth, urging a return to the prosperity of the past. One of the most striking aspects of the poem is the way it describes nature's abundance. The opening lines announce "Iyánfowórògí," as a place where nature flourishes,

...where, garnished in green
 pounded yam rested its feted arms
 on the back of stooping stakes...
 where yams, ripe and rand,
 waged a noisy war against the knife...
 ... where the yam wore the crown
 in the reign of swollen roots
 ... where a tempting yam sauntered
 out of the selling tray... (p, 17-18)

The poet employs personification to reveal the communicative ability of “yam” with the geographical area. The fertility of the earth exists as a result of the location. Therefore, he enumerates yam, corn, cotton and beans as resulting from the fertility of the land. So, one sees “fattening yams” with the bubbling desire to reveal itself through “a dough of contention smooth down / the rugged anger of hunger.” While “garnished in green” suggests beautiful vegetation, “pounded yam” resting on stakes connects the natural world with the cultural practice of farming and food preparation. This connection between nature and human farming activities reflects the fertility of nature as well as the beauty that this fertility entails. At “Iyánfowòrògí,” “valiant heaps cracked, finally, from the unquenchable zeal of fattening yams,” thus portraying nature as active and effective. Furthermore, the poet also introduces “Oke Eniju,” a place where corn grows in abundance,

...where coy cobs rocked lustily

in the loin of swaying stalks...

[where] the sky was a riot of pollen grains

[where] corn cobs flashed their milky teeth (p, 180).

In this part, the corn, “coy” and “rocking lustily,” dances in the wind happily. This mood presents the natural world as lively and beautiful and bustling with energy.

The reference to “tasselled joy” refers to the happy mood and sensation present in the fields through the existence of the fully matured male inflorescence. Another place, “Ogbese Odò,” is replete with the abundance of cotton flourishes. Here,

where cotton pods, lips duly parted

by December’s sun, draped busy farmsteads

in a harvest of smiles...

...earth’s wardrobe learnt a garb

to every season (p, 18-19).

The parting of the cotton pod’ “lips” beneath the sun is to reveal its hidden beauty. The opening under the sun reveals that natural elements like the sun helps to preserve and reveal the beauty of agricultural produce and treea. The cycle of life is not what is in question, rather it is the preservation of this cycle, which involves death and birth, to ensure that nature does not totally decline. The phrase “harvest of smiles” portrays that the preservation of the land, but it belongs to the people, reinforcing the theme of nature’s generosity.

4.3. Exploration of Environmental Decline through the use of Literary Devices

Niyi Osundare's *The Eye of the Earth* celebrates the beauty of nature through its use of imagery, personification, metaphor, repetition and traditional symbolism. The poet's use of rhythmic language and cultural symbolism further highlights the abundance and beauty of nature.

Poems such as *Harvest call*, *Ours to Plough, not to Plunder*, *The Rock Rose to Meet Me*, uses imagery, personification, contrast, repetition and metaphor, the poem effectively explores environmental degradation and express sorrow for the decline of this natural wealth, urging a return to the prosperity of the past.

4.3.1. The use of Imagery.

Imagery refers to description with the use descriptive or figurative language. Imagery is replete in the opening lines where we are introduced to "Iyántowórògí", a place described as where nature flourishes in beauty "garnished in green pounded yam rested its feted arms on the back of stooping stakes." Here, imagery depicts that "Iyántowórògí" is a land full of life describing its lush vegetation and connection to the natural world with the cultural practice of farming and food preparation. The imagery of *Ours to Plough, Not to Plunder*, reflects the difference in between what was to be of nature and what is of nature. The concept of environmental destruction is described in an

ideal environment where “wheatfields raise their breadsome hands / to the ripening sun” suggesting that with proper care, the land can be productive. Further use of imagery in the line “rough unhappy dust” implies that nature’s potential is being lost due to exploitation.

4.3.2. The use of Contrast

In addition, contrast in *Harvest Call* adds to the loss of natural beauty in the poem. The poet laments the decline of nature in the line and question, “Where are they the yam pyramids which challenged the sun in busy barns?” “Where are they?” The imagery of “yam pyramids” aids the illustration that there was once agricultural glory, and the absence of this glory demonstrates environmental decline. Repetition also aids the emphasis on “where,” further emphasising that these elements of nature exist in a geographical location, and as such, creates a sense of loss and decline. It is revealed that where these resources ought to be, they are found missing. In addition, *The Rock Rose to Meet Me* skilfully contrasts scenes of natural beauty with those of environmental destruction. For instance, “Behold, cornfields flourish around your foot / elephant grass fallows the land / for unborn harvests” suggests an area replete with life and beauty, which is threatened by human exploitations: “With the gold let us turn hovels into havens / paupers into people (not princes)”

4.3.3. The use of Personification

Harvest call uses personification to emphasize the various characteristics of nature using human attributes. It also reflects the damage done to nature. In a place called *Ogbese Odò*, cotton pods possess “lips duly parted by December’s sun,” stating that elements of nature participate with other elements of nature in harvest. However, this participation is later disrupted as the poet mourns the disappearance of various crops “Where are they the pumpkins which caressed earthbreast like mammary burdens?”

The various human characteristics bequeathed to Earth in *Ours to Plough, not to Plunder* reflects the nurturing quality of nature, making its decline feel more obvious. The personification of the earth in the opening lines also contributes to the theme of degradation: “The earth is ours to plough and plant / the hoe is her bristle / the dibble her dimple.” The “bristle” and “dimple,” the earth is described to have, portrays it as having the ability to be nurtured or harmed. Further, the lines: “Let legumes clothe the naked bosom/of shivering mounds and swing/its headward breasts” emphasizes the vulnerability of the earth. The phrase “naked bosom” refers to nature been stripped of its natural vegetation. The word “shivering” conveys an image of nature in fear of abandonment, or been ill as a result of abandonment or exploitation.

Another clear reference to environmental exploitation is found in:

Let water spring
 from earth's unfathomed fountain
 let gold shine
 from her deep unseeable mines (p, 46).

These lines reveal that nature possesses unlimited amount of resources to go round everyone in the world, rather than man taking more than what they need as a result of greed. However, environmental crises such as water and land pollution are as a result of this uncontrolled extraction of natural resources, a major cause of environmental degradation today.

4.3.4. The use of Metaphors

Metaphors enrich the poem by giving deeper meaning to natural elements. Hence, the phrase from *Harvest Call*, “The elephant hand which hits the haughty man in the head / and his testicles leak to the wondering earth” suggests that nature has the power and ability to humble those who exploit it. Similarly, the depiction of the sky as “frowning face” and the sun as “lifting the wrinkle of clouds” presents nature in human terms while in use as a metaphor for anger and unhappiness. Another metaphor is seen in: “The world may sprout a hand / of equal fingers,” where the poet imagines an ideal world where balance and equality are achieved, reflecting the use of Marxist ideals in the interaction between man and nature and man and man.

The title, *Ours to Plough, Not to Plunder* is already a request asking man not to misuse or “plunder” the earth. It also suggests that the exploitation of earth is considered robbing the earth of its beauty and natural resources. The word “plunder” is a metaphor of the destruction caused by greed, which aligns with the idea that environmental degradation occurs when humans prioritize short-term gain over long-term sustainability. This metaphor sets the tone for the poem and is reflected throughout the poem. One of the strongest indications of environmental destruction is found in the lines: “Our earth is an unopened grainhouse, / a bustling barn in some far, uncharted jungle, / a distant gem in a rough unhappy dust.” The phrase “unopened grainhouse” is a metaphor for the earth’s untapped resources as they remain unused, mismanaged or “unopened.” The resources of the earth are considered “a distant gem” which lay “in a rough unhappy dust” demonstrating the consequences of environmental neglect. The word “dust” symbolizes barrenness and destruction, and emptiness reflecting how exploitation and mismanagement has turned a once fertile land into wasteland.

4.4. Discussion of Findings

This study has examined the ways in which Niyi Osundare’s *The Eye of the Earth* portrays the relationship between humans and the environment, particularly in the context of environmental degradation. Through an eco-critical approach, the analysis has

revealed significant themes that highlight both the beauty of nature and the consequences of its exploitation.

One of the key findings is Osundare's depiction of humanity's role in environmental destruction. The poet portrays human activities such as deforestation, industrialization, and unsustainable agricultural practices as major contributors to the degradation of the natural world. In poems such as *Ours to Plough, Not to Plunder* and *Our Earth Will Not Die*, he warns against the reckless destruction of nature, emphasizing the long-term consequences of human insensitivity to the environment. This essay asserts that while modernization and technological advancements are beneficial, their use comes at the expense of the environment.

Additionally, the Osundare captures the beauty and values of nature, using imagery that celebrates the magnificence of forests, rivers, and landscapes. In *The Rock Rose to Meet Me* and *Harvest Call*, the poet uses visual imagery to highlight the beauty of the earth and the effects of human exploitation. The use of metaphors demonstrates the connection between humans and their surroundings, as it improves the interrelation between humans, reminding readers of the need to preserve and appreciate nature.

The poet's use of literary devices further enhances the thematic concerns of environmental beauty and destruction. Through personification, Osundare gives nature a voice, lamenting the harm inflicted by human activities. His use of symbolism,

particularly in *Earth, Forest Echoes*, reflects nature's resilience despite ongoing exploitation. The contrast between images of a thriving, untainted environment and one ravaged by human greed serves as a powerful warning against negligence. The poet also employs repetition and rhetorical questions to engage readers and prompt reflection on the state of the environment.

Another crucial finding is the interplay between leadership issues and environmental degradation. The study reveals that Osundare does not merely attribute ecological destruction to individual actions but also critiques leadership decisions to influence the behaviour towards the environment. Corruption, lack of policy implementation, and economic greed are key factors that increase the decline of nature. This illustrates the government of post-colonial Africa, where the government often prioritizes their gains over national development.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Niyi Osundare's *The Eye of the Earth* serves as a powerful literary commentary, praising both the beauty of nature and condemning human's arbitrary use of nature. This is achieved through the use of eco-criticism as theoretical framework. Osundare's poetry reflects the need for environmental consciousness, drawing attention to the reckless decline of nature and environment, often linked to human recklessness and modernization.

The poet's vivid descriptions and rich use of literary devices, such as imagery, symbolism, and personification, bring to life the splendor of nature while simultaneously lamenting its decline. Poems such as *Earth*, *Forest Echoes*, and *Harvest Call* highlight nature's inherent value, while works like *Ours to Plough, Not to Plunder* and *Our Earth Will Not Die* emphasize the urgent as the damages to nature are mostly irreversible damage that results from exploitation.

Ultimately, *The Eye of the Earth* reveals how poetry influences environmental advocacy, and socio-political critique. Osundare's work remains relevant in contemporary scenarios, where climate change, deforestation, and environmental decline continue to affect the existence of humanity. Through this essay, it is evident that literature is a medium to

create awareness and cause change, emphasizing that without the preservation of nature and the environment, respect for nature has not been achieved.

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