

## LITERATURE AND ENVIRONMENT: TANURE OJAIDE'S ECO-POETRY AND HIS ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

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### **Abstract**

Literature and environment also known as ecocriticism, interrogates how literature represents nature and the environment, intersects with environmental issues and activism, reflects ecological concerns and sustainability, and shapes human perceptions of the environment. It also explores the relationship between humans and the natural world. As a fascinating field of study, literature and environment examines the intersection between literary works and the natural environment through various approaches such as eco-poetry, environmental humanities, nature or green writing, among others. As a result, the concept of literature and environment has gained prominence in scholarly discourse and has become a catalyst through which environmental preservation and justice can be pursued via the tenets of eco-poetry and other literary genres. Specifically, this paper interrogates environmental justice in selected poems from Tanure Ojaide's *Songs for Myself: A Quartet*, and *The Questioner: New Poems*. Using Glotfelty's environmental theory, the paper explores the poet's representation of environmental degradation and the devastating effects of oil pollution in the Niger Delta, caused by multinational companies who are aided by government agencies. As the poet advocates for justice, fairness and equity, he exposes the contradictions inherent in contemporary Nigerian society and attacks political leaders and their collaborators, whom he depicts as inhuman, materialistic and corrupt. Through textual analysis, the paper also examines the techniques used by the writer in articulating his quest for environmental justice. The study reveals that the system of environmental justice applied to the Niger Delta region is inadequate and ineffective. There are widespread environmental negligence and human rights violations in the exploitation of the region's natural resources. Ultimately, this paper advocates for environmental justice, fairness and equity as essential pathways to peace, development and national unity in Nigeria.

**Key Words:** Eco-poetry, Literature, Environmental justice, Eco-criticism, Tanure Ojaide.

### **Introduction**

As a medium of expressing views about man and his environment, literature in general and contemporary Nigerian poetry in particular, is concerned with the existence, survival of mankind and the earth. In this context, literature focuses on subject matters about the ecology and the fate of man in a contemporary, integrated world in which natural resources are central to existence. Postulations on environmental matters and literary discourses have emphasised that nature is endangered and the exploitation of natural resources for the free market globally contributes to the destruction of the natural world, especially of border nations (Agofure 2016, p.1). Agofure's statement highlights the critical relationship between environmental degradation and the exploitation of natural resources for global economic gain. The emphasis on free on free market and the exploitation of natural resources has led to the destruction of the natural world, particularly in border nations or communities. She further explains that "this generates anxiety over increased inequality, exploitation, and underdevelopment, ecological degradation such a loss of biodiversity, erosion, global warming, desertification, flooding, waste, oil pollution, and loss of manure life (Agofure 2016, p.1).

Generally, poetry and particularly contemporary Nigerian poetry encapsulates the consequences of the interface between nature and man's activities in an epoch of environmental crises. In recent past, natural disasters have not only compelled human societies to re-examine the significance of nature for human survival but also led to the realisation that any harmful human action against nature will yield destructive consequences for humanity (Glotfelty 1996, p. xix). The growing concern with the dysfunction of the ecology in Nigerian poetry necessitates the deployment of literary works to evaluate environmental concern, thus giving literature, especially poetry a new area of focus. This is to raise awareness on the need for sustainable relationship between man and his environment. It is in this regard that this paper uses Ecocriticism as a literary theory in literary criticism to examine the selected poems in Tanure Ojaide's *Songs of Myself: Quartet* and *The Questioner: New Poems* as eco-poetry. Against this background, William Rueckert asserts that "the application of ecology and ecological concepts to the study of literature, because ecology (as a science, as a discipline, as the basis for human vision) has the greatest relevance to the present and future of the world" (1978, p.5). In this enterprise, the relationship between literature and environment are scrutinised in terms of ecological concepts. Art and ecology, therefore, attempts to find common ground between mankind and environment, to show how they can coexist in various ways, because

environmental issues have become integral parts of human existence. This is one of the challenges that Ecocriticism addresses in its attempts to find a more environmentally conscious position in literary criticisms.

### **Eco-Poetry and Environmental Writing in Nigeria**

Eco-poetry is poetry with strong ecological emphasis or message. Both eco-poetry and environmental writing are writings that are about the earth (nature, animals and/or the relationship between natural world and the human-built environment), and have a strong environmental or ecological undertones. Many poets, poems and poetry collections have expressed ecological concerns throughout history; but only recently has the term eco-poetry gained use (Mosley 1995, p. 3). One of a number of seminal texts helping to introduce the term unto a wider, critical use was *Eco-poetry: a Critical Introduction* edited by J. Scott Bryson (2002). Another example of the burgeoning use of the term at the millennial turn was the journal *ecopoetics*, which broadened the term from poetry into *poises* interpreted as making or writing more generally (*Wikipedia n.d.*). While *ecopoetics* played a significant role in popularising the term “eco-poetry” and expanding its scope beyond poetry to encompass other forms of writing, *poises* interpreted as “making or writing” in a broader sense, encompassing various forms of creative expression. One of the chief characteristics of eco-poetry, as defined by James Engelhardt, is that it is connected to the world in a way that implies responsibility. Ecopoetic “surrounded by questions of ethnics” (*Wikipedia*).

In Nigeria, Eco-poetry has found its place in the poetry of Niyi Osundare, Tanure Ojaide, Odia Ofeimun, Nnimmo Bassey, Helon Habila and other notable poets. These poets have articulated and explored environmental issues, exploitation of indigenous resources and the evils of colonialism in the lines of their poetry collections. Onyebuchi Nwosu asserts that these poets have “masterfully interwoven in the art of poetry to project a perspective it terms environmental poetics. Thus, utilising the instrument of poetry, the poets demonstrate the usefulness of art in portraying the ways in which human activities greatly impact on the human environment” (2022, p.115). For example, Osundare broached the idea of environmental poetry in his collection of poems, *The Eye of the Earth* (1986). The collection is a nostalgic rendering of his youthful life that depicts the environment in its natural state. The first three parts; “Back to Earth”, “Eyeful Glances” and “Rainsongs” expose in depth the natural environment that is resplendent with natural vitality and rock deposits found in former Ondo, now Ondo and Ekiti States. The poet paints an all-embracing picture of the beautiful landscape of Ikare-Ekiti his place of birth. In the same vein, Ojaide in his collection of poems, *Delta Blues and Home Songs: Poems* (depicts in totality environmental degradation in Niger-Delta region. The region that abounds in aquatic and terrestrial habitat is now a ghost of past glory. The cry of the poet is found in “When Green was the Lingua Franca”:

I see victims of arson wherever my restless soles take me to bearwitness. The  
Ethiopia waterfront wipeout by prospectors – so many trees beheaded and  
stream mortally poisoned in the name of job wealth! (*Delta Blues and*, 1998, p.  
2)

In the above poem, Ojaide laments that the ecological problem has given rise to unprecedented violence. Saro Wiwa and eight others were killed in the process. The youths have formed themselves into militant unit to fight this issue. The fight by Niger Delta militants is a far cry from environmental issue because they see it as an avenue to get a share of the national treasure.

Consequently, Nigerian eco-poets through their environmental writing (poetics) also confront and disparage inept Nigerian leaders and their partners in crime in their poetry whose evil plans and ineptitude impact negatively and inhibit security and development in Nigeria. Thus, it is penitent to link environment to the socio-economic, political and cultural activities which invariably intersect and interfere with human activities and the country’s security challenges. E nukora (2022, p.54). suggests that “these variable indexes are inextricably tied to the discourse on the integral human and national development and sustainability because the environment interfaces with people’s activities making it central human existence and development”

### **Ecocriticism as Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical frame work adopted for this study is Ecocriticism. It is one of the latest among the terminologies to enter into the annals of literary criticism, and about which Estok (2001, p.1). asserts that “it is very young” It is a literary theory which seeks to raise awareness about the interrelationship between literature and the environment, which according to Glotfelty (1996, p. xv) is “literary studies in an age of environmental crisis.” What this translates into according to Ejiodu (2016, p.20) is that “there are environmental problems, and that criticism in this mode examines the relationship between humans and non humans with a view to ascertaining how best the co-existence of both could be optimally managed.” Dobie in Ejiodu (2016, p.21) posits that:

Ecocriticism made its first appearance as a canon of literary criticism in 1978 in  
the title of an essay; “Literature and Ecology: An Experiment on Ecocriticism”  
by William Rueckert. Ecocriticism is a term that has to do with the

interrelationship between literature and nature, the use of literature to re-order the attitudes of man towards adjusting his way, so as to make him recognise the symbiotic affinity needed to forge a new and better relationship between man and “other” aspects of nature.

Thus, Ecocriticism as a literary term was coined in the late 1970s from “ecology” (eco) and criticism. Abrams (2005, p.71) asserts that ecology is “the science that investigates the interrelations of all forms of plant and animal life with each other and with their physical habitat.” He further says that:

Ecocriticism (or by an alternative name, environmental criticism) designates the critical writings which explore the relations between literature and the biological and physical environment, considered with an acute awareness of the devastation being brought on that environment by human activity. (Abrams 2005, p.71)

While investigating on the nature and function of ecocritics and, by extension, ecocriticism in “Ecocriticism”, it was observed that:

Ecocritics investigate such things as the underlying ecological values, what, precisely, is meant by the word nature, and whether the examination of “place” should be a distinctive category, much like class, gender or race. Ecocritics examine human perception of wilderness, and how it has changed throughout history and whether or not current environmental issues are accurately represented or even mentioned in proper culture and modern literature. Other disciplines, such as history, philosophy, ethics, and psychology, are also considered by ecocritics to possible contributors to eco criticism (*Wikipedia, n.d.*)

In literature, precisely eco-poetry, the environment is given a human voice, and a very loud voice at that; and it responds to humanity’s violation of her terrain and sanctity. The voice in ecopoetry always calls for a moderate interference, as it is absolutely impossible to avoid collecting from the earth or environment. This is what Ojaide and other eco-poets call for – a moderate interference to the flora and fauna of their society. It is in this light and against the background of Glotfelty’s definition of poetry as “the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment” that this paper examines some selected poem on Ojaide’s *Songs of Myself: A Quartet* (2015) and *The Questioner: New Poems* (2018) as Eco-poems that call for environmental justice. Environmental justice as a concept emerged in the 1980s, emphasising the fair distribution of environmental benefits and burdens among all individuals and communities (Bullard 1990, p.1). It seeks to address the disproportionate exposure of marginalised populations to environmental hazards, such as pollution, toxic waste, and climate change (Taylor 2014, p.2). Environmental justice is rooted in the principles of social justice, human rights, sustainability, aiming to promote equitable access to natural resources, healthy environments, and inclusive decision-making processes (Agyeman et al., 2003, p. 5).

Glotfelty’s (1996) ecocritical theory emphasises the interconnectedness of literature and the environment, highlighting the need for environmental justice. Some of the poems in Ojaide’s *Songs of Myself: A Quartet* and *The Questioner: New Poems* exemplify this concept, as they explore the relationships between humans, nature, and social justice. These selected poems critique environmental degradation, echoing Glotfelty’s call for environmental justice.

### **Tanure Ojaide as an Eco-Poet**

Ojaide, a prolific Nigerian poet was born on April 24, 1948. His roots run deep into the Delta region and his poetry collections are highly influenced by the oral traditions of Urhobo people. Admitting, Ojaide says that “it is the oral tradition that makes us the African writers we are. As an African writer, the oral tradition mediates between writing in English language and writing about a people and a place that is not indigenously and originally English” (Onyerieonwu 2012 p. 329). Ojaide is a recipient of so many awards such as the commonwealth poetry prize for the African region (1987), the BBC Arts and African Poetry (1988 and 1997), the Association of Nigerian Authors Poetry Prize (1988 and 1994), among many others. Some of his poetry collections since the new millennium include: *In the Kingdom of Songs* (2003), *In the House of Words* (2005), *The Tale of the Harmattan* (2007), *Waiting for the Hatching of a Cockerel* (2008), *Songs of Myself: A Quartet* (2015) and *The Questioner: New Poems* (2018). Ojaide is noted for his stylistic vision and criticism of imperialism, religion and environmental issues.

Ojaide is widely regarded as a prominent ecopoet, and scholars have praised his work for its powerful exploration of the relationship between humans and the environment. According to G.G Darah (2009, p.12), “the sinew of Ojaide’s poetry harps on the urgency of Ojaide’s art of resistance. The poetry of Tanure Ojaide... fits into the tradition of outrage against political injustice, exploitation and environmental disasters ....” Uzoechi Nwagbara’s (2010, p.18) insight on Ojaide’s environmental poetry is significant. He asserts that:

Following such polluted socio-economic landscape, Nigerian writers have risen to the occasion by using art to address, as well as, bring to the knowledge

of humanity this form of environmental devastation and inhumanity. The hallmark of Ojaide's art is to use literature to engage the realities in his milieu.

For him, literature is a product of social experiences.

Nwagbara" (2010, p.15) further posits that, "it is in resisting environmental and socio-economic slough that the essence of Ojaide's poetics is brought to the fore. Darah (2009, p.12) also perceives that "the poetry of Tanure Ojaide ... fits into the tradition of outrage against political injustice, exploitation and environmental disaster; from his titles, one can discern an abiding concern with the fate of the Niger Delta people." Still on Ojaide's poetry, Terhemba Shija (2010, p.2) highlights that "the destruction of the environment as in most of Ojaide's poems dealing with nature is symbolic of the destruction of African (Nigerian) culture and values" Ojaide's ecopoetry does not only articulate the thrust of ecocriticism, but, makes it functional, so that the aim of the concept is not lost in vagueness. Critics on Ojaide's work demonstrate that, Ojaide's literary compositions call for harmony with the natural world around mankind hence for the poet to be silent constitutes grave mistake, no matter how grim or unspeakable the national condition or invincible the power of authority might appear to be. If silent, the enemy speaks; he sets the agenda of the debate. The national condition will thus get worse. The polity is enamored when it reads the words, hears its voice on the mirror of every letter ... (Olafioye 2000, p.166). In all of these, the need to preserve the beauty, equity, purity of the environment, relates to mankind's sources of survival. These are captured in Ojaide's environmental poetry; hence, they make him an eco-poet.

### **Environmental Justice in Ojaide's *Songs of Myself: A Quartet* (2015) and *The Questioner: New Poems* (2018)**

Ojaide has won numerous awards for his creative works. He credits his maternal grandmother, who raised him, for inspiring his writings. "Whatever Inene told me in the morning" Ojaide claims "proved true by sunset." *Songs of Myself: A Quartet* (2015) sings a compelling song that describes different scenarios of Ojaide's life, including his early days, love life, the political situation of his country, and his environmentally devastated home of the Niger Delta. His love for his homeland makes him to often write one thing or the other about his people in his poetry collections. For Ojaide, the creative writer is never an airplant, but someone who is grounded in some specific place. It is difficult to talk of many writers without their identification with place. Every writer's roots are very important in understanding his or her work. From Ojaide's postulation, the importance of place and cultural context in shaping the creative writer's work cannot be overemphasized. Ojaide believes that writers are not detached from their surroundings, but are deeply rooted in their specific and environmental contexts.

*Songs of Myself: A Quartet* is deeply rooted in the indigenous African poetic tradition. Ojaide composed songs paying tribute to the god of songs, followed by songs of self-exhortation, and then songs mocking themselves before satirizing others. Ojaide's *Songs of Myself: A Quartet* is a collection of poems that blends the personal and political to paint a portrait of Nigeria in transition. The collection is divided into four parts: "Pulling the thread of the Loom", "Songs of Myself," "Songs of the Homeland Warriors" and "Secret Love and Other Poems." In the poem, "Can I still call from the River Nun?", the second in the section "Songs of the Homeland Warriors"; a section dedicated to Isaac Adaka Boro and Ken Saro-Wiwa. Ojaide masterfully crafts a touching and powerful exploration of environmental degradation and injustice resonating with the urgent calls for environmental justice. Through a fine distinctive use of language, imagery, and form, the poet paints a vivid picture of the River Nun's violation, indicting the culpable parties and advocating for collective action. The poem's title, "Can I still call from the River Nun?" is a rhetorical question that sets the tone of the persona's lamentation. The use of "Can I still" implies a sense of uncertainty and longing, highlighting the persona's deep connection to the river and their concern for its well-being. The River Nun, once a symbol of life and sustenance, is now "the toxic the toxic flames of arsonists" and "flares of raging gas" (Ojaide 2015, p.114). The poet's use of imagery and metaphor effectively conveys the extent of the ecological devastation, emphasizing the river's transformation from a vibrant ecosystem to a polluted and dying entity.

The poet's critique of environmental injustice is further evident in his portrayal of the oil industries destructive impact. He therefore asks "can the fish population fondly called the children of the gods/stop the poisoning of their resident water by oil workers?" (Ojaide 2015, p.114), highlighting the devastating consequences of unchecked exploitation. The poet persona's observation, "can I still call from the River Nun to the sea maids/lounging in the Atlantic to come to me for a party?" (Ojaide 2015, p.114) is a powerful indictment of the industries disregard for human life and the environment to the extent that they have made life difficult that he can no longer call the "sea maids" for a party. This depicts life in the poet's homeland before the arrival of the "conglomerate of poachers" and "money mongers" came to pollute the air that "sustains the living in this blessed portion" (Ojaide 2015, p.114). This stark contrast between the river's former vitality and its current desecration underscores the injustice of a system that priorities profit over people and the planet. Moreover, the poem highlights the disproportionate impact of environmental degradation on marginalized communities. The persona's lamentation that "can the warthog, porcupine, deer, and dozens of game/defend themselves against the army of developers?" (Ojaide 2015, p.114), show a sense of helplessness of the endangered species as well as the inhabitants of the

community who cannot speak or fight for themselves due to the federal might. The heartrending observation underscores the human cost of environmental injustice, emphasizing the need for a collective action to protect the environment and preserve cultural heritage. The persona's question, "Can I still call from the River Nun?" becomes a rallying cry, urging the community to reclaim their connection to the land and demand justice. Ojaide's use of language and form reinforces the poem's message, employing a lyrical style to convey the urgency of the issue. The poem's structure, divided into short stanzas, creates a sense of disjointedness, mirroring the fractured relationship between humans and the environment. The repetition of the word "can" becomes a haunting refrain emphasizing the relentless nature of environmental degradation and the need for sustained action. "Can I still call from the River Nun?" is a powerful poem of environmental justice, decrying the destruction of a virtual ecosystem, and the marginalization of a community.

In "In the Omoja River" (Ojaide 2015, p.117), Ojaide weaves a poignant tapestry of environmental degradation and social injustice, resonating with the urgent calls for environmental justice. Through the poem's nostalgic-lyrical voice, Ojaide paints a vivid picture of the Omoja River's desecration, lamenting "In the Omoja River we washed body and tools/as we crossed from the farm after the day's task/There too, young, we listened to murmuring waters..." (Ojaide 2015, p.117). The "cheerful" river, once a symbol of life, calmness and sustenance, has now been "pissed and pissed barrels of arsenic into the current/until it is no longer the ageless river sung but a cesspool" (Ojaide 2015, p.117), its beauty and vitality suffocated by the ravages of oil exploitation. According to the poet, these "criminals and transgressors" did not only pollute the waters but they also "stripped and stripped the forest naked of its evergreen/suit until it is no more a forest but a sand-field" (Ojaide 2015, p.117). The poet's use of imagery and metaphor effectively conveys the extent of the ecological devastation, indicting the culpable parties for their reckless disregard. In another poem, "Much of the year wet" (Ojaide 2015, p.118), the poet also calls for environmental justice. Ojaide employs various metaphors and poetic devices to convey the themes of environmental degradation, resilience, and the impact of human activities on nature. In the following lines "Much of the year wet, it lives a regular life/in royalty in the creeks, streams and lakes" (Ojaide 2015, p.118), the metaphor of the mudfish living a "regular life in royalty" creates an image of majesty and dignity, emphasising the fish's adaptability and thriving in its natural habitat. "The mudfish floats with retinue of family fins/and from its gestures must be partying" (Ojaide 2015, p.118) suggests a regal procession, while the image of "partying" conveys a sense of joy and celebration, highlighting the fish's contentment in its environment. The image of the mudfish avoiding hooks and nets while seeking plankton emphasises its resourcefulness and ability to thrive despite human interference. "In dry season often a castaway/In dusty creek ensconced in mud, a living miracle of drought, it settles" creates the image of resilience and highlights the ability to survive in harsh conditions.

The metaphor of the fish being "holed" in the earth creates an image of confinement, while the image of the rains freeing it from the "dungeon of dust" (Ojaide 2015: p.118) suggests liberation and renewal. "Should I choose to be fish in the next world/Would I survive in the methane-filled streams?" (Ojaide 2015, p.119). The rhetorical question and hypothetical create a sense of introspection and concern, highlighting the impact of environmental degradation on the natural world and the uncertainty of survival in a polluted environment. Ojaide's use of metaphors, imagery and rhetorical devices in "Much of the year wet" creates a powerful and evocative poem that raises awareness about environmental degradation, resilience, and the interconnectedness of nature. By employing these poetic devices, Ojaide invites the reader to contemplate the natural world's beauty, vulnerability, and the need for conservation.

*The Questioner: New Poems* (Ojaide, 2018), is another collection that explores themes of environmental degradation, social justice and personal identity. In "Elegy for the Water" (Ojaide 2018, pp.199 – 200), the poet crafts a poignant lamentation for the degradation of the Niger Delta's waterways, advocating for environmental justice. Through of masterful use of imagery, metaphor and form, Ojaide condemns the destructive impact of oil exploitation and neglect on the ecosystem and local communities. The poem sets the tone for the persona's mournful tribute to the desecrated waters. The use of "elegy" emphasises the sense of loss and mourning, while "waters" underscores the vital importance of the ecosystem. Ojaide's imagery paints a vivid picture of the waters' former beauty and current devastation of the environment in the Niger Delta. In the following lines, the poet cries:

Nobody expected the storm despite the severe-faced clouds that blackened the skies; we could not see far in the daytime hours. We believed despite all the alarms raised that standing our ground would not make victims of fools unafraid of brazen perils ahead, and if only I knew the land of those days would age faster than me, lose its green luster and resources and trash paradise to a wasteland, I would have built a barn from east to west for all species yam, I would have dug countless ponds of fish seeking rehabilitation after they fell from the skies in unrelenting storms, I would have deployed the strength of youth to nurture and defend the earth... (Ojaide 2018, p.200)

As seen above, the poet laments the degradation of the environment and the loss of natural resources. “Nobody expected the storm despite the severe-faced clouds that blackened the skies/we could not see far in the daytime hours” create an image of unexpected environmental disaster, despite the visible warning signs (severe-faced clouds possibly caused by oil explorers). The phrase “we could not see far in the daytime” suggests a lack of foresight and preparedness. The poem further highlights the tendency to ignore environmental warnings and the consequences of inactions. The phrase “standing our ground” implies attempt to resist the polluters of the environment, while “brazen perils ahead” foreshadows the devastating effects of environmental degradation. Expressing regret and nostalgia for a lost of era of environmental beauty and abundance, the image of land “aging faster”, the speaker emphasises the rapid degradation of the environment. More so, “I would have built a barn from east to west for all species of yam,/I would have dug countless ponds of fish seeking rehabilitation... I would have developed the strength of youth to nurture and defend the earth” (Ojaide 2018, p.200) offer a vision of environmental stewardship and conversation. The poet longs to have taken action to protect the natural world, using imagery of abundance (barns and ponds) and restoration (rehabilitation of fish).

The persona’s thoughts in the same poem, “Elegy for the waters” “I would not be frigid because winter comes with benumbed limbs/I would have garnered the sunshine of the tropical garden for life” (Ojaide 2018, p.200) . The metaphor of winter and its effects on the natural world (benumbed limbs) serves as a warning for the consequences of environmental degradation. The persona’s resolve to “not be rigid” suggests determination to take action against the numbing effects of environmental destruction. The image of “garnering the sunshine of the tropical garden” creates a vivid picture of harnessing the natural world’s resources for sustenance and survival. The phrase “for life” emphasises the importance of environmental conservation for the preservation of all living things in the Niger Delta. In the context of environmental justice, these lines can be seen as a call to action to address the disproportionate impact of environmental degradation on marginalised communities.

In another poem in the collection, “Of Worms, Fish and Fishermen” (*The Questioner*, pp. 223-224), Ojaide crafts an eco-poem that explores the interconnectedness of species and the devastating impact of environmental degradation in the Niger Delta ecosystem. In the poem, the persona explores the intricate web of life in the Niger Delta. The use of “worms”, “fish”, and “fishermen” emphasises the interrelationship of species, humans and the delicate balance of the ecosystem. Through “Of Worms, Fish and Fishermen,” Ojaide critiques thus:

I

Fish loves earthworms but cannot dig out the moist soil beside water to fill its appetite until the fisherman brings them together for his own human indulgence; another matter. He ferrets earthworms out of their refuge for baits. The fish population scrambles to swallow a mortal mistake that uplifts the fisherman to return home with the glory of his catch – a testament of future.

II

The worm, seeker of soft soil for permanent residence, and fish in water are neighbors that do not meet at all until the fisherman deploys his craft to their disadvantage, knowing its vulnerability, the worm burrows deep sub-soil to avoid the peril of voracious fish roaming for free meals. The worm endangered from all sides, fish human delicacy, and the fisherman is the great enabler of intrigues in water

III

I used small fish to catch big fish in the Omwe River, my prize from brown waters tainted with cannibal instincts. I unsettled worms from their safe and comfortable habitat, broke the exposed soil to give water more leeway to run, I know why, after Grandpa, Dad and I fished night and day, the streams dried up more land to build more homes or clogged by capital greed for oil to raise the Stock Market, My daughter has become a vegan and I no longer mention in her presence my fishing expeditions and the great catch...

V

... Let’s fish out the vultures and incarcerate them as everybody’s task on Environmental Day now idle and eliminate the contagion threatening human existence. (Ojaide 2018, pp.223-224)

This poem explores the interconnectedness of species and the impact of human actions on the environment. It highlights the relationship between fish, earthworms, and humans, showcasing how human activities disrupt the natural balance. In the first stanza, the poem describes how fish rely on earthworms for food, but are unable to access them until the fisherman intervenes, exploiting both species for human gain. This exploitation leads to the fish population’s decline, perpetuating a cycle of harm. The second stanza emphasises the earthworm’s

vulnerability, as it burrows deep to avoid the fisherman's bait and fish's predation. The worm's habitat is disrupted, and it becomes endangered due to human activities. The third stanza reveals the persona's personal experience with fishing and its consequences. He acknowledges the harm caused by their actions, including the destruction of habitats and the decline of fish populations. The persona's daughter has adopted a vegan lifestyle, highlighting the intergenerational impact of environmental awareness. The final lines, "Let's fish out the vultures and incarcerate them as everybody's task on Environmental Day... eliminate the contagion threatening our existence" (Ojaide 2018, p.224), serve as a call to action. The persona urges for collective responsibility to address environmental degradation and its consequences, such as the rise of pollutants and the decline of ecosystems. Through this poem, (Ojaide 2018 pp. 223-224) emphasises the intricate relationships within ecosystems and the need for sustainable practices to protect the environment and ensure a thriving future for all species.

In yet another poem "Global Demons" (Ojaide 2018, p. 96), Ojaide passionately advocates for justice in an ecosystem ravaged by human greed and neglect. Through powerful imagery and poignant language, Ojaide condemns the exploitation of natural resources and the oppression of marginalised regions. From an environmental justice perspective, the poem highlights the need to address the unsustainable consumption patterns and the exploitation of natural resources driven by globalised capitalism. It emphasises the importance of recognising the limits of the earth's resources and prioritising the well-being of both humans and the environment. The poem also alludes to the disproportionate impact of consumer culture on marginalised communities, who often bear the brunt of environmental degradation and pollution. By highlighting "demons of desire" that drive consumerism, the poem encourages readers to reflect on their consumption patterns and the role they play in perpetuating environmental injustice.

### Conclusion

Tanure Ojaide's eco-poetry embodies the principles of environmental justice, resonating with the concerns of ecocritics who advocate for a more sustainable future. Through the selected poems in *Songs of Myself: A Quartet* and *The Questioner: New Poems*, Ojaide challenges dominant narratives of environmental destruction, echoing the view of Glotfelty, who argues that "ecocriticism seeks to uncover the environmental dimensions of literature and culture" (Glotfelty, 1996, p. xviii). Ojaide's eco-poetry exemplifies the power of literature to inspire environmental justice, aligning with the views of Buell (1995, p. 23), who asserts that "literature can serve as a catalyst for environment awareness and activism." By exploring the intersections between literature and environment, the selected poems in *Song of Myself: A Quartet* and *The Questioner: New Poems* embody the principles of environmental justice, amplifying the voices of marginalised people and highlighting the disproportionate impact of environmental degradation on vulnerable populations.

Through the selected poems in these collections, Ojaide challenges the anthropocentric worldview that has contributed to environmental degradation, echoing the sentiments of Morton (2007, p.15), who argues that "the environment is not just a backdrop for human activity, but a living, breathing entity that demands our respect and care" Ultimately, Ojaide's eco-poetry serves as a powerful call to action, urging stakeholders - especially the government and oil companies - to confront contemporary environmental crises of our society and work towards a more sustainable future.

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