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Anthropomorphism as a Tool for Environmental Discourse in Niyi Osundare's Selected Poetry Collections

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Abstract

Environmentally conscious African writers are devising ways to push ecological concerns in their works. This paper examines the aesthetic of anthropomorphism in selected poems of Osundare to understand how the poet imbues non-human nature with human qualities. Osundare's poetry collections, *Green: Sighs of Our Planet* (Osundare 2021) and *City Without People: The Katrina Poems* (Osundare 2011) are purposefully selected to explore how the poet employs the aesthetics of humanization to depict the interconnectedness between human actions and environmental conditions. The theoretical framework of ecocriticism, which links literary works and environmental concerns, is deployed in the analysis of the selected poems. The study finds that Osundare leverages the African cultural belief in the spirituality of non-human nature to invest nature elements with human qualities. It concludes that the selected poet's engagement with the aesthetic of anthropomorphism enables the depiction of a humanized environment to bring empathy, emphasizing the need for sustainable environmental practices to mitigate climate change and preserve biodiversity.

Keywords: Anthropomorphism, Aesthetics, Humanization, Environment, African culture.

Introduction

A great number of critics have discussed Osundare's works from different perspectives, such as how his works present inherent environmental and social issues,

deploy Yoruba oral aesthetics, political satire, etc. However, existing ecocritical analyses have not yet thoroughly examined how Osundare employs anthropomorphism to emphasize the human-nature relationship, juxtapose human exploitation with environmental exploitation, and highlight the effects of ecological despoliation. This represents a critical gap in Osundare's scholarship, and the present study fills this gap by focusing on anthropomorphism as a literary tool in his environmental poetry. This research examines how Osundare employs anthropomorphism as a literary tool for environmental discourse in the poetry collections *City Without People: The Katrina Poems* (Osundare, 2011) and *Green: Sighs of Our Ailing Planet* (Osundare, 2021), giving the first thorough analysis of this style and a unique perspective on how his poetry bridges human and ecological concerns.

Contemporary African poets have had to contend with the social and political problems besetting Africa's landscape by using poetry as a suitable medium to distil the presentation and portrayal of these social maladies in their work. Some of the prominent poets who have emerged as a dominant force in contemporary African poetry, particularly within the context of the environment are Tanure Ojaide, Ogaga Ifowodo, Nnimmo Bassey, Gabriel Okara, among others, of which Niyi Osundare is a dominant voice. His poetry has attracted a wide range of scholarly attention, as perceived in The People's Poet: Emerging Perspectives on Niyi Osundare, edited by Na'Allah (2003). Osundare stands out among African poets for his consistent commitment to addressing social and environmental issues in his poetry. His poems provide insights into the exploitation of the environment by oppressive systems and the consequences of such exploitation for both human societies and the natural world. They also serve as a reminder of the urgent need to confront the looming environmental crises that threaten the Earth's ecosystems and biodiversity. Through his poetic engagements, Osundare warns his readers about the potential disaster that could befall humanity if urgent action is not taken to address environmental degradation (Oyeleye, 2022; Oladipo and Aliyu, 2025).

Osundare's poetry has been revealing and reflecting the connection between humans and the environment by ushering in the beginning of a new poetic revolution in Africa, a situation that is described as the transition of Modern African/Nigerian poetry from the loins of Euro-modernist poetry. This is deliberately innovative in the use of language, thereby positioning Osundare's works to stand out among others (Oluwabukola & Nureni, 2021). This is because he adapts the local language and traditional speech patterns as his style of poetry to show his devotion to the exploited African peasant (Shaguy & Alo, 2023; Oladipo & Aliyu, 2025). Osundare's works have also been revealed as a poet's expertise in handling sexual references in the collections despite traditional and sociolinguistic norms. Osundare devised a unique style to use expressions that are considered taboo in public (Oladipo & Aliyu, 2025). Dare (2005), in an article, Sexual discourse in Niyi Osundare's Poetry: A Sociolinguistic Reading, refers to Osundare as a new generational poet. While rating three of Osundare's works, *Midlife* (1993), *Waiting Laughters* (1990) and *The Eye of the Earth* (1986) as his most mature and vintage works. In this article, Osundare is praised for the strategy of mastering the use of ambiguities and the Yoruba convention, which allows users of the language to mention sex organs only as they are related to animals and material things. This strategy allows Osundare's

poetry to adopt a unique language style as well as scale through the tragedy of being charged with containing instances of obscenities.

Similarly, Ogunrotimi and Afolayan (2018) explore Osundare's style of poetry in an article titled, *The Artist and His Art: An Approach to Selected Poems of Niyi Osundare*. They posit that Osundare's creative style and language use are a result of the fusion of his cultural background and early exposure to nature, a situation that is constantly reflected in his method for expressing his opinion about the environment and society. Basically, the article examines Osundare's habitual usage of proverbs as well as the theme of politics and nature in his poems. It concludes that Osundare recognizes poetry as a unique art form that is capable of driving social change; therefore, he uses the common resources around him to simplify his poems and drive home his points.

Reflecting on ecological themes, Alabi (2021), in an article titled, Between the Praise and Defense of Nature: An Ecocritical Discourse of Niyi Osundare and Tanure Ojaide's Eco-Poetry discuss how Osundare's poetry, regarding *Eye of the Earth* (1986) celebrates nature and exposes the looming danger in the face of overexploitation of natural resources as well as environmental despoliation. The article describes how Osundare uses elements of nature as symbols for the exploration of life and activities that surround farming and vegetation, emphasizing sustainable activities that can reconcile humanity with nature. Similarly, Charles (2007), in an article titled, *The Possibilities of Hope: Africa in Niyi Osundare's Poetry*, points out that Osundare's poems carry too much hope as though he is untouched by the realities of recent times. Using Africa as a center point, Charles asserts that despair is the order of the day as hope looks unrealistic; however, he mentions that Osundare's poetry reflects a sacred type of hope. Concerning Osundare's Waiting Laughter, Edomi states that the poem focuses on the woes of Africa, however, hinting at a sign of hope for a better tomorrow.

Over the years, literary scholars have taken up the responsibility to explore issues pertaining to environmental sustainability as they investigate the interaction between man and the environment as well as the impact of the activities of man on the environment (Aliyu, 2018; Dewi, 2017; Oladipo and Aliyu, 2025). Discussing these issues by focusing on the anthropomorphic aesthetics in Osundare's texts will foster a better understanding and a clearer outlook of the effects of environmental despoliation. Maurya et al. (2020) identify the effects of environmental depletion to be pollution, biodiversity loss, animal extinction, global warming, etc. They advise that humans should protect the environment, as most of the human population depends directly or indirectly on activities based on natural resources for their livelihood (Enukora, 2021). To achieve an ecologically balanced environment, there must be a mutual and unstrained relationship between humans and nature (Oyeleke, 2022). This has prompted some literary writers, such as Helon Habila, Niyi Osundare, Tanure Ojaide, Nnimmo Bassey, etc, to take advantage of the power of literature in its many forms to create awareness for environmental sustainability. Among these authors, selected poetry collections by Niyi Osundare have been chosen as the focal point for this research. While recognizing the damage done to the ecosystem, Osundare celebrates the richness of biodiversity on planet earth and blames greedy political leaders and money-blind individuals for destroying the earth

(Nwagbara, 2013). His poems project the disasters brought upon the earth because of environmental exploitation, and he does not fail to express the notion of hope and restoration (Shaguy & Alo, 2023). Therefore, the prospects of reconciliation between man and nature are perceived in his poems (Oyeleke, 2022). This study explores how Osundare puts life and action into nature such that the readers can see, feel, and hear the situation of the ailing environment. It will project information about how humans can reconcile with nature in order to ensure environmental preservation and to foster a balanced ecosystem.

Theoretical Framework

This study addresses the use of anthropomorphic imagery as a tool for environmental discourse in the selected collections of Osundare's poetry using the theoretical lens of ecocriticism. Ecocriticism, as a literary theory, provides a valuable lens through which the complex relationship between literature and the environment can be examined; it is rooted in the interconnectedness of human culture and the natural world (Oppermann, 1999). Ecocriticism offers insights into how literary texts reflect and shape attitudes towards the environment. Through this approach, literature is understood not only as a product of human creativity but also as a medium through which environmental values and concerns are articulated and negotiated (Bate, 2000).

The origins of ecocriticism can be traced back to seminal works of Williams (1973), *The Country and the City*, and Meeker's (1997), *The Comedy of Survival: Literary Ecology and Play Ethics*, which explored the intersection of literature, culture, and the environment (Gladwin, 2017). These early writings laid the foundation for the emergence of ecocriticism as a distinct field of inquiry, highlighting how Western societies have historically marginalized nature in favor of human-centric worldviews. Williams (1973) in *Literature and Ecology: An expert in ecocriticism* played an important role in defining the scope and objectives of ecocriticism as a scholarly endeavor. Rueckert's definition of ecocriticism as the application of ecology and ecological concepts to the study of literature draws special attention to the interdisciplinary nature of the field, drawing connections between literary texts and ecological systems (Diwakar, 2024). Building upon Rueckert's foundational work, scholars like Simon Estok and Scott Slovic have expanded the scope of ecocriticism to encompass a wide range of literary texts and critical approaches. There has been an emphasis on ecocriticism's commitment to effecting change by analyzing the representation and function of the natural environment in literary and cultural discourse (Estok, 2001; Janjua, 2022). On the other hand, ecocriticism also highlights the inclusive nature which can encompass both explicitly environmental texts and those that may not initially appear to engage with ecological themes (Garrard, 2014; Slovic, 1999).

At its focus, ecocriticism seeks to interrogate how literature shapes and reflects human-nature relationships. This can involve examining literary representations of landscapes, ecosystems, and animals, as well as exploring the ethical and ideological dimensions of these portrayals. Ecocritics may also analyze how literature contributes to broader environmental discourses and social movements, influencing attitudes towards conservation, sustainability, and

environmental justice. One of the key strengths of ecocriticism lies in its ability to foster interdisciplinary dialogue and collaboration (Hebbar et al., 2024). By drawing on insights from fields such as ecology, environmental science, philosophy, and cultural studies, ecocritics are able to develop refined interpretations of literary texts that take into account ecological contexts and implications. Bell defines ecocriticism as "the study of literature and the environment from an interdisciplinary point of view where all sciences come together to analyze the environment and brainstorm possible solutions for the correction of the contemporary environmental situation" (Qtd in Dobie, 2012, p. 239). On the surface, this definition may look overtly scientific, but a critical understanding of it will reveal that it is the responsibility of the sciences to carry out research and analysis on the environment, while the result of such analysis will, in turn, provide information that literary writers and critics can draw content from.

Environmentalism in Contemporary Eco-Literature

Environmentalism in literature mirrors the increasing concern surrounding ecological issues and the profound impact of human activities on the planet (Dasht Peyma, 2025; Schneider-Mayerson et al., 2023). It explores the complex relationship between humans and the natural world, often advocating for environmental conservation, sustainability, and a deeper appreciation of the interconnectedness of entities in the ecosystem (Schneider-Mayerson et al., 2023). Environmentalism is a concept that allows literary authors to address several key environmental concerns, such as climate change, deforestation, biodiversity loss, pollution, and the overexploitation of natural resources (Oladipo and Aliyu, 2025; Shah et al., 2025). The growing significance of environmental issues in literature, particularly since the 1980s, highlights a shift in how literature reflects societal awareness of ecological challenges (Laheg, 2024; Singh, 2024).

A central theme in eco-literature is ecological awareness, which involves understanding the interconnectedness of all living organisms and the intricate balance of ecosystems. Many contemporary eco-literary works emphasize the consequences of disrupting this balance and advocate for a deeper appreciation of the natural world. Through detailed descriptions of landscapes, ecosystems, and biodiversity, authors often highlight the complexity of nature while simultaneously warning about the dangers of environmental degradation (Dewi, 2017). Ecological awareness is critical in fostering a sense of responsibility toward the environment. Authors use their narratives to explore the intricate relationships between species, ecosystems, and the broader environment, demonstrating the far-reaching consequences of ecological disruption (Dasht Peyma, 2025; Wood, 2019). By portraying these dynamics, eco-literature not only raises awareness but also inspires readers to reflect on their role in protecting the planet (Schneider-Mayerson et al., 2023).

One of the most urgent themes addressed in contemporary eco-literature is climate change. Climate change narratives often explore the impacts of global warming on ecosystems, communities, and individuals, presenting imagined futures where the consequences of environmental neglect are fully realized. These works aim to raise awareness about the

pressing need for climate action and to offer a glimpse of the potential outcomes if the current trajectory of environmental degradation continues unchecked. According to Garrard (2004), one of the effects of climate change is that "From now on, there will be nothing truly wild, and a child born now will never know a natural summer, a natural autumn, winter or spring" (p. 70). This simply means that the earth is in danger and in the future, we may no longer have earth as we used to know it. In many cases, these narratives go beyond environmental concerns and delve into the social, economic, and political ramifications of climate change. Communities displaced by rising sea levels, extreme weather events, and resource shortages are common themes, emphasizing the human cost of climate-related disasters. Through these narratives, authors encourage readers to confront the reality of climate change and consider the long-term consequences of inaction. Biodiversity and conservation are also recurring environmental discourses in eco-literature. Authors often celebrate the beauty of biodiversity as they echo their concerns over its rapid decline due to human activities such as deforestation, pollution, and habitat destruction (Lahtinen & Löytty, 2024). In many eco-literary works, characters are engaged in conservation efforts, advocating for the protection of endangered species and ecosystems. The loss of biodiversity is a pressing concern in contemporary eco-literature, as it threatens the stability of ecosystems and the well-being of future generations. Works that focus on biodiversity often emphasize the intrinsic value of preserving the variety of life on Earth, not only for ecological stability but also for cultural, aesthetic, and spiritual reasons. By highlighting the importance of conservation, these works inspire readers to consider their role in protecting the planet's rich biodiversity (Digvijay, 2024).

Conceptualizing the Aesthetic of Anthropomorphism

The idea of anthropomorphism stems from the fact that humans often confer their humanity on non-human entities to understand the world of other entities aside from humans. Rajsi (2017) defines anthropomorphism as "the attribution of human traits, emotions, and intentions to non-human entities" (p. 774). Anthropomorphism is the attribution of human characteristics to non-human entities, it is a literary device that authors use to evoke empathy and deepen reader engagement (Urquiza-Haas & Kotrschal, 2015). This technique can bring abstract concepts to life, allowing readers to connect emotionally with non-human characters, objects, or natural phenomena (Wood, 2019). By endowing non-human elements with human traits, authors bridge the gap between readers and the unfamiliar, fostering a sense of understanding and compassion (Karlsson, 2012; Kováč, 2020). Anthropomorphism is a relational approach wherein non-human entities are imbued with human-like characteristics. Essentially, anthropomorphism represents a human tendency to relate to the non-human world, whether it involves animals, plants, objects, or natural events as though these entities possess human attributes (Epley, 2018). In juvenile literature, anthropomorphism serves to foster a connection between young readers and fictional characters, facilitating the learning of social and moral lessons subtly (Anderson, 2021). Although anthropomorphism has ancient roots, its literary impact is akin to the discourse of sensibility, which allows authors to address delicate topics gently, thereby evoking an aesthetic response from readers (Adhuze, 2022).

Through the use of anthropomorphic imagery for environmental discourse, poets make non-human entities in the environment more relatable and accessible to readers. They can transform abstract concepts into tangible experiences, fostering a deeper emotional connection and enhancing thematic exploration in poetry. Similarly, attributing human characteristics to natural or abstract elements helps poets to explore complex ideas and themes in a less complex manner. This technique enables poets to delve into the interconnectedness of humanity and nature. Anthropomorphic representations in the African context reflect spiritual symbolism of the representation of natural entities. Akano (2021), while discussing nature's animism in Niger Delta poetry, posits that, "There is also the symbolic presentation of nature as mythical and mystical, which man must harmoniously relate to and idolize for spiritual ministration." An example of this description can be deduced among the worshippers of the *Osun* River in Nigeria, who refer to River *Osun* as a woman with so many powers, one of which is the power to make a barren woman conceive. As a result, the worshippers at the *Osun* grove extoll the river *Osun,* attributing to the river the qualities of a great mother, the ability to be enraged, and the ability to be appeased. However, Aliyu (2018) describes humanizing non-human entities as a psychological attempt to understand and interact with non-human entities in the environment, which can be used as a strategy for environmental advocacy, an idea that is the center point of Osundare's poetry.

Methodology

This research explores the aesthetics of anthropomorphism in the selected poetry collections of Niyi Osundare. It outlines the qualitative research design, data collection strategies, including author interview and textual analysis. It also involves the theoretical frameworks of ecocriticism and anthropomorphism as a guiding tool for textual analysis. The approach is organized into four subsections of research design, data collection, data analysis, and theoretical framework. Together, these components ensure a rigorous examination of Osundare's poetry through close reading, supported by both direct insight from the poet and relevant scholarship, to address the research questions. The methodology demonstrates how the research problem is approached and why this design is appropriate for exploring human-environment connections in literature and the social themes in the selected texts.

The research design is delimited to two selected poetry collections of Osundare, *City Without People: The Katrina Poems* (Osundare 2011), and *Green: Sighs of Our Planet* (Osundare 2021). These collections were purposively selected because each foregrounds human-environment relationships. Focusing on these two works by a single author enables an in-depth case study of that author's style and thematic development. This design choice is strengthened by the fact that Osundare is renowned as a leading African eco-poet, often focusing on both the human and non-human dimensions of planet earth in his poetry collections. Concentrating on his work, therefore, offers rich data for examining anthropomorphism in environmental poetry. Another key feature of the research design is the incorporation of an interview with Niyi Osundare as a data source. Including the poet's commentary adds a qualitative dimension of authorial insight to complement textual analysis.

In literary research, if the author is contemporary and accessible, interviewing them can illuminate the intentions or inspirations behind their work. After obtaining ethical clearance and the poet's consent, a semi-structured interview was conducted through a videoconference. The interview focused on Osundare's early life in the African environment, his reflections about anthropomorphic imagery and environmental issues, his creative process, and his views on the role of poetry in advocating for nature. The direct engagement with the author helped ground the analysis in the poet's perspective, adding credibility and depth.

The primary data for this study are the texts of two poetry collections by Osundare, *City Without People: The Katrina Poems* (Osundare 2011), and *Green: Sighs of Our Planet* (Osundare 2021). These collections collectively contain poems that serve as the units of analysis. The poems themselves were treated as textual data, from which examples of anthropomorphic language, imagery, and themes were identified. Each collection was obtained in print form, ensuring that all poems can be read and referenced in their entirety. In collecting poem texts, careful attention was paid to bibliographic details and the integrity of the content. All poems were read multiple times and annotated for instances of anthropomorphism, such as animals, earth, or abstract natural forces described with human attributes, and for thematic elements that relate to environmental advocacy or social commentary. Passages where Osundare directly addresses nature or allows non-human entities to "speak" were highlighted, as these are central to the aesthetic under study. The poems were also noted for imagery, tone, and emotive language that suggest how the reader is meant to feel about nature, for instance, pity for a "wounded" earth or anger at those who harm it. These annotated texts form the primary dataset that was analyzed qualitatively.

In addition to primary sources, the study employed a scholarship review method, essentially a literature review as a secondary source of data and theoretical support. This involved collecting relevant books, journal articles, and scholarly discussions on ecocriticism, anthropomorphism, and Osundare's poetry. These sources do not constitute the object of analysis themselves but provide critical perspectives, definitions, and context that inform the primary analysis. Likewise, studies on anthropomorphism in literature or environmental communication are reviewed to understand how attributing human traits to nature can affect readers' empathy and perception. Notably, previous analyses of Osundare's works are examined to see what themes and methods have been identified by other researchers, thereby avoiding duplication and positioning this study within existing scholarship. Also, to ensure systematic analysis, a coding approach was applied, human attributes imbued on non-human entities in the analysis are referred to as "agencies."

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Aesthetic of Anthropomorphism in Niyi Osundare's Sighs of Our Ailing Planet and City Without *People: The Katrina Poems: The Katrina Poems*

The broader discourse on environmental degradation and its consequences for human societies and ecosystems in Osundare's poetry has gained prominence in recent years. The relationship between humanity and the natural environment is a topic of critical importance in

contemporary discourse. Scholars and poets like Osundare have played a vital role in raising awareness about environmental issues and advocating for meaningful change. It is expedient to interrogate human-environment relationships and confront the realities of environmental degradation, to work towards forging a more harmonious and sustainable relationship with the Earth. For this purpose, two of Osundare's poetry collections, namely, *Green: Sighs of Our Ailing Planet* (Osundare, 2021) and *City Without People: The Katrina Poems: The Katrina Poems* (Osundare, 2011), are examined.

Humanizing Nature in Osundare's Poetry: The Agency of Speech

In Osundare's poetry collections, *Green: Sighs of Our Ailing Planet and City Without People: The Katrina Poems: The Katrina Poems*, environmental degradation emerges as a prominent theme where anthropomorphic imageries are used to reflect the detrimental impact of human activities on nature and how nature reacts to this treatment. In "Hole In the Sky," environmental degradation is depicted through an anthropomorphized Earth. Osundare humanizes the Earth by giving it the agency of speech, which serves as a powerful metaphor for the interconnectedness of human actions and environmental consequences. With this anthropomorphic aesthetic, Osundare reiterates the feelings of the Earth. The Earth starts a conversation by calling on the persona to tell the story of how human exploitation has caused the Earth so much violation and damage:

'Tell my story,'
Said the Earth to me
'Oh, tell my story the way it is,
Don't sugarcoat its bile
Don't varnish its rust
Don't cover its scars with pretty words
Tell my pain the way it is (Osundare, 2021, p. 1).

Furthermore, communication between natural entities is depicted in "The Lake Came to my House" as the poet describes the beginning of the hurricane Katrina that engulfed New Orleans in 2005 using the imagery of a conversation among the leaves, trees and the wind: "It all began as a whisper among/ The leaves. The tree's tangled tale/ And the wanton narrative of the wind" (Osundare, 2011, n.p). Similarly, the Trees of the Amazon are humanized in the poem, "Amazone Burning" as they are given the agency of speech. This allows them to express themselves, emphasizing how important they are and collectively contributing to maintaining ecological balance. As though in a chorus, the Trees of the Amazone introduce themselves, stating the role they play in sustaining the world:

We are the Trees of the Amazone
Ageless couriers of the Earth and Sky
We traverse the darkest depths and the loftiest heights
We, the branch and stem which sustain the world (Osundare, 2021, p. 18).

Individually, the Trees continue to introduce themselves by stating each of their peculiarities, which Osundare portrays in a way that reflects an imagery of humans giving a presentation

about themselves and their daily activities. The Kapok tree describes itself as "Giant of the Amazone," it says,

My name is Kapok, Giant of the Amazon
They call me "Father of the Animals."
And they have never been far from right (Osundare, 2021, p. 20).

The Ipe tree introduces itself saying, "I am a vital lobe in the lungs of the planet" (Osundare, 2021, p. 21). Also, the Shiringa (Rubber tree) introduces itself by saying, "They named me Rubber Tree/ For my rare, invaluable juice" (Osundare, 2021, p. 21). This speech continues as the Cashapona (Walking palm) tree and Barrigona tree also take their turns to introduce themselves as important parts of the Amazon that contribute to the welfare and sustainability of the Earth. In the same vein, the trees in "Treetalk" engage in a conversation among themselves as they question the cruelty of humans to the environment, "Why are so-called humans/so cruel with their axe" (Osundare, 2021, p. 25), the tree asked. This conversation, in which the persona refers to as "Green salutation, anxious whispers," reveals how the trees think humans have become inhuman, such that they do not spare even fellow humans in their cruelty:

"Human," did you say?"
Retorts the Barrigona
Can't you see what they do
To their fellow humans?" (Osundare, 2021, p. 25).

Similarly, in "Autumn in New Hampshire," the sky and Mount Monadnock, a mountain located in New Hampshire, are given the agency of speech as the persona reveals that, "Its dialogue with the New England sky/ Is as old as the ravens on its ribs." The persona also mentions how "The apple's song survives the ages" (Osundare, 2021, p. 80). This symbolizes how natural entities interact with each other without human interference as seasons change. Also, in "The Rain Has a Story," the rain is described as having the ability to talk, and the persona reveals that.

This year's rain
Has a story
This year's rain
Has a song (Osundare, 2011, n.p)

Osundare often time, deploys anthropomorphic speech to challenge the Western concept of nature as mute or inert. In "Hole in the Sky," the Earth directly implores the poet-persona to "tell my story the way it is," insisting the poet bear witness to its "bile" and "scars" (Osundare, 2021, p. 1). This device aligns with indigenous African cosmologies in which land and sky are animate and communicative (Enukora, 2021). By giving the planet a speaking voice, Osundare transforms diffuse environmental crises into a direct testament of suffering. Such agency of speech is not decorative as it functions as a summons, urging readers to "listen" to the environment's grievances. Similarly, in *City Without People: The Katrina Poems*, trees, wind, and water engage in dialogue, "a whisper among the leaves" and "the wanton narrative of the wind" to foreshadow Hurricane Katrina's devastation (Osundare, 2011). In "Amazone

Burning," the rainforest trees introduce themselves as a community of speaking subjects whose lives are intertwined with planetary well-being. Research scholars have observed that such anthropomorphic voice can foster readers' environmental empathy by creating an imagined proximity to nonhuman beings (Waytz et al., 2010; Kováč, 2020). Agent of speech seen in Osundare's talking Earth and forests thus serve as literary embodiments of ecological interconnectedness, enabling readers to feel implicated in the story's nature tales. Taken together, the agency of speech accorded to the Earth, trees, rain, wind, and sky in Osundare's poetry reveals an ecological philosophy rooted in interconnectedness, ethical responsibility, and mutual co-existence. By humanizing natural entities and allowing them to speak, converse, and bear witness to their own suffering, Osundare challenges the notion of nature as passive and repositions it as an active moral subject. These anthropomorphic voices collectively expose the acts of human exploitation while affirming the value and agency of the nonhuman world. Through this, Osundare articulates an ecological view that demands attentive listening, and a compassionate relationship between humans and the environment. To further emphasize the agency of speech in Osundare's poetry, Osundare during an interview with the researcher, mentioned that his father always implored him to understand the language of the trees in the forest. This gives an insight into why he chooses to give trees the agency of speech in his poems.

Humanizing Nature in Osundare's Poetry: The Agency of Resistance

Just as the poet humanizes nature in some of the poems by giving it the agency of speech to lament overexploitation, the poet continues to humanize it by giving it the ability to fight back. In "Katrina Anthem," the wrath of nature is represented by Hurricane Katrina. Addressing Hurricane Katrina as a "shameless witch" is the poet's technique of expressing how nature seeks revenge on humans like a witch who seeks revenge with her "blind campaign" (Osundare, 2011, n.p). Still expressing nature's ability to react to exploitation, the poet humanizes the lake as an uninvited visitor who came to his house. In the poem, "Omiyale," the persona reveals how the lake barged into his house "(Absolutely uninvited)." Osundare presents the lake in this poem with human qualities such as clumsiness, rudeness, and greed, which describe the destructive nature of a flood:

Like a band of wailing monsters
It barged through the door without knocking
Tore through the window like desperate burglar
A fellow more greedy, I never saw
Until the day the Lake came to my house
Absolutely uninvited (Osundare, 2011, n.p)

Anthropomorphism in agency of resistance becomes a tool for reimagining environmental disasters as reactions within a damaged human-nature relationship (Aliyu, 2018). Katrina, in "Katrina Anthem," appears as a "shameless witch" on a "blind campaign" (Osundare, 2011). While storms are meteorological, Osundare uses Katrina as a retaliatory agent, its fury a symbolic response to environmental mismanagement, climate injustice, and human arrogance.

This casts the hurricane as a moral antagonist rather than a neutral natural force. In "Omiyale," floodwaters "barged through the door without knocking" and "tore through the window like a desperate burglar." The flood becomes an intruder whose aggression mirrors humanity's own ecological violations. Anthropomorphism was used to expose disaster as part of a reciprocal dynamic, such as when humans "cement its stomach," yet "water has memory" and eventually "fights back" (Osundare, 2011). This aligns with African animist views of nature possessing spirit and agency (Oyeleke, 2022) and supports Shaguy and Alo's (2023) argument that Osundare's work functions as counter-hegemonic discourse critiquing capitalist environmental harm. Resistance becomes a mode through which nature asserts dignity and demands accountability. The agency of resistance in Osundare's poetry constructs an ecological philosophy in which nature is an active force capable of response and retribution. By humanizing hurricanes, floods, and lakes as retaliatory agents, Osundare reframes environmental disasters as moral reactions to human greed, ecological violence, and climate injustice. These acts of resistance expose the reciprocal dynamic between human exploitation and natural backlash.

Humanizing Nature in Osundare's Poetry: The Agency of Instruction

In addition, Osundare humanizes nature by giving it the ability to teach. In the poem, "Lesson," the persona reveals that Katrina "Told me a thing or two about/ The tyranny of things" (Osundare, 2011, n.p). Osundare also identifies that Hurricane Katrina came as a teacher. In "Katrina Taught Me," the persona expresses that Katrina came to teach humans how:

> to live with nothing
> to tease the breeze and forgive the wind
> to treasure every moment as if it were the last
> to listen to the silence of the weary heart
> to cherish new friends… (Osundare, 2011, n.p)

The agent of instruction draws upon the global tradition of fables in which animals or natural forces impart ethical guidance (Anderson, 2021). In the African context, it also resonates with proverbs that treat environmental disruption as a warning to the living. Osundare's anthropomorphism reframes catastrophe as nature upheavals instruct humanity on ecological limits and humility that challenge the technocratic view in which crises are merely phenomena to be controlled rather than lessons to be learned (Savoy, 2015). The agency of instruction thus reveals nature's epistemic authority within an Afrocentric ecopoetic framework.

Humanizing Nature in Osundare's Poetry: The Agency of Memory

Furthermore, Osundare humanizes nature as he depicts nature with the agency of memory (active and passive memory), the ability to remember as well as forget. For example, in "Water Never Forgets," the poet presents "Water" as capable of having an active memory; the persona reveals that "Water has its memory." With this, the poet can communicate an important warning to humans that, "When we scoop its heart/ steel its span and cement its stomach… Water has memory" and will fight back to reclaim its "trespassed honour" (Osundare, 2011,

n.p). Also, "The Lake Which Forgot Its Clothes" exemplifies how Osundare humanizes nature by describing it as possessing passive memory, just like a human who tends to be forgetful. By mentioning that "The lake left home without its clothes/ Courting prying eyes with the succulence of its sighs," the poet seeks to explain how the lake overflows its boundary, showing off its strength and splendor on the street. This type of anthropomorphism provides an imagery of the stare that can be caused when a human goes out in public without clothes. With this, Osundare communicates the spectacle caused by the overflowing of the lake, whose "stride and surge/ Was a joy-talk for the busy birds" (Osundare, 2021, p. 98). Here, the birds are also humanized to have feelings such as joy. Memory plays a crucial role in Osundare's anthropomorphism as nature is portrayed not only as acting in the present but also as remembering past harms. The poem "Water Has Memory" personifies water as a being that recalls every intrusion such as damming, dredging, channelization and eventually reasserts its trespassed honour which symbolizes slow violence as long-term ecological disturbance often forgotten by humans but retained within damaged ecosystems (Osundare, 2011; Nixon, 2011).

Humanizing Nature in Osundare's Poetry: The Agency of Emotion

"Timid Season" is yet another poem in which Osundare humanizes natural entities by presenting them as capable of expressing feelings. In this poem, "the stones wept," "the mountains shifted their gaze/ with prudish disdain," the night is "nervous" and the season is "timid" (Osundare, 2021, p. 79). In "The Lake Came to my House," Osundare humanizes the lake as having the ability to be angry: "Tornado-tormented, the Lake overran/ Its fence, pouring its piled-up anger" (Osundare, 2011, n.p). This is to express that when human activities disturb nature, in this case, the lake, nature could get angry and fight back as a reaction to exploitation. Osundare attributes fear, sorrow, and anger, which are human emotions, to nonhuman nature. Such emotive anthropomorphism moves beyond pathetic fallacy as nature does not mirror human emotion but is itself an emotional agent. This technique cultivates what ecopsychologists identify as "eco-empathy," the emotional identification with nonhuman beings that can motivate environmental concern (Lahtinen & Löytty, 2024). Osundare also uses emotion as the internal life of nature, dramatizing the consequences of human abuse (Osundare, 2011, n.p). Scholars have shown that attributing emotions to nature increases moral concern and pro-environmental behavior, these emotive landscapes function pedagogically as well as poetically, transforming abstract ecological degradation into an emotional drama of suffering and retaliation (Epley, 2018; Waytz et al., 2010).

CONCLUSION

The exploration of human-environment relationships in literature, particularly through the lens of ecocriticism, reveals the profound impact of human activities on the natural world. Niyi Osundare's poetry stands as a representation of how literary expressions can be used as a medium for creating environmental awareness. By giving natural entities, the agency of speech, instruction, emotion, and memory in his poems, Osundare drives home the stinging

effects of environmental degradation on both humans and the environment. This method helps readers to empathize with nature as well as take proactive steps to avert further damage that could wipe out humanity in the long run. Using anthropomorphic imagery, Osundare effectively highlights the interconnectedness of human actions and environmental consequences, emphasizing the urgent need for sustainable practices and collective action to mitigate climate change and preserve biodiversity. His works, alongside those of other contemporary African poets, contribute significantly to the discourse on environmental sustainability, urging readers to reconsider their relationship with nature and to advocate for a more harmonious coexistence with the Earth.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and publication of this article.

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