An Ecostylistic Analysis of Nnimmo Bassey's *Darts Hurled by Carbon* and *No More Sins to Confess*

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Abstract
Across history and cultures, poetry has served as a powerful tool to interpret nature and human activities. For Nnimmo Bassey, a Nigerian environmentalist, activist and poet, verse becomes a means of articulating ecological crises and confronting the destructive entanglements of human, political and corporate actions that exist in the Anthropocene. This paper investigates the thematic concerns and stylistic markers in two of Bassey's ecopoems, *Darts Hurled by Carbon* and *No More Sins to Confess*, exploring how they reflect and reinforce his ecosophy which is a vision of ecological justice rooted in resistance, moral urgency and spiritual responsibility. Drawing from Daniela Virdis' (2022) ecostylistic framework, the analysis focuses on features such as point of view, metaphor, lexical patterning and foregrounding to demonstrate how linguistic form generates ecological meaning. The poems are steeped in the themes of fossil-fuel violence, systemic complicity, spiritual erosion and environmental grief, rendered through vivid imagery, irony and religious allusion. *Darts Hurled by Carbon* presents an in-depth critique of extractivism and political inertia, while *No More Sins to Confess* reflects the psychological and moral exhaustion of living in a world desensitised to environmental collapse. United by Bassey's ecopoetic voice and ecosophical worldview, both texts position poetry as a medium of resistance, mourning and moral awakening. This study affirms the relevance of ecostylistics in uncovering how ecopoetry engages with the environmental and humanistic dilemmas of the Anthropocene.
Keywords: Anthropocene, ecostylistics, ecopoetry, ecosophy.

Introduction

Across cultures and centuries, nature has held a central place in poetic expression. From West African oral traditions to Japanese haiku, Native American chants and European ballads, poets have long drawn on the natural world to explore human emotions, history and spirituality. Nature served not just as a backdrop but as a powerful metaphor and memory keeper which Rajani (2021) calls a poetic mirror of the human condition. Overtime, this intimate relationship between poetry and nature shifted with the Industrial Revolution. Mechanisation brought mass deforestation, pollution and ecological imbalance, eroding traditional ties to the environment. As Fatah (2019) notes, industrialism reframed nature as a resource for extraction, undermining its spiritual and aesthetic significance.

These disruptions have intensified in what scientists call the Anthropocene which is a geological epoch defined by human dominance over Earth's systems. Coined by Crutzen and Stoermer (2000), the term captures the climate crisis, biodiversity loss and pollution that now shape our planet. In Nigeria, the Anthropocene is a harsh reality. Oil spills, deforestation and industrial waste have devastated ecosystems, especially in the Niger Delta. Berazneva and Byker (2022) reveal that "forest loss leads to an increase in neonatal mortality - one standard deviation of forest loss is associated with a 9-15% increase in the likelihood of death within the first month of life." This shows how environmental degradation directly harms vulnerable populations and the socio-ecological consequences of the Anthropocene in the Nigerian context. Yet, the ecological crisis is not purely physical or scientific; it is deeply ethical, cultural and discursive. Dominant narratives, whether political, religious, or embedded in everyday language, often normalise environmental exploitation. For instance, Christian theological doctrines that emerged in the second millennium promoted human dominion over nature and encouraged intensive resource exploitation (Beau, 2020). Lynn White Jr.'s influential thesis also argued that Christianity, particularly in its Western medieval form, laid the ideological foundation for anthropocentric attitudes toward the environment (as cited in Beau, 2020). Further compounding this issue is the influence of economic discourse, which Piron (2018) notes has evolved into a hegemonic narrative reducing all human and environmental interactions to productivity and utility. Therefore, our linguistic choices as it concerns the environment, play a pivotal role in shaping our ethical orientation toward it. As Stibbe (2021) observes, language both reflects and reproduces ideologies, making it critical to examine how discourses can perpetuate or challenge ecological injustice.

Although literature reflects a range of ideological positions, it remains a potent space for resistance and critical engagement. As a tool of environmental consciousness and activism, poetry, in particular, provides a space to question dominant ideologies and reimagine more ethical human-nature relations. Eco-poetry, unlike traditional nature poetry, foregrounds the broken relationship between humanity and the environment. Newman (2015) explains that eco-poetry while it describes nature, also highlights the environmental crises of our time, revealing the interconnectedness of ecological and human suffering. Nigerian eco-poets have embraced this role. Through vivid imagery and metaphor, they confront environmental injustice, corporate exploitation and governmental neglect. Agofure (2018) argues that Nigerian eco-poetry reflects an ecological consciousness shaped by corruption and global capitalism. Among these poets, Nnimmo Bassey stands out. His work fuses literary craft with activism, exposing the socio-political roots of ecological destruction. Through striking language and stylistic innovation,

Bassey's poetry challenges dominant narratives and reimagines a more ethical relationship with nature. This study adopts Daniella Virdis' ecostylistic approach to examine Bassey's poetic techniques, particularly his use of language to construct ecological meaning and advocate for ecosophy, a philosophy that recognises the inherent worth of all life. In a world shaped by exploitation, Bassey's voice offers a powerful call to rethink how we speak, act and coexist with the Earth.

Literature Review

The critical reception of Nnimmo Bassey's eco-poetry has continued to grow, with scholars examining its activist message, stylistic sophistication and environmental focus. Adebiyi-Adelabu and Oyetunji (2021) analyse *We Thought It Was Oil but It Was Blood* and *I Will Not Dance to Your Beat* through a Marxist perspective. They argue that Bassey's tone of resistance and revolutionary stance positions his poetry as a vehicle for environmental agitation and protest. Their reading highlights a sense of mourning and critique that defines his poetic voice. Building on this, Egya (2016) places Bassey within the tradition of Niger Delta poets such as Gabriel Okara, Tanure Ojaide and Ogaga Ifowodo. Using Rob Nixon's theory of slow violence and the environmentalism of the poor, Egya contends Bassey's ecopoetry documents ecological harm while serving as cultural resistance to systemic exploitation. Odia (2020) introduces the concept of ecotopianism, observing a shift in Nigerian eco-poetry from lament to vision. He finds in Bassey's work a call for environmental renewal and active protection, rather than passive despair.

Other critics approach Bassey's poetry through symbolism and pedagogy. Akosu (2023) emphasises the poet's portrayal of environmental degradation through his depiction of the abuse of land, animals and plants. She argues that his literary techniques enhance readers' ecological awareness and highlight the interconnectedness of all life forms. Onuoha and Michael (2022) take a pedagogical approach, applying Freirean thought to argue that Bassey's poetry functions as "poetic reportage," blending collective memory, protest and civic engagement. Language itself plays a central role in shaping Bassey's ecological message. Anasiudu (2022), using postcolonial ecocriticism and functional linguistics, examines how deixis, metaphor and pronouns construct socio-ecological meaning. Maledo and Kadiri (2024) apply pragmatic theory to show how Bassey manipulates conversational maxims to foreground environmental protest and rhetorical emphasis. While these studies illuminate Bassey's poetic activism and linguistic skill, few have applied the ecostylistic approach. Ecostylistics, which merges ecological concern with stylistic analysis, examines how language shapes environmental thought. Introduced by Andrew Goatly at the 2010 PALA conference, the term calls for a reorientation of stylistics toward ecological awareness. Virdis (2022) and Stockwell (2024) suggest that ecostylistics is not a new discipline but a deliberate shift in focus. It considers how linguistic elements such as syntax, metaphor and narrative structure, serve environmental communication and ethical reflection.

According to Mohammed and Jafar (2023), ecostylistics centres on two perspectives: the relationship between textual style and the natural world and the identification of ecological language patterns that promote environmental literacy. Stockwell (2024) adds that ecostylistics aligns with "4E cognition": embodied, embedded, enactive and extended. This emphasises how human perception, social interaction] and language are shaped by and responsive to the

environment. Drewnoik and Kuznaik (2024) position ecostylistics within the evolution of cognitive linguistics and ecolinguistics, suggesting that it reflects an eco-philosophical turn in the study of meaning and representation. As Zurru (2017) notes, ecostylistics, sometimes called green stylistics, shares ground with both ecocriticism and ecolinguistics, combining literary analysis with ecological insight. This approach is especially relevant in a time when language plays a crucial role in shaping attitudes toward environmental degradation and sustainability. This study addresses a critical gap by applying ecostylistics to Bassey's poetry. It explores how his use of language constructs ecological meaning, challenges exploitative ideologies and promotes an ethical reimagining of human-environment relations within the context of the Nigerian Anthropocene.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative, interpretive methodology grounded in ecostylistics, with a focus on the linguistic and stylistic analysis of poetic texts. The aim is to examine how language is employed by Nnimmo Bassey to construct, challenge and reframe human relationships with the environment in the context of the Anthropocene. This approach is informed by Daniella Virdis' (2022) ecostylistic framework, which combines principles of stylistics with insights from ecocriticism, emphasising the ethical and ecological implications of linguistic choices. The poems selected for analysis are chosen for their explicit engagement with themes of environmental degradation, extractivism and ecological justice within the Nigerian context. Both poems are found in Bassey's (2022) collection titled: *I See the Invisible*. The texts selected for analysis are representative of Bassey's wider body of work that blends literary activism with ecological consciousness. The analysis is situated within the Nigerian environmental context, particularly the ecological consequences of oil exploitation, deforestation and environmental injustice in the Nigerian society. These contextual realities inform the interpretive lens applied to the selected texts.

Daniella Virdis (2022) defines ecostylistics as an ecologically committed form of stylistics that examines how language constructs and disseminates ecological ideologies. Her approach "is in line with the scholarly and social militancy pursued by a part of ecostylistics and by ecolinguistics," and is geared toward "a broader use and dissemination of life-sustaining ecosophies and ecological agendas" (Virdis, 2022, p. 72). In particular, she identifies foregrounding, point of view and metaphors as key stylistic tools that expose ecological meanings and commitments in texts. These elements highlight how language shapes environmental thought, values and action. These are central to what she calls the stylistic dimension of ecosophy. In this study, Virdis's method is expanded by incorporating lexical patterning to enrich the stylistic analysis of poetic discourse. This extension supports the aim of identifying how meaning is made together with the means through which ecological consciousness is systematically encoded in the lexis of Bassey's poetry. Therefore, the study combines foregrounding, point of view, metaphors and lexical patterns to uncover the environmental ethics embedded in the texts. In essence, this methodological approach not only decodes the stylistic mechanisms through which Bassey constructs his eco-critical voice but also underscores the role of poetic language as a medium of ecological intervention in the Anthropocene.

Lexical Patterning

i. Nominalisations and Nominal Groups

In *No More Sins to Confess,* nominalisations dominate the listing of human-induced harms. Phrases such as "deforestation without care," "exporting environmental costs" and "displacing the poor" package complex actions into dense noun phrases. This compresses time and agency, making harms appear habitual or systemic rather than momentary. These abstract processes sound almost bureaucratic, implying normalised, institutionalised wrongdoing. Similarly, in *Darts Hurled by Car*bon, noun groups like "conferences of Pretenders," "carbon cash changers," and "decisions and non-decisions sentenced to have effect in the 4th generation" point to the hollow formalities and performativity of global climate discourse. These heavy noun clusters contribute to a sense of ritualised failure. The compound "carbon farts" is a coinage used by the poet to achieve satire, nominalising pollution while ridiculing it in order to reduce industrial-scale damage to vulgar excess. Bassey's use of noun groups across both poems often removes direct human actors from blame, emphasising structures such as "hooded market forces," "drools of drones," "swinging ropes of TNCs." These become the new agents of destruction, displacing responsibility from individuals to systems.

ii. Adjectival Modifiers

In *No More Sins to Confess*, adjectives such as "non-productive seeds," "stubborn plastics," and "astonished confessor" add evaluative force. These nominal modifiers are descriptors used to expose exploitation ("non-productive" reflects capitalist utility failure) or persistence of waste ("stubborn") and the emotional disorientation of traditional morality ("astonished"). On the other hand, the poet used more biting and political evaluative adjectives to modify nouns in *Darts Hurled by Carbon*. Expressions such as "gutless polluters," "hollow thoughtless chambers," and "zombie politicos" are used. These are not simply pejorative; they discredit institutional authority and highlight moral vacuity. Adjectival contrasts also appear in ironic juxtapositions. For example, "Myopia" becomes the land of the ruling class, while "clowns" wear "electoral crowns." This sarcastic inversion repositions the elites as comic or dangerous failures.

iii. Verbs and Agency

In *Darts Hurled by Carbon*, the distribution of verbs highlights a clear ideological distinction between the agents of harm and the agents of resistance. The poem frequently attributes destructive actions to institutional or political agents, often named explicitly through the third-person plural pronoun "they": "they feed on the blood of the damned," "they hung the planet on life support," and "they keep dancing while lives are snuffed." These verbs are transitive and material, projecting concrete actions of environmental violence, political deception and moral evasion. The verb "hung", in particular, personifies the Earth as a passive victim subjected to anthropogenic harm. Similarly, "cooked up Mother Earth" places polluters in direct control of environmental degradation, reinforcing human agency, especially corporate and governmental, in driving ecological collapse. Such active verbs make responsibility traceable and expose systemic culpability. The imagery of "conferences of pretenders" and the verb "scorn" further assign agency to elite actors who evade accountability while posturing publicly.

In contrast, verbs used in *No More Sins to Confess* largely emphasise passivity, complicity, or confusion, particularly through the repeated use of first-person singular actions like "I shuffle,"

"I kneel," "I search," "I recall," and "I wonder." These are largely mental and behavioural processes, focused on introspection rather than external impact. The verbs are subdued, often attached to a speaker attempting to locate moral boundaries in a world where sin has become unrecognisable. The repetition of "nothing pops up to count as sin" implies not only moral paralysis but also a kind of cognitive deadlock, where action is suspended in ambiguity. The contrast between the two poems is striking. While *Darts Hurled by Carbon* names agents and galvanises action, *No More Sins to Confess* retreats into disorientation. The former uses verbs to map out a battlefield of ecological justice, while the latter uses them to sketch a moral wasteland, where action has lost its meaning. In ecosophical terms, *Darts Hurled by Carbon* imagines resistance as necessary and possible; *No More Sins to Confess* presents it as stifled, almost absurd in a world where "good turned bad/bad turned good." Through their verb choices and agentive constructions, both poems illustrate distinct stages of ecological consciousness by dramatizing exposure and uprising on one hand while documenting numbed complicity in the Anthropocene.

Point of View

According to Virdis (2022), point of view refers not only to who tells the story but also to the psychological and ideological angle from which events are perceived. She opines that an analysis of the point of view seeks to illuminate nuances and bring out "the many-sidedness of any text" (Virdis, p. 55). In *Darts Hurled by Carbon*, Nnimmo Bassey constructs a galvanizing collective voice through the strategic use of first-person plural and third-person plural pronouns. The repeated invocation of "we" and "our" ("Sometimes I wonder if we deny the future," "Our raised fists and stomping feet will…") creates an inclusive subjectivity that binds speaker, audience and environment into a shared struggle. These "we" statements are anchored by dynamic verbs such as "raise," "stamp," "drive" that transform the poem into a manifesto of eco-resistance. The "They clauses stand in opposition ("They feed on the blood of the damned," "They hung the Planet on life support") as they locate agency and culpability squarely in faceless elites, polluters and policy-makers. By contrasting "we" with "they," the poem crafts a clear ethical dichotomy: "we" as community and hope, "they" as complicit destroyers of the planet.

In contrast, *No More Sins to Confess* operates through an introspective first-person singular perspective. The speaker's repeated "I" actions such as "I shuffle," "I search," "I wonder," establish a penitent figure seeking moral clarity in a world where sin has been redefined. These private, mental and behavioural verbs emphasise confusion and guilt rather than action. Moments of collective reference appear only through the universal quantifier "all" ("All evils are accepted as good," "All are out on a ride"), suggesting that the society at large is in moral collapse. Occasional unnamed agents, for instance those who "ignite wars," "trash stubborn plastics," or "snatch food" are presented with impersonal verb forms, which obscure whether individuals, corporations, or structures are responsible. This depersonalisation deepens the speaker's sense of alienation.

Together, the poems trace a spectrum of agency: *Darts Hurled by Carbon* empowers "we" to resist and indicts "they," while *No More Sins to Confess* confines the moral reckoning to a solitary "I," even as it gestures toward collective guilt with "all." Bassey's pronominal choices thus map the transition from personal disorientation to communal mobilisation, reflecting two essential stages in the journey toward eco-ethical awareness in the Anthropocene.

Foregrounding

In both poems, Bassey uses grammatical foregrounding to force the reader's attention onto the ethical and ecological crises he describes. As Virdis (2022) explains, foregrounding identifies linguistic deviations that draw attention to themselves and analysing them is important to revealing the overall message relayed by the text. *In Darts Hurled by Carbon*,"each stanza begins with the repeated clause opening "Sometimes I wonder…," a fronted adverbial that frames the poem as a series of urgent questions and immediately draws us into the speaker's restless concern. He further accelerates the poem's rhythm by piling up noun phrases without conjunctions such as, "Conferences of Pretenders," "carbon cash changers," "clowns in the land of Myopia," so that each label lands like a satirical smack against inaction. Sound patterns deepen the effect. The cluster of hard /k/ sounds in "carbon cash changers" links economic greed to ecological violence in the ear of the listener.

Likewise, *No More Sins to Confess* opens many stanzas with "Contrite, I…" or "Nothing pops up…," repeatedly foregrounding the speaker's moral paralysis. The poem then unleashes a rapid catalogue of abuses such as, "Displacing the poor / Deforestation without care / Pushing non-productive seeds" by omitting conjunctions, which mirrors the relentless, unbroken chain of environmental crimes. Here, too, sound foregrounding is at work: alliteration in phrases like "stubborn plastics" and "pushing non-productive" makes these words stick in the mind, emphasizing their destructive persistence. Finally, Bassey's line "White and black: hues of same coin" deliberately subverts the conventional phrase "black and white," which in English typically signifies absolute distinctions between good and evil, right and wrong. By inverting this common collocation to "white and black," Bassey destabilises that fixed moral dichotomy. The familiar rhythm of the phrase is disrupted, drawing attention to the poet's intentional deviation from normative expression which is a case of foregrounding through grammatical and lexical deviation. In each case, these specific grammatical choices (repetition of clause openings, listing without conjunctions, invented noun groups and deliberate inversions) do more than ornament the text; they compel the reader to confront the Anthropocene's human-made violence directly and without relief.

Metaphorisation

Metaphors, as applied in Virdis' ecostylistics, are functions cognitively and ideologically. In her opinion, metaphors help to "reconceptualise knowledge and experience" through familiar source domains that illuminates complex ecological concerns. The poet uses metaphors as a tool to render abstract environmental issues emotionally and morally immediate in the poems. For *Darts Hurled by Carbon*, metaphorisation is dense and politically charged. The metaphor in the title transforms "carbon" from a passive element into an active agent of violence that hurls "darts" which are small, sharp weapons, suggesting precise, deliberate harm. This metaphor reframes carbon emissions as attacks on the Earth and its people. The poem continues with metaphors that link environmental degradation with systemic complicity. The phrase "carbon cash changers" recalls the biblical cleansing of the temple, aligning financial profiteers with moral corruption. The "conferences of pretenders" are also metaphorised as theatrical performances, where real issues are cloaked in illusion and denial. Metaphors like "zombie politicos" and "the flood overturns the tables" give the climate movement a revolutionary imagery, drawing on metaphors of reawakening, confrontation and even sacred upheaval.

In *No More Sins to Confess*, metaphorisation works differently. The poem builds an extended metaphor of confession and penitence, where the speaker enters the confessional only to find that no "sins" register anymore. This suggests a society so desensitised to wrongdoing that moral language has become void. This metaphor not only critiques moral relativism but also draws attention to the failure of traditional structures (religious or judicial) to account for environmental destruction. The idea that "dead fish bop and the stench is loved" metaphorically frames death as performance and pollution as aesthetic pleasure, pointing to society's perverse acclimatisation to ecological collapse. Later, the merging of "war games and video games" reduces real human suffering to "blobs on our smart phone screens," metaphorising the desensitising effects of digital media on moral perception.

Results of Findings and Implications

The analysis shows that ecostylistic tools such as lexical patterning, point of view, foregrounding and metaphor enable a deeper understanding of how Bassey's language choices highlight ecological and moral concerns. This approach is grounded in Daniella Virdis' (2022) ecostylistic framework, which combines stylistics with ecological discourse analysis to "promote a broader use and dissemination of life-sustaining ecosophies and ecological agendas" (p. 72). In both *Darts Hurled by Carbon* and *No More Sins to Confess*, these stylistic features are both aesthetic and functional. He uses these features to expose environmental degradation, critique normalised complicity and express a call for awareness and resistance. Through careful attention to how Bassey structures phrases, attributes actions and shapes voice and point of view, the poems reveal how eco-poetry can challenge dominant narratives and promote an ecocentric perspective. This analysis is in aligns with Virdis' view that, while ecostylistics is a descriptive practice, it also functions as an "ecologically committed" method, aimed at revealing and supporting nature sustaining discourses (2022, p. 72). Ecostylistic analysis, therefore, is not an end in itself but a means of making visible the deeper ideological and ecological work that Bassey's poetry performs.

Conclusion

Nnimmo Bassey's poetry emerges from a distinctly Nigerian ecocentric vision, grounded in the real ecological and political crises of the Niger Delta, a region devastated by decades of oil extraction, environmental degradation and political neglect. His ecosophy offers a powerful critique of anthropocentrism and the ethical collapse surrounding environmental injustice. Importantly, it is through his deliberate language choices that Bassey communicates his ecological stance and challenges the reader to reconsider humanity's relationship with nature. In the poems analysed for this study, Bassey's use of grammar, lexis, metaphor and voice embodies his ecosophy. His stylistic choices are deeply ethical. From the militant energy of *Darts Hurled by Carbon* to the mournful irony of *No More Sins to Confess*, Bassey uses poetic language to make environmental ethics visible, especially from the perspective of a Nigerian eco-activist. His ecosophy calls for a radical rethinking of what it means to live justly with the earth, particularly in a postcolonial context where ecological violence often goes unacknowledged. The study concludes that Bassey's poetry exemplifies how ecostylistic analysis can uncover the ethical dimensions of environmental discourse. His language choices function as instruments of resistance, revealing how poetic form can challenge ecological apathy and inspire collective reflection and action, especially in the Nigerian and global South context.

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