

OPTIMISM AMID ENVIRONMENTAL CRISIS IN NIYI OSUNDARE'S *MOONSONGS AND THE EYE OF THE EARTH*

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Abstract

The strained relationship between humans and nature creates an unstable present, leading to multiple ecological crises that threaten both human societies and the environment. Often depicted in apocalyptic literature, these crises present a bleak outlook, emphasising eco-pessimism and uncertainty about our planet's future. This study explores Osundare's response to these ecological challenges in *Moonsongs* and *The Eye of the Earth* through an ecocritical lens. A qualitative research methodology was adopted to analyse the selected poems from these collections. Findings reveal that Osundare's work concurrently critiques human activities contributing to environmental degradation and embodies a strong sense of eco-optimism. Findings further reveal that Osundare's poetry emphasises nature's resilience and regenerative power, advocating a renewed relationship between humanity and the Earth. This redefined relationship is essential for fostering environmental transformation, as it echoes humanity's hope for a sustainable ecological future by recognising nature's capacity for renewal. Ultimately, the study concludes that Osundare's eco-poetry projects an optimistic ecological perspective, encouraging sustainable practices and deeper ecological knowledge as essential steps towards addressing environmental degradation.

Keywords: Osundare's eco-poetry, eco-optimism, humanity, relationship, Earth's resilience, the ecological crisis, the natural world

Introduction

Niyi Osundare's ecopoetic works have garnered significant critical responses across the continent and beyond, establishing him as an ardent environmentalist (See Elgezeery 63; Eukora 53; Nwagbara 196). However, the eco-optimistic stance in his poetry has been underexplored, creating a gap this study aims to fill. This research argues that despite the prevailing global ecological crisis, Osundare's ecological stance is

characterised by an optimistic view. While he lays bare and laments the despoliation of the natural world and humanity's parasitic relationship, he also acknowledges and celebrates nature's resilient essence. As his poetry evidences, "The poet extols the lost glorious environment of primordial times with nostalgia and advocates a healthy environment" (Enukora 53) while critiquing the attendant consequences of the excessive consumerism characteristic of late capitalism. The broader implication of his work is that humanity's impact upon the Earth is profound and negative, necessitating primordial knowledge, indigenous wisdom, and redefined ecological attitudes to subsume the culture that exalts the exploitation of nature, which proves counterproductive. This study examines the resolute ecological hope and optimism amid the ecological degradation and woes depicted in Osundare's *Moonsongs* and *The Eye of the Earth*, assuring humanity of alluring ecological futures in contrast to the bleak visions that come with ecological devastation.

A Critique of Osundare's Poetry

Osundare, "a leading light" in the Alter-Native poetic tradition, combines and juxtaposes "the rustic and the rural, the profane and the urbane, the verbal and the non-verbal resources of language to produce an artistic paradigm of contemporary Nigerian society and experience" (Abdu ix). He ranks among the leading contemporary African poets, and his revered place in African poetic letters has drawn significant attention to his work, which covers diverse areas of human life. His humanistic outlook and vision compel him to critique various facets of society, including unsavoury anthropogenic activities harmful to both human and nonhuman species inhabiting our ecological space. Thus, many scholars have aired their critical views regarding the ecological dimensions of the poetry collections under study, enriching the existing scholarship on his poetry.

For instance, Elgezeery notes that in *The Eye of the Earth*, "the poet returns to his, and his people's early relationship with the earth or land in order to set its present deterioration and degradation in perspective and empower the land for future blooming and greening, or rather turn remembrance into a positive power that breathes new life into the present" (63). This is similar to Enukora's view that "The poet extols the lost glorious environment of primordial times with nostalgia and advocates a healthy environment that will enable the entrenchment of justice, equity, and fairness which will ultimately engender development in the present Nigerian society" (53). While both scholars acknowledge the cordiality in the primordial relationship between humanity and nature and how such knowledge could contribute significantly to building the Earth and man's place within it, they do not prioritise the eco-optimistic vision of the work. It is pertinent to note that Inasmuch as Osundare explores the complex and uneasy relationship between man and nature and the indispensable role of indigenous sustainable ecological practices, he offers a profound vision of hope against the odds.

Godwin Doki states, "Osundare's concern with physical nature is varied. Apart from showing the importance of Earth (nature) it is also used to show that the Earth (nature) signifies wealth and all the life-giving forces. It is mother-earth and natural laws demand that the wealth accruing from nature should be used for the advancement of society" (70). Doki's focus lies in exploring the egalitarian and environmental justice vision in the work, where the entire society shares in the resources 'accruing from nature,' failing to take into account the current state of the Earth, which begs for urgent attention. It must be noted that only a renewed earth can yield its wealth for the advancement of society, and in its current state, the Earth seems handicapped. However, the hope projected in the poems gives a vision of flourishing ecosystems and biodiversity, a state capable of birthing an egalitarian society. Thus, despite the Earth's inequalities, exploitation, and destruction, there lies hope in the natural world, requiring exploration in scholarship. Taking this paradigm into account is significant for humanity's attitudinal change.

Kemi Atanda Ilori sees *The Eye of the Earth* as "an exuberant voyage of memories of a youth on earth pilgrimage, discovering anew – away from the encumbrances of his Western education – the soul of his own society" (1) without necessarily emphasising the ecological dimension of the work, a paradigm overwhelmingly characteristic of the entire imaginative endeavour. Moreover, Ilori does not even in passing comment on the ecological hope projected in the work. This gap underscores the significance of undertaking a study that locates and illustrates the eco-optimism paradigm in Osundare's poetry.

It is evident that Osundare, like all reform environmentalists, "lays emphasis on the preservation of landscape in order to save the human race" (Fenn cited in Adegoke et. al. 128). The idea of 'preservation' here is problematic; while the use of the word 'preservation' suggests an ecocentric or biocentric paradigm, which fails to situate accurately Osundare's engagement within the centrism debate, our focus lies in establishing the fact that Fenn's study does not take into account the overwhelming presence of hope envisaged for the entire ecosystem, as illustrated in the images of the rejuvenated Earth painted in the poems, specifically, "Who Says that Drought Was Here?" and "Our Earth Will not Die."

Emma Ngumoha observes that "In Niyi Osundare's *The Eye of the Earth*, the poet functions as a primeval community's shaman or rainmaker whose main duty is to ensure adequate rainfall whenever 'the rains have kept their time' and drought persists beyond the vernal equinox" (Ngumoha 1). Ngumoha's focus on the renewing power of the rains highlights the Earth's potential to recover naturally from its wounds. However, he neither focuses on examining the broader implications for the ecosystems nor specifically identifies the vision of ecological hope pursued by the poet, who deliberately and painstakingly raises awareness about the pallid, degraded Earth whose state gives virtually no hope for humanity and nonhuman species. Besides, he explores the rain phenomenon from a folkloric, spiritual dimension without necessarily

leveraging the redemptive power inherent in folklore as a source of indigenous knowledge and wisdom. This can also be explored to illustrate how this supernatural dimension translates into hope for our ecological futures.

While Adegoke Jude Zeal et al. acknowledge that "Environmental concerns are ubiquitous in the entire collection" (141), they do not concern themselves with the eco-optimist stance that *The Eye of the Earth* projects. The study primarily focuses on examining the environmentalist leanings in the collection to establish the poet's quest to critique "the uneasy relationship between humanity and nature" (Elsdon 1) with the ultimate aim of redefining it to a symbiotic level. Our endeavour in this research transcends this simplistic act of demonstrating "an awareness of his natural environment" (Adegoke et al. 151) to explore the hope the poems project amid concerning environmental challenges.

In his critical opinion in the preface to the collection, Osundare observes that "Waters are dying, forests are falling. A desert epidemic stalks a world where the rich and ruthless squander Earth's wealth on the invention of increasingly accomplished weapons of death, while millions of people perish daily from avoidable hunger" (Osundare xiv). Osundare himself appears to be primarily concerned about the devastated state of the Earth resulting from man's wholesale interference with the Earth, without necessarily hinting at the optimism that runs through the poetic endeavour. The work presents a powerful vision of ecological hope for humanity and the entire Earth, particularly contingent on the resilient potential of the Earth and humanity's shift from strong anthropocentrism to weak anthropocentrism, commonly bearing semblance to ecocentrism. This gap opens up justifiable grounds upon which to plant our current scholarship.

In his analysis of Osundare's poetry, Oguntuase observes the poet's representation of how "The activities of man have led to disruptions in the occupational lives of the rural populace whose economic survival depends on their daily interactions with the earth," critiquing how "Land despoliation, deforestation and water pollution have resulted invariably in the absence of food crop farming and sea farming of sea foods and other aquatic harvests which provide protein, nutrients and other benefits for the use of man" (38). His study focuses on man's parasitic and inimical relationship to the natural world, which has birthed ecological woes— a development that begs for urgent sustainable ecological steps to avert a total collapse of earth support systems and humanity's doom. Although he, in passing, observes that the "Poet ends the poem on a note of defiance, hope and optimism. Trusting in the infinite capacity of the earth to renew, redeem and regenerate itself" (Oguntuase 44), he does not primarily focus on 'hope and optimism' evident in Osundare's work, thereby creating a lacuna for this research to fill. Again, no effort is made to explore the hope and optimism paradigm in *Moonsongs*, one of the study texts in this research. Exploring this perspective using both texts justifies our endeavour.

Ecocriticism: A Theoretical Justification

The theory adopted in this study is ecocriticism, a literary theory rooted in environmental concerns depicting the relationship between humanity and nature as reflected in literature and other cultural productions. Ecocriticism “seeks to evaluate texts and ideas in terms of their coherence and usefulness as responses to environmental crisis” (Kerridge 5). It is an interdisciplinary framework that critiques anthropocentrism, emphasising the interconnectedness of humans, nonhuman species, and ecosystems. It interrogates how texts represent, shape, and respond to ecological realities, from environmental degradation to the celebration of nature's intrinsic value. Ecocriticism encourages a shift from human-centred narratives to holistic perspectives that honour ecological balance. Ecocriticism's focus on humanity's ethical responsibilities towards the environment fosters awareness of nature's agency and intrinsic worth, challenging readers to rethink their place within a dynamic, interdependent biosphere. The poems analysed in this research article depict an uneasy relationship between humanity and other species. However, it projects a more cordial relationship predicated on renewed ecological attitudes, advocating interdependence, an outlook he believes will guarantee a pleasant ecological future. The research's engagement with the poetic works' ecological awareness, from depicting a degraded Anthropocene world to advocating for a paradigm shift away from weak anthropocentric values and projecting ecological resilience and optimism, justifies our application of the ecocritical theoretical framework.

Eco-optimism and Hope in *Moonsongs* and *The Eye of the Earth*

The poems in the two collections under study illustrate the ecocritical tradition, depicting the relationship between humanity and the natural world. For instance, the poem “Back to the Future” illuminates the resilient nature of the natural environment amid the global ecological crisis, projecting optimism. Here, Osundare depicts a world where echoes of the past and the future coalesce, and the environment is at once depicted as both wounded and enduring. It presents a vivid and imaginative portrayal of time, nature, and the interconnectivity of the past, present, and future as the foundation for positive change in our ecological relations, which is expected to engender a rejuvenated earth.

The first few lines of the verse are an apt evocation of a sense of antique history and the idea that the energy of past ages and extinct creatures, such as dinosaurs, still live in vestiges in the Earth as fossils and remnants of blazing fires. Consequently, this sets the stage for a reflection on the ongoing transformation of the natural world. In further portrayal of the state of the Earth, the poet reveals that the “sky coils up like a wounded foil/with silver scars” (*Moonsongs* 68), thereby depicting the environment as one suffering the damage engendered by human actions and thus requiring healing. The imagery of the “orphaned sun” standing on the edge of maps with “latitude of lashes” conveys a sense of disorientation and the need for direction in

traversing the multifaceted issues surrounding the natural environment and man's relationship to it.

Once again, the poem emphasises the significance of maps as a promise of guidance, signifying the potential for change and restoration in the face of environmental challenges. More so, it touches on the understanding that history serves as a guide for the future, as captured in the expression, "the map is history's whisper/in the ears of yester-morrows" (68). This invokes the power inherent in indigenous knowledge and wisdom in combating ecological woes midwifed by humanity's heedless pursuit of progress. By broader implication, this conveys the view that learning from the past can inform and guide our actions in the present and the future, especially as it concerns our ecological attitudes and our overall relationship to the natural environment. Furthermore, through vivid imagery, the poet romantically depicts two celestial beings—the sun and the moon— racing after each other in "lofty depths" and the shadows falling like "robes of airy emperors" or "pythons of skyjungles" (68), suggesting a sense of continuous movement and transformation, which in turn emphasises the cyclical nature of time and life. The expression "lofty depths" alludes to celestial bodies' eternal 'dance' and the unending cycle of day and night. All these instances emphasise the resilient nature of the natural world, even in the face of global ecological disaster, thereby imbuing human beings with optimism and hope.

In the quest to establish the enduring nature of the natural world, Osundare concludes the poem with the idea of "Echoes," which can be interpreted as the reverberation of actions and decisions taken through time. The evocation of a drum "which woos the ardour of forgotten sticks" (69) reminds humankind of its ability to awaken and rekindle forgotten knowledge and traditions that can aid it in addressing environmental challenges in the present geological epoch of indiscriminate interference with earth support systems. The poem unearths nature's resilience and potential for positive change in the face of environmental crisis. This is, however, contingent on humanity's change in its attitude towards the environment, understanding our history, and the interconnectedness of all organisms.

Osundare's poem 'Our Earth Will Not Die' explores the devastating impacts of environmental degradation while simultaneously projecting a vision of hope and renewal. The poem deftly juxtaposes the grim reality of ecological destruction with a resolute belief in nature's capacity for resilience and recovery. The first stanza's opening lines starkly depict the violence inflicted upon the natural world: "Lynched/ the lakes/Slaughtered/the seas/Mauled the mountains" (50). The use of terms such as "lynched," "slaughtered," and "mauled" calls to mind the brutality of human actions against the environment, portraying nature as a victim of relentless exploitation. These powerful images set the stage for the poem's exploration of the environmental crisis.

The poet vividly illustrates the extent of environmental damage with such grim images as "a lake is killed by the arsenic urine/from the bladder of profit factories," and

"a poisoned stream staggers down the hills/coughing chaos in the sickly sea" (50). These lines emphasise industrial pollution and its catastrophic effects on water bodies, stressing the interconnectedness of various ecosystems. The imagery of a "wailing whale, belly up like a frying fish" (50) further accentuates the dire consequences of environmental neglect, painting a bleak picture of the seas and the life within them. However, despite this sombre portrayal, the poem's refrain, "But our earth will not die," injects a note of optimism. This recurring line serves as a mantra, reinforcing the belief in nature's enduring strength and capacity for regeneration. It is a counterpoint to the preceding images of destruction, offering a glimmer of hope amid the devastation. The poem continues to catalogue the damage wrought by human activities:

And the rain
the rain falls, acid, on balding forests
their branches amputated by the septic daggers
of tainted clouds. (51)

Here, the acid rain symbolises the harmful effects of industrial pollution on forests, further compounded by the image of "weeping willows drip mercury tears." The "nuclear sun" rising "like a funeral ball" and reducing everything to "dust and dirt" paints a dystopian picture of a world ravaged by nuclear fallout. However, even in the face of such catastrophic scenarios, the poem maintains its optimistic refrain.

Osundare's enumeration of the deaths of various species— "Fishes have died in the waters. Fishes./Birds have died in the trees. Birds./Rabbits have died in their burrows. Rabbits" (51)—serves to stress the widespread impact of environmental degradation. However, the repetition of "But our earth will not die" after each lament reinforces the poem's central message of resilience and hope.

Having lamented man's destruction of the Earth, the tone of the final stanza of the poem becomes "festive" (51), shifting focus to a vision of renewal and rebirth, as captured in:

Our Earth will see again
eyes washed by a new rain
the westering sun will rise again
resplendent like a new coin. (51)

The above imagery of cleansing and renewal contrasts sharply with the earlier depictions of decay and destruction. The "new rain" symbolises purification and the potential for a fresh start, while the "resplendent" sun evokes a sense of brightness and optimism. The harmonious interactions between the wind, trees, and grasses and the abundance of blooming harvests illustrate a restored and thriving ecosystem. The concluding lines, "The sea will drink its heart's content/when a jubilant thunder fling open the skygate/and a new rain tumbles down/in drums of joy" (51), encapsulate the poem's message of ecological hope and optimism. The personification of the sea

drinking to its heart's content and the celebratory imagery of rain falling like "drums of joy" emphasise the potential for nature's rejuvenation. The poem's final affirmation, "Our earth will see again/this earth, OUR EARTH," reinforces a collective responsibility and a shared optimism for the future of the planet Earth.

Similarly, the poem "When" presents a surreal yet deep meditation on the cyclical nature of life, the environment, and time, underlining the interplay of decay and renewal. The poem is laden with rich metaphors and vivid imagery that reflect the destruction and enduring resilience of the natural world. Though the poem initially evokes a sense of foreboding and loss, its ultimate message is one of persistence and survival, reinforcing the theme of optimism amid environmental crises. The opening lines establish an atmosphere of quieting power:

the sun's silver terror roars into a whisper
and shadows fall to Earth,
with a dark pain their roars airy joints. (*Moonsongs* 51)

Here, the "sun's silver terror" is diminished to a "whisper," symbolising the passage of time or the waning of a once formidable force. The imagery of shadows falling to Earth with "dark pain" evokes a sense of impending doom or decline, but the sun's softening roar also hints at a quieting after chaos, a momentary lull in the natural cycles of life. This introduces the delicate balance between power and fragility in the environment, a tension that runs throughout the poem. Time itself becomes a physical entity in the following stanza:

the clock's faithful hands limp over
its figured face, their fingers so light
with dusts of time's unalloyed gallop. (51)

Osundare personifies the passage of time as something that "limps," weighted down by the accumulation of years, yet moving forward nonetheless. This emphasises the relentless progression of natural and environmental cycles, regardless of human activity. The "dusts of time" suggest erosion, decay, and the effects of age, yet the poem hints that time continues unceasing, even if slower and more burdened by history. The imagery of nature, both beautiful and menacing, is woven into the fabric of the poem, as the speaker describes landscapes that seem to move between states of vitality and decay:

life's river shrinks and swells
in the bewildering groin of intractable forests
where leaves rise and fall like salaaming elves. (51)

This passage depicts a river that alternately expands and contracts, reflecting nature's unpredictable and uncontrollable forces. The river is surrounded by a forest that is "intractable," evoking a sense of the untamable and mysterious aspects of the natural world. However, the image of leaves rising and falling "like salaaming elves" indicates that there is still a playful, almost magical energy within these landscapes, even amid

the uncertainty. The movement of nature is cyclical, and despite the overwhelming forces of destruction, there is always something alive, something moving towards rejuvenation. In a striking metaphor, the poet states:

The teeth of the mountain are sour with the sun
and steaming valleys are bowls of flesh
with the flighty spice of ancient winds. (51)

Here, Osundare describes mountains and valleys in almost anthropomorphic terms, as though the landscape itself is alive and suffering. The “teeth of the mountain” being “sour with the sun” shows that even the most enduring features of the Earth are not immune to wear and exhaustion, worn down by exposure to the elements. However, the image of “bowls of flesh” in the valleys, spiced by “ancient winds,” evokes both mortality and a sense of reverence for the long history of the land. This combination of flesh, spice, and wind suggests that life and death are intertwined and that even in decay, there is an inherent beauty and significance to nature’s cycles.

The poem takes a shift as it introduces the elements of fire and indigo, symbolic of the enduring spirit of nature: “Not a knell, oh not a knell/A thousand rains cannot slay the fire of the parrot/Not a knell/a thousand oceans cannot rival the indigo of *agbe*”(52). The repeated phrase “Not a knell” is a defiant assertion that the end has not yet come. Despite the environmental crises that threaten the land, the elements—the fire of the parrot, the indigo of *agbe* “a deep-blue bird” (52)—remain untouchable by rain or oceans. These natural symbols resist destruction, embodying the resilience and endurance of the natural world. The parrot and the *agbe*, both associated with bright, enduring colours, become metaphors for the natural world’s potential to resist the forces of extinction and decay. In the final stanza, the poem emphasises this unyielding spirit of survival:

We shall not go till we have eaten the elephant of the moon
We shall not go
till our scrupulous eyes have stitched the broken tendons
of the sky
We shall not go
Till our dreams spawn golden suns
In the chronicle of stubborn trees (*Moonsongs* 52)

The above excerpt implies that humanity’s work is not yet done. The metaphor of eating “the elephant of the moon” (52) hints at a monumental task involving fully engaging with and understanding the natural world. Likewise, the “broken tendons of the sky” (52) must be mended, symbolising the need to repair the damage done to the environment. The reference to “scrupulous eyes” specifies that this task requires careful, thoughtful action—perhaps a reflection on humanity’s responsibility to the Earth and the optimism that comes with committing to healing and restoring the natural world.

"When" presents itself as a poem that emphatically paints the cyclical nature of environmental destruction and regeneration; it acknowledges the toll that time and human activity take on the natural world and celebrates the indomitable spirit of nature, which refuses to be extinguished. The poet's dexterous deployment of imagery, from "salaaming elves" to "zebra clouds" and "the fire of the parrot," imbues the poem with a sense of awe and reverence for the resilience of the Earth, ultimately projecting a vision of hope amid the environmental crisis.

"Raindrum" is yet another acute exploration of the relationship between rain and the Earth, framed within a context of environmental crises and the ensuing renewal brought by rain. The poem opens with a striking image of the roofs responding to the rain's arrival:

The roofs sizzle at the waking touch,
talkative like kettledrums
tightened by the iron fingers of drought. (*Moonsongs* 32)

The poet likens the sound of the rain on the roofs to "kettledrums," which evokes both the percussive force of rain and the celebratory tone it brings after a long drought. This metaphor establishes a sense of optimism from the onset, as the rain's touch awakens the dormant energy of the environment, providing a stark contrast to the "iron fingers of drought." Here, Osundare juxtaposes the harsh, lifeless grip of drought with the vitality brought by rain, signalling a transition from desolation to rejuvenation. Furthermore, we see the streets, also, animated by the rejuvenating power of the rain, where:

Streets break into liquid dance
gathering legs in the orchestra of the road,
gliding eloquently down the apron of the sky. (32)

The phrase "liquid dance" personifies the streets, signifying the potential of the rain to revive nature on the one hand and also infuse the human-made environment with a dynamic life force on the other. The imagery of streets "gliding eloquently" aesthetically creates a visual of grace and ease, further reinforcing the sense of optimism and hope. Here, the rain is not a destructive force but a life-giving one, orchestrating a harmonious renewal of nature and human spaces.

However, the optimism in "Raindrum" is tempered by reflections on past environmental hardships as the speaker recalls memories of drought:

A stray drop saunters down the thatch
of my remembrance waking memories long dormant
under the dry leaves of time:
of caked riverbeds
and browned pastures
of baking noons
and grilling nights

of earless cornfields
and tired tubers. (32)

The "stray drop" awakens memories of a time when the Earth was parched, with "caked riverbeds" and "browned pastures", symbolising the strong effects of drought. This stanza of the poem acknowledges the severe environmental degradation experienced during dry seasons, characterised by benumbing by lifelessness and exhaustion. The "earless cornfields" and "tired tubers" categorically capture the toll that drought takes on agriculture and food security, closely tying human survival to the natural world's condition. However, despite these grim recollections, the poem pivots back to a tone of optimism as the rain signals renewal:

Then
Lightning strikes its match of rain.
Barefoot, we tread the throbbing Earth,
Renewed. (*The Eye* 32)

The figurative expression "Lightning strikes its match of rain" (32) is testament to the fact that the rain is a force of ignition, setting a revitalisation process into motion. As depicted in the poem, the Earth, which once suffered under drought, now "throbs" with life, and the speaker treads on it "barefoot," suggesting an intimate, tactile connection with the newly revived environment. "Renewed," which is the concluding word and line of the poem, captures the optimistic outlook, echoing the cyclical nature of environmental recovery and the belief that, despite crises, nature can experience regeneration and thrive as in primordial times.

The beauty of the poem "Raindrum" lies in the poet's artistic yoking of binary images of environmental crisis and renewal, buttressing the theme of optimism amid ecological degradation. Even though the poem depicts the harsh realities of drought and environmental decline, it continues to return to the hope-giving idea that nature, with the arrival of rain, possesses an innate capacity to heal and restore itself. This vision of renewal aligns with Osundare's broader ecopoetic philosophy (as evident in the two poetry collections under study), where the natural world, despite experiencing human-induced damage, maintains a resilient posture that guarantees hope for the future.

This vision of optimism and hope also features prominently in the poem "Who Says that Drought was Here," which epitomises the poet's signature blend of ecological awareness and optimism. The poem celebrates nature's remarkable capacity to heal itself after the devastation of drought, framing the rebirth of the landscape as a testimony to the natural world's resilience. From the outset, the refrain, "Who says that drought was here?" establishes a tone of disbelief and wonder, as the lushness of the restored environment starkly contrasts the preceding aridity. The repetition of this refrain emphatically paints the theme of renewal, suggesting that the verdant recovery renders the memory of the drought almost unbelievable. The "green

guests," which symbolise the returning vitality of the Earth, become both literal and metaphorical proof of nature's fortitude as they erase the marks of past desolation. Rain imagery plays a central role in Osundare's optimistic vision of recovery. In the lines, "The rain has robed the earth/in vests of verdure,/the rain has robed an earth/licked clean by fiery tongue of drought"(34), the rain is personified as a restorative force, dressing the Earth in "vests of verdure." This act of "robbing" transforms the landscape, infusing it with life and colour where there was once barrenness. The drought, depicted as a "fiery tongue," is a destructive force that has stripped the Earth bare, but the rain's return swiftly covers the scars left behind. This interplay between destruction and renewal emboldens the cyclical nature of environmental crises and recovery, with rain symbolising hope and regeneration. The image of the earth "licked clean" (34) also suggests a purification process, as though the rain has not only revived the land but cleansed it of the damaging legacy of drought.

Moreover, the poem's depiction of the forest's transformation further reinforces this sense of ecological optimism. The once-dead trees, whose "skeletal spires" (35) once pointed accusingly at the "unwinking face of the baking sun," are now "drapering twigs into groves" (35). Previously ravaged by the harsh sun and drought, the forest is now alive with youthful energy. Osundare's use of the phrase "afire with herbal joy" (34) is particularly striking, as it reclaims the image of fire, previously associated with destruction, and reconfigures it as a symbol of vibrant life. No longer skeletal, the trees now "slap the heavens face" with their fresh, youthful leaves, as if in defiance of the hardships they have endured. This imagery is a pointer to the fact that nature not only recovers from crises but, like the phoenix, emerges from them with renewed vigour and strength, its capacity for renewal seemingly limitless.

As the poem progresses, Osundare expands his focus beyond the trees to depict the revival of the entire ecosystem. The image of anthills "throw[ing] open their million gates/and "winged termites swarm[ing] the warm welcome/of compassionate twilights" (35) brings to life the bustling activity of a restored environment. In this vision, all aspects of nature—plants, insects, birds—are interconnected, each playing a role in the flourishing ecosystem. Butterflies and moths, traditionally symbols of transformation, take on added significance here, as they represent the delicate beauty and fragility of the environment. Their presence establishes that even the smallest creatures contribute to the harmony and balance of the natural world. The "fledging flowers" and "crispy mushrooms" (35) serve as metaphors for the rebirth of life, as these new growths signal the end of the drought and the beginning of a new cycle of abundance. The image of mushrooms breaking the fast of "venturing soles" (35) further emphasises the relationship between humans and the environment, as nature provides sustenance and shelter for all living beings.

The poem's final stanza brings this message of ecological optimism full circle. Returning to the refrain, "With these green guests around,/Who says that drought was

here?"(Eye 35), the poet makes a clarion call to readers to reflect on the resilience of nature. The transformation described throughout the poem—of trees, flowers, insects, and animals—becomes an acute reminder that "The earth is not a dead place. It is a body full of life (Thoreau 95). It is a plain constantly evolving in response to both natural and human-induced changes. The "green guests" of the poem are not merely passive observers; they are active agents in the process of renewal, symbolising the ability of nature to heal itself even in the face of overwhelming adversity.

In "Who Says that Drought Was Here," Osundare articulates and celebrates nature's resilience and the optimism inherent in its cycles of destruction and renewal. The poet's deft use of imagery and rhythmic refrains substantiates the ecocentric understanding of the interconnectedness of all living things and suggests that irrespective of the severity of the ecological crisis, nature reserves the capacity to recover and thrive. The poem's message of hope is clear: despite the scars left by environmental degradation, the Earth has the power to regenerate, presenting a vision of optimism amid the ongoing environmental crises of our time.

The poem "Under the Mango Tree" presents a complex narrative about life, growth, and natural cycles of change, with the mango tree acting as both a literal and symbolic focal point. While the poem highlights the transient nature of life and the quiet tension between flourishing and decline, Osundare projects a subtle optimism through the recurring image of the mangoes, which represent renewal, life's continuity, and the delicate balance between growth and decay. The poem speaks to the environmental crisis, but more importantly, it emphasises resilience amid the inevitable transformations in nature.

From the opening lines, Osundare portrays the mango tree as a powerful metaphor for life's fragility: "... so many lives hanging green/on racks of ripening branches" (*Moonsong* 49). The "lives hanging green" alludes to the mangoes and human lives, marking the symbiotic relationship between humanity and nature. The word "ripening" hints at both maturation and the impending fall of the fruit, introducing the dual themes of growth and inevitable decline. The image of the fruit "hanging" suggests a precariousness, yet it is not static; the tree continues to nourish these lives until they are fully ripened, implying that life, despite its uncertainties, moves towards fulfilment. The natural cycle persists as Osundare depicts the changing seasons and the transforming landscape. The transition from the cold of December to the vibrant ripeness of Easter is described as a process of metamorphosis:

The Easter sun has, finally,
translated December's flow
into marvels of milky green,
milky green, awaiting the fattening yellow
of basket seasons...(Moonsong 49)

Here, the "milky green" fruits, not yet fully ripe, await their final transformation into the "fattening yellow" of full maturation. The ripening process parallels the Earth's

capacity for renewal, a hopeful assertion that the harshness of past seasons (like the figurative environmental crisis) eventually gives way to periods of growth and abundance. The “basket seasons” refer to harvest, a time when the fruits of patience and persistence are reaped. This imagery of seasonal change affirms the resilience of nature, which, even after barrenness, can be reborn and offer sustenance. The sun’s role as a translator of seasons suggests a cyclical and hopeful rhythm in nature, as life constantly finds new ways to flourish. However, the poem does not shy away from the looming challenges that come with growth. Osundare employs contrasting imagery, such as the “disobedient jazz” carried by the wind, which evokes a sense of disorder. The jazz metaphor introduces an element of unpredictability and chaos within nature:

a disobedient jazz boards
the butterfly wings of the wind,
settling glum on the sweaty ears
of laden donkeys. (*Moonsongs* 49)

This “disobedient jazz” calls to mind the tension between vitality and the external forces that seek to disrupt the harmony of nature. The imagery of “sweaty ears of laden donkeys” adds a layer of toil and burden, implying that life’s cycles—while regenerative—are fraught with challenges. Nevertheless, even here, optimism can be found in the jazz itself, a music form that thrives on improvisation and resilience, reflecting the adaptability of both nature and humanity. The recurring image of the mangoes—swaying in the wind, responding to the environment around them—further reinforces this idea of resilience. We see the mangoes “swing from leaf to leaf,” and the entire scene is animated by the “melody of sighing winds” and the “orchestra of rocking twigs.” This personification of nature as a living, breathing entity filled with music and movement transforms the mango tree into a symbol of hope. Even amid the uncertainty of existence, the tree and its fruit persist, nourished by the very winds threatening to uproot them.

As the poem progresses, Osundare introduces more layers of complexity to the environmental imagery, reflecting on the fragility of nature and its delicate relationship with human interference. The mango tree, now so tall that “it hardly knows its sprawling roots” (49), mirrors the disconnect between humanity and the natural world. However, this towering presence is not entirely detached: “revellers douse stiffening fires/with petrols of boot-legged gins” (49). The “revellers” who gather under the mango tree symbolise humanity’s casual disregard for the environment, yet the tree still stands tall, its “sprawling roots” deeply entrenched. This disconnect serves as a warning, yet the presence of revellers and the continuation of life around the tree suggests that hope persists even in the face of human-induced environmental crises. Osundare’s depiction of the mangoes as “mortal murmurs” alludes to the brevity of life and the inevitability of death:

The mortal murmurs of musing mangoes
of crude climbers and missiles

from starving quivers;
and suddenly, each fruit a toll
of expiring winds. (51)

The mangoes, once symbols of growth and ripeness, now take on the connotation of mortality. The phrase "each fruit a toll" suggests that each falling mango marks the passage of time, a reminder of life's impermanence. However, the very act of falling—of returning to the Earth—can also be viewed as a form of renewal. This duality stresses Osundare's theme of optimism amid environmental crisis; even as the fruits fall and "expire," they contribute to the cycle of life, eventually nourishing the soil and enabling new growth. The poem concludes with a metaphor that encapsulates Osundare's vision of resilience:

mangoes man goes. Man
Goes in so many lives hanging green
on the racks of ripening branches. (50)

Here, Osundare draws a direct parallel between the mangoes and human life, reinforcing the interconnectedness of all living things. The repetition of "man goes" simultaneously highlights life's transient nature and affirms the continuity of existence. Just as the mangoes fall and new ones take their place, so does humanity persist, renewed by nature's cycles of growth and decay. In this poem, Osundare balances the themes of environmental crisis and optimism. While the poem acknowledges life's fragility and human activity's impact on the natural world, it also celebrates nature's resilience and the Earth's regenerative power. Through the symbol of the mango tree and its ripening fruits, Osundare projects a hopeful vision of renewal, reminding us that, despite the challenges, life continues to thrive in all its cyclical beauty.

Conclusion

Osundare's eco-poetry projects a varied perspective on the environmental crisis, blending acute awareness of ecological degradation with a hopeful vision for the future. While acknowledging the severe impact of anthropogenic activities on the natural world, Osundare's poems ultimately emphasise nature's resilience and regenerative potential. He voices advocacy for a transformative relationship between humanity and the environment, suggesting that a redefined ecological attitude is essential for reversing environmental damage. Osundare's work raises humanity's consciousness that the hope for an ecologically sustainable future hinges on recognising and nurturing nature's capacity for renewal. Thus, the poet's optimistic ecological outlook is a clarion call to action, urging humanity to embrace a harmonious and respectful relationship with the natural world, an act essential for restoring and preserving our planet.

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