

# **We Live, only if the Environment Lives; An Enquiry into Niyi Osundare's Eco-poems**

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## **ABSTRACT**

*This paper sets out to investigate the symbiosis between humankind and the environment that they inhabit. The relationship between the denizens of the earthly environment and the lifelong interdependence of both flora and fauna are examined in this work. Two of the volumes of poetry by Niyi Osundare are used in the treatment of the themes of this study. These are: *Waiting Laughters* (1990) and *The Eye of the Earth* (1996). The literary theoretical approach known as ecocriticism is deployed in the study of the poems selected from both collections. The study is further underpinned by the Reader Response critical theory. The paper concludes that a mutually rewarding co-existence is the only prescription for an augury of pleasure and sustainability between the environment, on the one hand and humankind, on the other.*

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## **Introduction**

From timeless pre-history, the relationship between humankind and their natural habitat has been of interest to scholars of diverse fields and disciplines. Till date scholars like Raymond Williams (1973), Joseph Meeker (1974), and Cheryll Glotfelty (1996) have written about the necessity to interrogate human existence in line with their relationship to the environment. This enquiry has given rise to several studies connected to literatures of nature and of the environment in general. Humankind should eke a living on a continuous basis from the earth on which they live. This important need gives rise to the overriding need to relate meaningfully with the environment to sustain a productive dependence on each other. Scholars and critics have taken interest in making enquiries about how best to treat the environment so that a worthwhile, sustainable and mutually beneficial dependence is forged.

## **Theoretical Framework**

The dependence of humankind on land, per se, is interrogated by an appropriate theoretical scaffolding. In this study, the literary ecocriticism approach has been identified to address issues of literature and the socio-cultural milieu in which a particular literary product is created and consumed. Ecocriticism probes the interface between literature and the environment. Literature, as deployed in this essay, refers to all strands that literary productions encompass. The traditional typology of literature, prose, play and poetry, are involved in this seminal enquiry because any of the three is useable to interrogate how the environment and humankind benefit from the intervention of literature. Ecocriticism is

believed to have begun with the pioneering publication of an English writer and critic, Raymond Williams. He wrote *The Country and the City* in 1973. His was an enquiry into pastoralism. A year later, in 1974, an American writer, Joseph Meeker, wrote *The Comedy of Survival: Literary Ecology and Play Ethics*. The kernel of these publications is that the environment is undergoing some crisis because the Western world separated culture from nature with the result that nature (the environment) is progressively side-lined in the scheme of things. The term, “Ecocriticism”, remained shadowy until it was given form and substance in an essay written by William Rueckert: titled *Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism* (1978). Quoting Rueckert, Glotfelty and Fromm (1996) note that ecocriticism is mainly concerned with “the application of ecology and ecological concepts to the study of literature (107). Glotfelty further expatiates when she says:

Just as feminist criticism examines language and literature from a gender conscious perspective and Marxist criticism brings an awareness of modes of production and economic class to its reading of texts, Ecocriticism takes on (an) earth centred approach to literary studies (Glotfelty xviii).

As far as Simon Estok is concerned, Ecocriticism goes further than “simply the study of nature or natural things in literature. Rather, it is a theory that is committed to affecting change by analysing the function- thematic, artistic, social, historical, ideological or otherwise of the natural environment or aspects of it represented in documents- literary or others that contribute to material practices in material worlds”(220). Scott Slovic contends that “Ecocriticism is the study of explicitly environmental texts from any scholarly approach or, conversely, the scrutiny of ecological implications and human-nature relationships in any text, even texts that seem, at first glance, oblivious of the nonhuman world” (160). The positions taken and canvassed by the scholars whose definitions we have cited in the foregoing foreground the place of ecocriticism in probing how humankind and the environment can exist and benefit each other.

Further still, this paper shores up the place of critical theory in literature by looking at another theory known as Reader Response Theory, RRT, for short. As the name instructs and illuminates our minds, it is a theoretical approach to literary studies that emphasises the reader far above and ahead of other critical stakeholders in the process of making meanings from texts. The theory is popularised by a scholar known as Stanley Fish whose essay, sensationally titled, *Is There a Text in this Class?* (1980) was accorded a wide reception in the critical world of literature. The gen of Fish’s postulation is that a text, any text at all of any form of literature, is bereft of a distinct didactic purpose and direction other than the one imposed on it by a reader. In other words, three readers of the same text will come up with three different meanings. This accords with the views of Norman Holland and Louise Rosenblatt expressed by Lois Tyson (2006). Tyson identifies five typologies of the Reader Response Theory as follows: (a) the transactional reader response approach which is associated with Louise Rosenblatt and Wolfgang Iser. This approach believes that there is a link or connection between the intrinsic meaning of a text and a reader’s interpretation of the same text. The reader’s opinion is influenced by several factors including, personal experiences, emotion and knowledge. (b) Affective stylistics reader response theory is associated with Stanley Fish who maintains that a text is a meaningless entity with no impact on society unless a reader imposes meanings on it from which society can then benefit. (c) Subjective reader response theory is the position taken by David Bleich who insists that different readers are capable of bringing out different meanings from a text because it does

not have a stereotype, permanent, and unalterable mono-semantic import. (d) Psychological reader response theory is associated with Norman Holland who is of the opinion that the motives of a reader for reading a text are the determinants of the type of meanings he comes up with. (e) Social reader response theory is the fifth of Tyson's categorisations. It is an extension of the earlier positions taken by Stanley Fish. Fish modifies his views by adding that aside from individual readers, members of an interpretive community make meanings from texts by using specific interpretation strategies.

Louise Rosenblatt in *Literature as Exploration* (1965) says that the reader response theory is a text related performance. As such, it disavows subjectivity and essentialism. In *The Reader, the Text and the Poem* (1978), Rosenblatt explains that "what an organism selects out and seeks to organise according to already acquired habits, assumptions and expectations becomes the environment to which it also responds"(17). With these theoretical backgrounds in mind, we are set to investigate the correspondence between humankind and their environment from the optic of literature (poetry in this case).

### **Concerns about the environment in *The Eye of the Earth***

Very many of the poems in this collection of Niyi Osundare's poetry deal directly with his concerns about the physical environment in which his people, the Yoruba of South West Nigeria, live. The greater percentage of the population makes a living from their interactions with land through farming, logging activities and related agrarian occupations. The poet fears that the future of humankind, typified in this narrow perspective by the Yoruba, is threatened by food insecurity, land degradation and sundry unacceptable practices relating to land use. The preface to *The Eye of the Earth* contains an insight into the poet's preoccupations with the poems in this collection. It is as follows:

The poet raises vital queries, (and) amplifies crucial fears about the state of the earth, our home. With nuclear dust in the hearth and acid rain in the roof, just how will tomorrow's children live? The vision which provokes this question is, in the main, not very distant from the insistent voices of peace-loving people of the world urging that we give the human race priority over the arms race. (xiv).

We modify this position by showing that it is not children alone whose future is imperilled. The pervasive uncertainty hangs threateningly over everybody, regardless of age. In addition, we propose that priority is given to the human race over not only "the arms race" but more importantly over any practice that threatens the sanctity and conventional use of land and the environment in general. The poet's abiding passion and nostalgia for the environment is expressed in the first stanza of the poem titled, "Forest Echoes". The relevant lines are rendered here:

A green desire, perfumed memories,  
A leafy longing lure my wanderer feet  
To this forest of a thousand wonders.  
A green desire for the petalled umbrella  
Of simple stars and compound suns. (3).

...

The constant reference to “a green desire” is a reminder that the verdant lushness of the natural environment is part of life. It is to be preferred to an environment turned brown by the absence of rain and the general aridity of the environment. The further reference to “this forest of a thousand wonders” illuminates us about the limitless possibilities that our forests could offer humankind in terms of large acreage of land for farming, afforestation for the purpose of industrial logging activities and the natural vegetation and healing properties that the forests offer humanity. The poet is manifestly nostalgic about the green environment because of what it offers to people instead of the adversities that beset humankind on the heels of urbanization. His attraction to and affection for the environment is seen in the second stanza of the poem where the poet muses:

The rains have kept the time this year  
(Earth has (finally) won the love of the sky)  
Trees bob with backward sap  
And leaves grab a deepening green  
From the scanty sun (3).

The need for a balance in the ecosystem is stressed in the foregoing when the poet points out the interdependence of the elements of nature. This is seen when the “leaves grab a deepening green” because “the rains have kept their time this year”. He shows how lamentable the lateness of rain or its total absence has been for humanity. The timeous presence of rain and its pluvial properties enliven humanity and lifts the human spirit. Humanity is assured that life and living are secured by the availability of food which is made possible by the availability of land for farming and rains to water the planted seeds. In yet another pointer to the beauty of the forests and their positive impact on mankind, the poet paints a beautiful picture of the utilitarian nature of the large trees that populate the forests. Some of the trees, presented to the reader in their Yoruba names, make life, even modern life worth living for humankind. This is what the poet shows us when he writes:

Let *iroko* wear the crown of the roof  
Let *ayunre* play the clown of the fireplace  
But let no tree challenge the palm  
Evergreen conqueror of rainless seasons  
Let no tree challenge the palm  
Mother of nuts and kernels  
Tree proud and precious like the sculptors wood  
Bearer of life and wine. (6).

The poet has clearly and convincingly captured the benefits of the trees in the forests to humankind. *Iroko*, for instance is used by the Yoruba of South Western Nigeria as roofing

planks. It is preferred to others because it is hard wood that will require no replacement in the entire life span of a building. The other tree, *ayunre*, is also used by Osundare's people to cook their daily meals, morning, noon and night. This is why the poet describes it as the "the clown of the fireplace". Of no less importance is another tree whose natural habitat is the forest, the palm tree. Its properties are legion, almost defying the assignment of numerical value. The poet declares flatly and repeatedly, "let no tree challenge the palm" because it is "mother of nuts and kernels" and it is "the bearer of wine and life". Indeed, the palm tree is more. It is used for roofing as well as its palm fronds can be fashioned into brooms without which several homes will seethe with stench and stains. Christians in festive periods could make local crucifixes from its fronds in remembrance of Christ's triumphant entry into Jerusalem. The infinite possibilities offered by the forests would have been permanently and irretrievably lost to humankind if the environment had laid waste. This is why Leopold notes that "a thing is right when it preserves the integrity, stability and beauty of the biotic environment. It is wrong when it tends otherwise" (240).

In another poem, "The rocks rose to meet me", Osundare deploys the myth of the mighty rocks in Ikere Ekiti, his home town to show the allure of the environment and all that humanity can benefit from it. He says for him "it is a home coming of a kind, a journey back (and forth) into a receding past which still has a right to live" (xiii). A strikingly instructive portion of the poem under consideration reads as follows:

The gold, let us dig,  
Not for the gilded craniums  
Of hollow chieftains  
(time's undying sword awaits their necks  
Who deem this earth their sprawling throne)  
With the gold, let us turn hovels into havens  
Paupers into people (not princes)  
So hamlets may hear  
The tidings of towns  
So the world may sprout a hand  
Of equal fingers. (14).

The poet in the above poem advocates an equitable distribution of the natural resources available in the environment amongst all the people occupying the space regardless of sex, creed, status or age. This is why the gold that is generally believed to lay untapped in the belly of the mighty rock, *Olosunta*, should be mined and its value in currency deployed to provide a better life for all. The poet decries the selfishness of the rich few who he describes as "hollow chieftains". He predicts an unmitigated disaster for them because "time's undying sword awaits their necks". This is unveiled hatred for those who despoil the earth without considering the welfare of the greatest number of the working people. The poet counsels that the resources from the environment are better used to "turn hovels into havens" and "paupers into people" so that "hamlets may hear the tidings of towns" and "the world may sprout a

hand of equal fingers”. In the way that writers influence their societies without pointedly naming names, the poet has successfully sowed a seed of discord between local agents of imperialists and the haves-not who weather the storm of despoliation and degradation of the environment.

In a poem, “Harvest Call”, our attention is riveted to the danger that can befall humankind by a careless use of the environment. It is a well-tended and well protected environment that can fully compliment the existence of humankind. Where that land is over used and abused, it will no longer support the production of food to sustain humans. This is why Osundare laments the absence of staple grains from the menu of his people. His queries in the following stanza lends credence to the havoc that a barren earth can cause in the process of food production through famine.

But where are they?  
Where are they gone:  
*Aroso, geregede, otili, pakala*  
Which beckon lustily to the reaping basket  
Where are they  
The yam pyramids which challenged the sky  
The lusty barns  
Where are they  
The pumpkins which caressed earthbreast  
The mammary burdens  
Where are they  
The pods with sweetened harvest air  
With the clatter of dispersing seeds?  
Where are they? Where are they gone? (20).

The poet repeatedly queries the absence of these grains from the granary of his people and, by extension, the table of other humans who savour their tastes on their buds. His deliberate repetition of the interrogative sentence, “where are they” and “where are they gone” is to draw attention to the severe loss of these food items from the dining tables of their regular consumers. It is lamentable that humankind can be robbed of these grains and their high nutritional values because of our careless relationship with the earth. He does not merely lament the avoidable absence of these grains, he rekindles hope that things can get better if we adopt a friendlier approach to the treatment of the environment. This is the position taken in the concluding couplet of the poem under reference. He has this to say:

With our earth so warm  
How can our hearth be so cold?

This says it all, if the earth is well catered for, how can the hearth, the local fireplace for cooking local meals be cold. Coldness here is a euphemism for inertia and inactivity arising from having nothing to cook for hungry mouths made desperate for something to eat by the ill treatment the earth has suffered.

In yet another poem, “Let Earth’s Pain Be Soothed” the poet decries the absence of rain, an essential ingredient for the survival of humans. His own personal pains equate with the pains borne by an earth which has been left for long untouched by rain. He importunes in the following:

The sky carries a boil of anguish

Let it burst

Our earth has never lingered so dry

In the season of falling showers

Clouds journey over trees and over hills

Miserly with their liquid treasure. (27).

The line, “our earth has never lingered so dry//in the season of falling showers” is an admission of how baneful and agonizing it has been to live for such a long time without even a drizzle of rain. The overriding importance of rain is further underscored by its description as ‘liquid treasure’. This all important treasure has become scarce, almost impossible to come by because of unfavourable weather conditions. Changes in the climate have exacerbated the living conditions of people not only because the rains no longer fall as regularly as they should, but worse, when they do, humans now complain of such phenomenon as acid rain which were alien to the diction and culture of the people before industrialisation and modernity.

In a mood that combines anger, hope and desperation, the poet importunately wishes that the rains could fall even as he composed his lines of poetry. This is what he says:

Let it rain today

That parched throats may sing

Let it rain today

That earth may heal her silence

Let it rain today

That cornleaves may clothe the hills

Let it rain

That roots may swell the womb of lying plains

Let it rain today

That stomachs may shun the rumble of thunder

Let it rain

That children may bath and bawl and brawl (28).

The earnestness and the imploring mood and tone of the poet accentuate the urgency of the need for rains. Its coming will meet the various needs of different categories of peoples outlined and itemised in the lines of poetry above. The balance between the daily earthly needs of humans and the abundance of rains at regular intervals can only be struck if the environment is not abused by the carelessness of the human elements in it.

In yet another poem, “Meet me at Okeruku”, the poet continues his lamentation of the ugliness and indignity that the absence of rains can cause to humanity in general and to the physical habitation of humankind. Humans and other physical objects are transformed from dirt to sparkling beauties depending on when the rains fall. Let us see this transformation in the two stanzas below:

Meet me at *Okeruku*

Where earth is one compact

Of reddening powder

Daubed coquettishly

On the harmattan brow

Of trembling houses.

And when the rains are here

When this dust is clod and clay

Show me your camwood shoes

Show me hurried toemarks

On the ciphered pages of narrow alleys

Awaiting the liquid eraser

Of the next shower (35).

In the two stanzas excerpted here, the difference in the situation of objects, in this case the “trembling houses” daubed coquettishly on the harmattan brow. Houses become coated with brown dusts carried about by harmattan winds. In the second stanza, toemarks which have been smeared by dirt of dust and which have created “camwood shoes” for human legs will definitely be washed clean by “the liquid eraser//of the next shower”. The timely presence of rains in great quantum would have made these burdens and inconveniences unnecessary.

“Who says the drought was here” is an exclamatory, combative and almost repudiatory inquest into the immediate impact of rain after a period of drought. The poet, by adopting this probing, almost sensational title, attempts to show the remarkable differences in the



environment and its human denizens before and after rain. From start to finish, the poet uses the refrain, “with these green guests around//Who says that draught was here?” to shore up the importance of the messages contained in each stanza of the entire poem. The refrain and relevant stanzas are reproduced here:

With these green guests around  
Who says that drought was here

The rain has robed the earth  
In vests of verdure  
The rain has robed an earth  
Licked clean by the fiery tongue of drought

With these green guests  
Who says that drought was here

Aflame with herbal joy  
Trees slap heaven’s face  
With the compound pride  
Of youthful leaves  
Drapering twigs into groves  
Once skeletal spires in  
The unwinking face of the baking sun (34).

The two stanzas above and the accompanying refrains say it all. The coming of rains has an immediate transformative effect. The brown coats worn by the environment have been replaced immediately and happily with new attires aptly described by the poet as “vests of verdure”. The trees that were once lean, lifeless and almost withering have bounced back to life and become “aflame with herbal joy”. The new luxuriating trees in their resurgence and resplendence now “slap heaven’s face”. These wonderful possibilities are actualised only when the rains come and restore normalcy to an environment adversely affected by drought.

The poem, “Farmer-Born” is a reminiscence of the poet’s fond remembrances of his days as a youth going to his father’s farm. He finds the allure of that period evergreen and unforgettable. His love for the farm and his accompanying satisfaction with his gains are possible because of an environment that conduces to good living. He says:

Farmer-born peasant-bred  
I have frolicked from furrow to furrow

Sounded kicking tubers in the womb  
Of quickening earth  
And fondled the melon breasts  
Of succulent ridges (43).

The personifications in “womb” and “breast” accentuate his endearment to the earth, to the farm and to his native environment in general. He likens the womb of the earth and the breasts of the ridges to full grown female reproductive and mammary organs. This can be safely interpreted to mean that the earth incubates the seedlings and the nutrients in the ridges give nurture to plants precedent to a bumper harvest.

In yet another poem, “They too are the earth”, two extremes- of poverty and want and of indifference of leaders to the feelings of the masses of the people- are juxtaposed here to foreground the glaring stark differences between the two sides of the divide. The following excerpts exemplify this point:

They too are the earth  
The swansongs of beggars sprawled out  
In brimming gutters  
They are the earth  
...

Now let us contrast the next stanza with the foregoing.

Are they of this earth  
Who fritter the forest and harry the hills  
Are they of this earth  
Who live that earth may die  
Are they? (45).

The poet represents the opinions of millions who decry the attitude of a few privileged people who think they own the entire world and can do as they please with it. The few people “who live that the earth may die” are themselves not insulated from the deleterious consequences of their actions. They merely cut their noses to spite their faces! Osundare engages in an unveiled attack on agents of commercialisation and privatisation who seize the people’s commonwealth with subtlety and wiles. Their most important consideration is profit and never the welfare of the masses of the working class who have little or nothing to show for their toil and exertions.

The poem, “Ours To Plough, Not To Plunder” is another in the series of eco-poems in the collection under reference. The poet counsels the local users of the land to be mindful of their

interactions with it because a lot depends on this interdependence and symbiosis. Several stanzas of the poem are excerpted in the following to underscore the importance and necessity of subsistence agriculture, the main plank on which many people rest for survival. The stanzas are as follows:

The earth is ours to plough and plant

The hoe is her barber

The dibble her dimple

Out with mattocks and matchets

Bring calabash trays and rocking baskets

Let the sweat which swells earthroot

Relieve heavy heaps of their tuberous burdens (48).

The poet appears to be saying that local farm implements which our peasant forbears used in the days of yore are still helpful today. Hoes are used for cultivation, tilling and ridge making in virtually all parts of Africa where non industrialised agriculture takes place. The dibble is the pointed instrument to plant grains in the earth. Given that all other things are equal, there will be good harvests which will make happy farmers “relieve heavy heaps of their tuberous burdens”

The next stanza rekindles the hope of humankind in an environment whose capacity to support life is infinite. It says:

Our earth is an unopened grainhouse,

A bustling barn in some far, uncharted jungle

A distant gem in a rough unhappy dust

This earth is

Ours to work not to waste

Ours to man not to maim

This earth is ours to plough, not to plunder. (48-9).

The last poem for consideration in this collection is “Our Earth Will Not Die”. The poet’s tone is firm, unwavering and definitive. Hope, anchored on faith, is seen in:

Lynched

the lakes

Slaughtered

the seas

Mauled

the mountains

But our earth will not die (50).

These lines summarise the astonishing regenerating capacity of the earth. It is capable of enduring its rape and plunder by unkind users but it refuses to die. The poet praises this resilience. On yet a final note of hope, the poet reassures that the future will be better than today when he says:

Our eyes will see again

eyes washed by a new rain

the westering sun will rise again

resplendent like a new coin

...

and a new rain tumbles down

in drums of joy.

Our eyes will see again

this earth, OUR EARTH (51).

### **People's Weapon against environmental degradation in *Waiting Laughters***

This essay in addition to the above will now examine the other collection, *Waiting Laughters* from the lenses of ecocriticism to see how its contents address issues of the environment, using the instrumentality of poetry. Wagih Armani notes that "the title of the volume, *Waiting Laughters*, indicates the role of laughter as a weapon of resistance that the African society is waiting for, considering it an epitome of freedom" (1). Laughter therefore acts as an instrument used by the oppressed to lessen the burden of oppression on themselves. For James Scott, E.P. Thompson and Pierre Bourdieu, "laughter is one of the weapons of the weak" which can be easily deployed against the mighty and the powerful without any physical confrontation or bloodletting (Goldstein 7). We surmise that the poet has adopted this approach to show that the weak in society are still able to protest the various forms of oppression visited on them without physical actions. Amani, again notes that "the oppressors or elite(s) can display their power through political and economic control whereas the oppressed can resist through laughter" (4). Phillips argues that "resistance implied in laughter is a kind of resistance presented in a "positive and optimistic sense" (192).

With this background in place, we proceed to do some textual analysis and elucidation of relevant lines and stanzas in the poem. In the first division of a total of four, the poet says:

I pluck these words from the lips of the wind

Ripe like a pendulous pledge;  
Laughter's parable explodes in the groin  
Of waking storms  
Clamorous with a covenant  
Of wizened seeds

Tonalities. Redolent tonalities (2).

This stanza, like all the others after it, is loaded both with native wisdom and density of diction and meaning. Like the Igbo of Eastern Nigeria, the Yoruba are also rich in culture and the use of proverbs and witticisms in their diurnal deployment of language. Indeed Achebe is on record in *Things Fall Apart* (1997) to have said "amongst the Ibos the art of conversation is regarded very highly and proverbs are the palm oil with which words are eaten" (4). This is also true amongst the Yoruba as several literary works of diverse genres produced by scholars of Yoruba extraction have shown. The verbal density and texture of Osundare's renditions in this and other stanzas almost obscure the meanings of his messages. Yet, perceptive scholars extract water from stone, to use a biblical expression, in getting at his intended meanings. In the main, he is saying that the environment is home to enough experiences and phenomena that could provoke laughter in the place of tears of anguish.

In (III) the poet reels out in one stanza after another the terrible experiences visited on the peoples by leaders who care only about themselves and neither the environment nor its human components. Osundare has the following to say:

Waiting,  
all ways waiting,  
like the mouth for its tongue

My land lies supine  
like a giant in the sun  
its mind a slab of petrified musing  
its heart a deserted barn  
of husky cravings

And in this March,  
this March of my heated coming,  
the sky is high in the centre of the sun  
cobs faint in the loins of searing stalks,

the tuber has lost its voice in the stifling womb  
of shrivelled heaps

A king there is  
In this purple epoch of my unhappy land;  
his first name is Hunger,  
his proud father is Death  
which guards the bones at every door (45).

A litany of woes and harvest of human miseries are recorded in the foregoing as ample attestations to the execrable conditions wrought by the hands of an environment that has been unfairly treated by those who should show concern. A land that “lies supine” and whose mind is “a slab of petrified musing” can only yield “a deserted barn of husky cravings”. The same feelings of anguish are seen in the stanza where the heat in the month of March is decried. When the “sky is high in the centre of the sun”, the effect is that “cobs faint in the loins of searing stalks” and “the tuber has lost its voice in the stifling womb of shrivelled heaps”. The poet reveals that a dark pall of hunger, starvation and death is cast on the land as he says that leadership has failed. He gives expression to this in “A king there is//in this purple epoch of my unhappy land”, a land whose “first name is hunger” and “whose proud father is Death”. The spectre of death is so widespread and prevalent that it “guards the bones at every door”.

Finally, the lull that the environment has witnessed by careless handling has resulted in lamentable reverses in its fortunes. This is why Osundare says the following:

Waiting,  
still waiting  
like the brown fable of rainless regions,  
the sun’s stony victory in the wilderness  
of fleeing dust  
  
the arid lament of trees without leaves  
without songs  
the baobab’s missionary patience  
  
and rivers whose beds know no liquid snore  
in season of slumbering moons, cracked,  
the lips of voiceless grass (92).

These avoidable reverses are probed by *Waiting Laughters*, the second collection of poems used in this examen. Its fundament, ecocriticism as a literary standpoint for its study, justifies the fusion of literature as a tool to deploy in responding to issues affecting humankind in their natural environment.

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