

## Universal Celestial Symbols in the Love Poems of Niyi Osundare and William Shakespeare

Phyllis Oniopusaziba AKPOTI<sup>1</sup>

### Abstract

Niyi Osundare is often praised for his love of nature and for speaking for the earth as his evergreen mistress. However, less attention has been paid to his use of universal symbols in his love poems, just as similar symbolic patterns in the love poetry of William Shakespeare have not been sufficiently examined in comparative terms. This study analyses the use of universal celestial symbols such as the sun, moon, and stars in selected love poems by Niyi Osundare and William Shakespeare. It aims to show how these symbols are employed to convey the theme of love and to invite readers into a shared experience of emotion and meaning. The research is carried out through a close reading of selected poems from *Tender Moments* (2006) and *Complete Sonnets* (1906/1991), using Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theory of the unconscious and desire (1900) as the analytical framework. The study finds that universal celestial symbols play a central role in articulating love, desire, and emotional attachment, while also fostering a strong connection between the poets and their readers. It therefore concludes that the use of universal celestial symbols enables both poets to strengthen their thematic concerns, reflect their distinct cultural backgrounds, and encourage deeper reader engagement with their creative expressions.

**Keywords:** Niyi Osundare, Poetry, Psychoanalysis, Symbolism, Universal Celestial Symbols, William Shakespeare.

### 1. Introduction

Chadwick (2018) explains symbolism as any mode of expression that points indirectly to something through another object or image. Abrams (2005) treats a symbol as anything that stands for something of importance, while Cuddon (2013) defines it as an animate or inanimate object that represents another concept. Booth and Mays (2010) argue that a symbol condenses

---

1. Department of English and Communication Studies, Federal University Otuoke, Bayelsa State, Nigeria; [akpotipo@fuotuoche.edu.ng](mailto:akpotipo@fuotuoche.edu.ng)

complex or even imperceptible ideas into a more concrete form. Childs and Fowler (2006) describe a symbol as an aesthetic device in which the attributes of an object substitute for a purely logical presentation. Taken together, these views show that a symbol is not merely a simple replacement of one thing with another, but a vivid way of making abstract feelings and ideas definite and present. Symbols often carry abstract or hidden meanings and appeal to the senses, whether visual, auditory, tactile, gustatory, olfactory, kinaesthetic, or organic.

Jabbi (1985) and Abrams (2005) draw a distinction between private symbols and universal symbols, noting that poets often create symbols as part of their effort at self-expression. According to them, private symbols are personal and depend on the writer and the reader for their meaning. Thus, they are the personal or lexical signs of a poet, used to serve particular artistic or expressive needs. In contrast, universal symbols are rooted in shared human knowledge and carry meanings that large groups of people recognise. Booth and Mays (2010) add that universal symbols are those that have been used repeatedly over a long period and whose significance remains familiar across cultures.

Furthermore, Fromm (1957) gives “fire” as an example of a universal symbol. He argues that humans experience fire in the same way, and because of this shared experience, it represents similar things to all people. Fire, for instance, represents energy, light, and power because of its observable features. This suggests that universal symbols are innate, as they are based on the characteristics of objects that humans experience in similar ways. This implies that, whether symbols are private or universal, they function by creating mental images that go beyond literal description. In other words, universal symbols appeal to all human beings as a result of shared human experience.

While several studies have examined symbolism in poetry, most have focused either on private imagery or on culturally specific symbols. Very little attention has been paid to the use of universal celestial symbols, particularly in love poetry, and even less to their comparative use across different literary traditions. This study addresses this gap by focusing specifically on celestial symbols such as the sun, moon, and stars in Niyi Osundare’s *Tender Moments* and William Shakespeare’s *Complete Sonnets*. Through a comparative engagement between an African poet and an Elizabethan poet, the study offers a fresh perspective on how universal celestial symbols function as a shared symbolic language for expressing love. This comparative focus on universal symbolism, rather than cultural or private imagery, constitutes the main novelty of the research and underscores the enduring power of celestial symbols across time and space.

## 2. Literature Review

Niyi Osundare has consistently been praised as a poet who is deeply attached to nature, as he speaks for the earth as his “ever-green mistress”, deserving care, respect, and protection. As a result of his engagement with environmental concerns, critics have frequently described him as an eco-poet whose works give voice to the wounded earth through rich imagery and

symbolism. However, while much critical attention has been given to Osundare's ecological vision and private imagery, little attention has been paid to his deployment of universal symbols, especially those connected to erotic love. This study responds to this neglect by examining Osundare's use of universal celestial symbols in articulating erotic desire.

It is worthy of note that several scholars have examined Osundare's imagery largely from an ecological perspective. Jeff (2009) and Alabi (2021), for instance, focus on how imagery in *The Eye of the Earth* celebrates and defends nature. Jeff identifies images such as "forest of Ubo Abusoro", "palm wine", "trees", "kernels", and "weaver bird" as markers of the poet's intimacy with the natural environment. Alabi similarly highlights expressions like "bread basket", "retinue of vines", and "royal leaves", arguing that they reinforce Osundare's reverence for the earth. However, these images function mainly as private or individual artistic choices rather than universal symbols. Addo (2015) broadens the discussion by classifying Osundare's imagery into sensory categories such as sound, visual, auditory, and sensuous imagery. Examples like "trees slap heaven's face" and "the hoe is her barber" are cited to show the poet's vivid language. Although some of these images suggest sensual or erotic undertones, Addo does not examine them as universal symbols, nor does he explore their connection to the theme of erotic love. Other scholars have approached Osundare's imagery from an agricultural and socio-ecological angle. Olaluwoye and Ekueme (2020) analyse farming tools such as hoes and machetes as symbols of productivity and renewal, while also noting sexual expressions like "the forbidden territory between your legs". Despite their relevance to erotic meaning, these expressions are treated as figurative images rather than universal symbols grounded in meanings that call for global participation. Bamigboye (2019) examines images associated with environmental destruction in Osundare's poetry, identifying expressions such as "trampling rain", "liquid nights", and "nameless pools". Although these images contain water-related elements, they are used metaphorically and lack traditional symbolic depth. Similarly, Elgezeery (2013) studies imagery in "Forest Echoes" to discuss nostalgia, time, and environmental loss, focusing on private images such as "green desire" and "inky glue", as well as symbolic representations of time. These symbols, however, remain individual rather than communal or traditional.

From a socio-political standpoint, Nwagbara (2013) reads *The Eye of the Earth* as a critique of capitalism, drawing attention to violent verb images like "lynched" and "slaughtered". Wosu (2022) also emphasises Osundare's concern with social inequality, identifying images of animals, trees, and water bodies used to distinguish the oppressed from the elite. While water imagery appears in these readings, it is neither examined as aquatic symbolism nor as part of a traditional symbolic framework. Ndifon (2022) and Alu (2008) similarly focus on Osundare's realistic portrayal of poverty and market life through striking imagery. Their analyses underscore the poet's social vision but do not address universal symbolism. Even when Yoruba oral elements are discussed, critics tend to concentrate on language use rather than symbolic meaning.

A significant body of scholarship has also examined Osundare's reliance on Yoruba oral traditions. Odinye (2015) and Anyokwu (2008, 2011, 2013) explore oral forms such as *oríkì*, *ijálá*, *èkùn iyàwó*, proverbs, and riddles in Osundare's poetry, tracing their roots to Yoruba worldview and aesthetics. Ogunrotimi and Afolayan (2018) and Abdullahi (2017) further discuss how these oral devices enrich the musicality and ideological force of the poems. However, even within these studies, attention is placed on technique and performance rather than on universal symbols, especially those associated with erotic meaning.

When it comes to the theme of love in Niyi Osundare's poetry, critics seem largely to ignore this aspect. Although Anyokwu (2008) deserves recognition for examining erotic love in *Tender Moments*, his analysis remains limited. Rather than focusing closely on how love is constructed through symbolism within the collection, the study frequently shifts attention to comparisons with other poets and texts. As a result, the symbolic strategies Osundare employs to express erotic love are not sufficiently explored.

A similar pattern is evident in Shakespeare studies. Although Shakespeare's use of symbolism has attracted sustained scholarly interest, critics often treat symbolism broadly, focusing on politics, philosophy, cosmology, or rhetoric rather than on how specific symbolic systems function in love poetry. For example, Schrickx's (1951) early study of "Solar Symbolism and Related Imagery in Shakespeare" convincingly shows that the sun often represents kingship, authority, and public power. However, this analysis limits solar symbolism to political and hierarchical meanings, leaving its role in love poetry unexplored.

Broader studies, such as Walker's (1955) discussion of "The Celestial Plane in Shakespeare", show that images of the sun, moon, stars, and heavens frequently frame questions of fate, time, and moral order in Shakespeare's plays. Yet love is treated only incidentally, and celestial imagery is not examined as a symbolic language for desire or intimacy. Similarly, other critics approach celestial symbolism through the lens of Renaissance cosmology and astrology. Cetera-Włodarczyk (2021) argues that Shakespeare's imagery reflects the early modern shift from a stable, "sphered" cosmos to a more unstable and decentred worldview. She reads celestial references as indicators of epistemological anxiety and cosmological change. Foakes (2010) focuses on the dramatic and thematic role of imagery. He argues that Shakespeare uses repeating images, such as celestial symbols, to create a specific emotional atmosphere in his work. However, because his analysis focuses mostly on the plays, he does not explain how these atmospheric images are used to define the personal and intimate world of the Sonnets.

Even in studies of Shakespeare's sonnets where love is central, celestial symbolism is rarely isolated for sustained analysis. Meireles (2005) identifies solar, water, nocturnal, and seasonal symbols, but he treats them largely as private symbols, even though some (such as solar and water imagery) are universal. Ramadhan (2013), in his own research, examines "images of nature" in Shakespeare's poetry but again does not clearly distinguish universal from private symbols or demonstrate their relevance to the theme of love. Whissell's work on

sound symbolism highlights phonetic effects in Shakespeare's sonnets rather than symbolic systems (2017). Consequently, celestial images remain scattered observations rather than forming a coherent symbolic framework for love. Yulianda (2022) also mentions symbols in the sonnets but does not categorise universal celestial symbols specifically or discuss their significance in the portrayal of love. Abegunde and David's (2025) study in Agidigbo, while focused on adaptation and postcolonial rewriting, also touches on symbolism and love: objects such as Othello's "handkerchief" and Otaelo's "jigida" serve as cultural symbols, while romantic relationships reveal how love is constrained by race and caste, highlighting societal pressures rather than personal desire. This study, however, still ignores the relevance of universal symbols.

Overall, scholarship on both Osundare and Shakespeare reveals a clear pattern: critics prioritise ecology, politics, cosmology, style, and rhetoric, while neglecting the systematic study of celestial symbols as vehicles for expressing erotic love. Moreover, although Osundare has been compared with poets such as John Keats and T. S. Eliot, there is no known comparative study between Niyi Osundare and William Shakespeare, particularly on symbolism. This study fills this critical gap by examining how both poets employ universal celestial symbols, such as the sun, moon, and stars, to articulate love and desire. By placing Osundare's *Tender Moments* in dialogue with Shakespeare's love poetry, the study offers a fresh comparative perspective that moves beyond cultural specificity to explore shared symbolic strategies across time, space, and literary tradition.

### 3. Theoretical Framework

Celestial symbols have long been regarded as metaphors of divinity and humanity's connection to higher realms. Barber (1989) observes that "celestial symbols such as the sun, moon, and stars have from earliest times served as metaphors of the divine, of eternal law, and of humanity's link to heaven". Cirlot (2001) adds that the sun represents cosmic power and spirit, the moon signifies receptivity and time, and stars symbolise destiny and eternal order. Similarly, Ferber (2007) shows how, in poetry, these images are tied to themes of love, mutability, glory, and the divine. This study examines these symbols as they are used to portray the theme of love by Niyi Osundare and William Shakespeare. It is anchored in psychoanalytic theory, particularly Sigmund Freud's ideas on desire, symbolism, and the unconscious. Freud (1900/2010) maintains that human emotions and behaviours are shaped not only by conscious thought but also by hidden drives that find indirect expression in dreams, art, and literature. In this light, love is not simply a rational choice but a deep psychological impulse rooted in unconscious processes. In literary texts, symbols often serve as a bridge between the conscious and the unconscious. Thus, celestial images such as the sun, moon, and stars can carry meanings that go beyond their physical reality. They may symbolise permanence, ideal beauty, or the longing for unity. Freud's notion of displacement suggests that such symbols permit repressed feelings or desires to appear in a disguised form, making them socially acceptable (Freud 1961).

Within love poetry, celestial symbolism can thus be understood as an indirect means of expressing desire, hope, and even the fear of loss.

Later psychoanalytic critics such as Jacques Lacan have extended Freud's ideas, linking desire to what he calls the "Other", a symbolic realm where longing is never fully satisfied (Lacan 1977). This concept is relevant to both Niyi Osundare's African poetic voice and William Shakespeare's Elizabethan sonnets. Although separated by culture and history, both poets employ universal symbols to convey emotional truths. Through a psychoanalytic lens, their works may be read as explorations of the unconscious dimensions of love, where affection, idealisation, and the desire for eternity are projected onto the vast and enduring image of the cosmos.

This study examines the use of celestial symbols by the poets and how this use reveals underlying tensions between the finite nature of human life and the infinite qualities they attribute to love. Freud's psychoanalytic theory is particularly well suited to this analysis because it explains how abstract images and symbols function as expressions of unconscious desire and emotional conflict. Since love poetry often deals with feelings that are intense, idealised, or difficult to express directly, celestial symbols provide a symbolic outlet through which such emotions can be projected. The psychoanalytic approach provides a framework for the study to interpret these symbols not merely as decorative imagery, but as meaningful representations of inner psychological states. It not only highlights the thematic convergences between Osundare and Shakespeare but also uncovers the deeper psychological forces shaping their portrayal of love.

#### 4. Methodology

This research adopts a qualitative approach through close reading and textual analysis of selected poems from Niyi Osundare's *Tender Moments* (2006) and William Shakespeare's *Complete Sonnets* (1609/1991). In the study, all references to Osundare's poems are followed by the abbreviation "TM" to indicate they are taken from his collection *Tender Moments* (2006), while references to Shakespeare's sonnets use the Roman numerals of the sonnets as published in *Complete Sonnets* (1609/1991). These two texts were selected because they foreground love as a central theme and make frequent use of universal celestial symbols, which is the focus of this study.

A total of ten poems were selected from Osundare's *Tender Moments* and five from Shakespeare's *Complete Sonnets*. The decision to select more poems from Osundare is deliberate, as the study aims to place greater emphasis on an African poetic voice while examining how universal celestial symbols operate within a contemporary African context. Osundare is chosen because he is a major modern African poet whose love poetry blends nature, sensuality, and emotional intimacy and still has received limited critical attention in relation to universal symbolism, especially celestial imagery. Shakespeare is selected because his sonnets remain foundational to the study of love poetry in English literature, and his extensive

use of celestial imagery provides a strong historical and literary basis for comparison. Studying both poets together allows the research to explore how similar symbols function across different periods, cultures, and literary traditions.

The selection of poems was guided by the presence of celestial symbols such as the sun, moon, stars, and other cosmic elements, which are central to the study. Poems containing these symbols were carefully identified and analysed to determine how they function as universal symbols of love, desire, constancy, and emotional attachment. Their analysis is informed by Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theory of the unconscious and desire, first articulated in *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900). Freud's concepts of symbolism, displacement, and unconscious desire are operationalised in this study by interpreting celestial images as symbolic expressions of inner emotional and psychological states. Rather than treating these images as purely decorative, the study reads them as indirect representations of repressed feelings, longing, idealisation, and fear of loss within love relationships. Through close reading, attention is paid to how language, imagery, and symbolism reveal these unconscious dimensions of love in the selected poems, thereby linking poetic expression to underlying psychological processes.

## 5. Data Analysis and Discussion

### The Uses of Celestial Symbols in Niyi Osundare's *Tender Moments* and William Shakespeare's *Complete Sonnets*

Celestial symbols function prominently in love poetry as expressive tools through which poets elevate private emotion into universal experience. Niyi Osundare and William Shakespeare use symbols like the sun, moon, stars, and sky to portray the theme of love. While Osundare's use of celestial symbolism is often intimate and emotionally grounded in the experiences of the persona, Shakespeare's use of celestial symbols tends to show the connection between love, time, decay, and immortality. However, universal celestial symbols are significant in the works of both poets as they enhance the portrayal of the central theme of love.

In Osundare's poem "You are the Reason", celestial symbols are employed to express deep affection for the beloved. The poem reads:

You  
Are the reason  
The sun rises everyday  
In the eastern side of our sky  
You  
Are the reason  
The rose is red, the egret white  
The rainbow a caravan of colours (TM 5)

The strength of the poem lies in the speaker's vivid articulation of his emotional attachment. From the outset, the speaker validates the central role of his lover in his life. Through deliberate

diction, she is presented as the anchor around which his world revolves. In psychoanalytic terms, this idealisation mirrors Freud's concept of cathexis, where the lover's libido is invested so intensely in the beloved that she becomes the organising principle of his psychic world. The rising of the sun daily becomes not only a metaphor for the freshness and constancy of his feelings, but also an unconscious projection of his need for stability and renewal, as the sun is often associated with a maternal or nurturing figure. The phrase "our sky" conveys intimacy and shared experience, hinting at a fantasy of merged identities where boundaries between self and other are blurred.

A similar elevation of the beloved to cosmic significance appears in Shakespeare's "Sonnet XV", where celestial imagery is used to confront the impermanence of beauty and life:

When I consider everything that grows  
Holds in perfection but a little moment,  
...  
Whereon the stars in secret influence comment;  
...  
And, all in war with Time, for love of you,  
As he takes from you, I engraft you new. (XV)

Here, Shakespeare's diction, though difficult to decipher, is deliberate and deeply layered. He expresses the inevitable truth that time changes all things, including beauty. The stars and the sky evoke vast, impersonal forces shaping human existence. Psychoanalytically, this awareness of time's destructive power can be read as an encounter with the death drive (Thanatos), where youth and beauty are desired more intensely precisely because of their fragility. While Osundare's sun rises daily because of love, Shakespeare's celestial order reminds the speaker of decay. Yet in both poems, love functions as resistance: Osundare affirms love as the cause of cosmic harmony, while Shakespeare uses poetic creation as a means of symbolically preserving the beloved.

Returning to Osundare, the repetition of "You are the reason" reinforces the depth of passion. The beloved is ascribed supernatural power to influence colours and beauty itself, mirroring Lacan's notion of the "objet petit", the unattainable object of desire that promises psychic wholeness. The "rainbow" as "a caravan of colours" as expressed in the poem emphasises her role in completing the speaker's vision of the world. That is to say, the mistress makes him feel complete.

This sense of completeness contrasts productively with Shakespeare's "Sonnet XXV", where celestial symbols highlight instability rather than harmony:

Let those who are in favour with their stars,  
Of public honour and proud titles boast,  
Whilst I, whom fortune of such triumph bars,  
Unlook'd for joy in that honour most.



Great princes' favourites their fair leaves spread  
But as the marigold at the sun's eye;  
In themselves their pride lies buried,  
For at a frown they in their glory die.

...

Then happy I, that love and am belov'd,  
Where I may not remove, nor be remov'd. (XXV)

Here, Shakespeare rejects dependence on external validation, retreating instead into love as a psychic anchor. The stars symbolise the arbitrariness of fate, while the marigold's dependence on the sun exposes vulnerability. Psychoanalytically, this reflects a withdrawal from ego-based achievement into intimate attachment, similar to Osundare's emotional investment in the beloved as a stabilising force.

In "Tender Moments", Osundare again draws on celestial symbolism to convey love, beginning in a narrative tone:

And you smile your big-cheeked smile  
Your eyes breaking out of your face  
Like the sun through the mist  
Of a young and ancient dawn (TM 24)

The imagery conveys admiration and affection. The "big-cheeked smile" is both teasing and tender, while the simile "like the sun through the mist" infuses the smile with light, warmth, and renewal. Comparative devices are used by the speaker to emphasise his admiration of the mistress. The manner in which the sun reveals itself here is notable. Psychoanalytically, this smile can be read as a signifier of the maternal image, an archetypal image of care and reassurance lodged in the unconscious. The juxtaposition of "young" and "ancient" mirrors how desire conflates the present beloved with past formative experiences of love, suggesting her beauty is both timeless and deeply rooted in the speaker's psychic history. The celestial image of the sun is apt since it is as old as humanity and yet has the capacity for renewal.

This fusion of admiration and unconscious longing finds a parallel in Shakespeare's "Sonnet XXXIII", where the sun symbolises both radiance and betrayal:

Full many a glorious morning have I seen  
Flatter the mountain-tops with sovereign eye,  
...  
Even so my sun one early morn did shine  
With all triumphant splendor on my brow;  
But out! Alack! He was but one hour mine,  
The region cloud hath mask'd him for me now. (XXXIII)

Shakespeare's sun, like Osundare's, initially embodies beauty and triumph. However, its fleeting presence reflects the speaker's unconscious fear of abandonment and loss. Psychoanalytically, this aligns with Freud's *fort/ dynamic*, where withdrawal intensifies attachment. The "region cloud" masking the sun mirrors repressed anxieties that intrude upon idealisation. Unlike Osundare's nurturing solar image, Shakespeare's sun becomes a reminder of impermanence. Yet, in both poems, the beloved remains emotionally central, even when obscured.

Osundare deepens intimacy in the second stanza of "Tender Moments":

Your lips play around the base  
Of your teeth  
Laughter erupts, fresh  
As the frothy song of a mountain stream (TM 24)

The focus on lips and laughter suggests spontaneity and emotional overflow. Alliteration intensifies the musicality of feeling. According to Freud, the lips are associated with the oral stage of development, evoking pleasure, nourishment, and attachment. The comparison to a mountain stream conveys vitality and purity, underscoring how the beloved unconsciously reactivates deep memories of comfort and fulfilment.

This emotional overflow contrasts with the conflicted tone of Shakespeare's "Sonnet XXXV", where celestial symbols underscore ambivalence:

No more be griev'd at that which thou hast done;  
Roses have thorns, silver fountains mud,  
Clouds and eclipse stain both moon and sun  
And loathsome canker lives in the sweetest bud.  
All men make faults and even I in this,  
Authorizing thy trespass with compare  
Myself corrupting, salving thy amiss,  
Excusing thy sins more than thy sins are:  
For thy sensual fault I bring in sense,  
(thy adverse party is thy advocate)  
And 'gainst myself a lawful plea commence:  
Such civil war is in my love and hate,  
That I an accessory needs must be  
To that thief which sourly robs from me (XXXV)

Here, the eclipse of moon and sun reflects a shadow moment, where the beloved's imperfections disrupt idealisation. The speaker uses comparative language to pass his message, which is that even the most beautiful things have faults. He mentions the imperfection of the celestial symbols of the moon and the sun, saying that even these great symbols must succumb to eclipse. He therefore uses symbols and images to encourage his lover to see past her faults.

However, as the poem progresses, he reproaches himself for making excuses for the lover's mistakes because of his feelings for her. Psychoanalytically, the speaker's rationalisation and self-blame reveal displacement and denial. While Osundare's celestial imagery reinforces harmony and pleasure, Shakespeare's exposes psychic conflict, showing how love accommodates both devotion and resentment.

In "Under Another Sky", Osundare shifts celestial symbolism toward longing:

The sun rises here from a different sky  
Days answer to different names  
...  
We remain many zones apart  
But your heart beats  
In the left chamber of my chest (TM 65)

The "different sky" signals emotional displacement caused by separation. The repetition of "different" suggests psychic rupture, echoing the trauma of separation from the first love object. Yet, emotional unity persists through memory. The "house of memory" becomes a psychic space where presence survives absence.

This internalisation resonates with Shakespeare's longing for permanence in "Sonnet LIX":

O, that record could with a backward look,  
Even of five hundred course of sun,  
Show me your image in some antique book (LIX)

Here, the desire to see the beloved across "five hundred courses of sun" reveals an unconscious yearning for timelessness. Idealisation freezes the beloved in an eternal image, echoing Osundare's preservation of love within memory. In both poems, celestial time is resisted by psychic time.

In "Closer by Far", Osundare paints tender images of love and longing through celestial symbols:

The rain fell  
On New Year day  
The sun has  
Changed its address  
The stars are tiny twinkles  
On water washed roads  
The song is a tender stitch  
In the garment of your absence  
I borrow one light sheet  
From the book of the sun  
And scribble this note with

The ink of the sea  
The house echoes  
My voice (TM 67)

Here, the absence of the lover shapes the entire mood of the poem. The line “The sun has changed its address” personifies the sun, suggesting that warmth, joy, and meaning have departed with her absence. Psychoanalytically, this can be read as projection, where inner emptiness is externalised onto the cosmos. The stars, usually symbols of beauty, appear as “tiny twinkles” against rain-washed roads, reflecting a melancholic state in Freudian terms, where the lost object is not fully relinquished.

This melancholic reconfiguration of celestial beauty finds resonance in Shakespeare’s “Sonnet XXV”, where worldly honours fade as quickly as the favour of the stars. In both cases, cosmic imagery reflects emotional instability and loss. However, while Shakespeare ultimately retreats into love as permanence, Osundare balances despair with endurance. The act of borrowing “one light sheet / from the book of the sun” functions as a defense mechanism, preserving a fragment of joy against the psychic threat of abandonment.

The paradox of distance and intimacy is crystallised in the closing lines:

Each time I give  
Your name to the winds  
I feel you  
In the breath of every dawn  
Beloved, the farther away you are  
The closer to the heart of my being (TM 67)

Here, distance intensifies intimacy. In psychoanalytic terms, this mirrors introjection, where the absent beloved becomes part of the self. This paradox closely aligns with Shakespeare’s repeated insistence that love, once internalised, survives time and separation.

Osundare extends this celestial elevation of love in “Love from the Sky”:

My memory so high  
It grazes the shoulders  
Of the sun  
I spot your smile  
On the lips  
Of a looming horizon (TM 54)

The height of memory signals idealisation. The beloved’s smile on the “lips of a looming horizon” fuses sensual and cosmic imagery, reflecting the sublimation of desire into symbolic form. The word “lips” introduces a latent erotic charge, revealing how repressed sensuality resurfaces through celestial imagery.

Shakespeare similarly fuses time, memory, and desire in “Sonnet XV” and “Sonnet LIX”, where poetic creation becomes a means of defying decay. Both poets engage in sublimation, transforming anxiety about loss into artistic devotion. Osundare’s celestial height mirrors Shakespeare’s attempt to “engraft” the beloved anew through verse.

The physical longing intensifies:

My hands long  
For the charmed circle  
Of your waist (TM 54)

The “charmed circle” suggests enchantment and compulsion, resonating with Freud’s idea of libidinal fixation. Desire here resists rational moderation, binding the speaker to the beloved as an irreplaceable object.

This compulsion reappears later in the poem:

From these heights  
I look at the world below  
Mansions look like match boxes  
Highways assume the aspect of furnished serpents  
How distance distorts  
But in your supple fullness  
You beckon me home (TM 67)

Distance distorts perception, a phenomenon object relations theory links to absence. The beloved’s “supple fullness” becomes magnified, while the external world shrinks into insignificance. This psychological magnification parallels Shakespeare’s fixation on the beloved as the sole source of meaning in a mutable world.

In “Dusk”, Osundare uses the sun to express emotional loss:

As your sun rises  
On your side of the sky  
Mine here is about to rest  
  
Soft-red,  
My longing,  
Handsome like hibiscus vernacular (TM 63)

Here, the poet uses the solar symbol to convey both time and emotional state. Just as the girl’s “sun” is rising, signifying joy and vitality, his own is “about to rest,” symbolising loss and emotional decline. The contrast between sunrise and sunset illustrates splitting, where the lover’s joy is separated from the speaker’s sorrow. Her sunrise signifies renewal, while his sunset reflects deprivation. This mirrors Shakespeare’s use of solar imagery to signal betrayal and forgiveness in “Sonnet XXXIII”, where the sun’s disappearance does not annul love.

The “soft-red” imagery and apostrophic address intensify intimacy, transforming grief into aesthetic expression. Freud’s concept of secondary revision is at work here, reshaping raw loss into poetic beauty.

In “Keep Your Window Open”, Osundare employs celestial symbols to express the kind of love he wishes to bring to his lover:

Beloved,  
When you go to bed tonight  
Leave your window unclosed  
I am coming with the early morning breeze  
The moon on my right  
On my left a choir of stars (TM 78)

Here, the celestial symbols are strategically positioned at the close of the poem, with all other images revolving around them. This structure reflects the psychological centrality of the beloved in the speaker’s emotional world. From a psychoanalytic perspective, these symbols function as projections of unconscious desire. The moon, stars, and breeze are not merely natural phenomena but manifestations of wish-fulfilling fantasy. The instruction to “leave your window unclosed” operates as a symbolic invitation to intimacy, aligning with Freud’s notion of dreams as wish fulfilment, where the window represents psychic openness.

This longing for permanence and openness parallels Shakespeare’s assertion in “Sonnet XXV” that love “may not remove, nor be remov’d.” In both poems, love is imagined as a stable psychic space immune to external disruption. Osundare’s celestial procession mirrors Shakespeare’s retreat from worldly instability into the private certainty of affection.

By invoking the moon, Osundare gestures toward timeless love. In Jungian terms, the moon embodies the anima, the inner feminine image guiding the male psyche toward wholeness. Positioned “on my right,” the moon becomes a guiding force, while the “choir of stars” suggests celestial coronation. This idealisation aligns with psychoanalytic views of love as a process through which the beloved is endowed with healing power.

A similar symbolic coronation occurs in Shakespeare’s sonnets, where the beloved is repeatedly elevated above time and decay. In “Sonnet XV”, poetic creation becomes an act of preservation, while in “Sonnet LIX”, the speaker imagines the beloved existing unchanged across centuries. In both cases, celestial imagery supports the fantasy of emotional immortality.

Osundare’s “End Note” returns to cosmic disorientation after loss:

The sunflower folded up its petals  
...  
The moon, ever since  
Has not risen  
From the same side  
Of our sky (TM 64)

Here, the moon reflects psychic destabilisation following separation. As in “Closer by Far,” where “the sun has changed its address,” cosmic order collapses with the loss of the beloved. From a Freudian perspective, this signals melancholic fixation, where the ego remains bound to the lost object. J. C. Cirlot’s association of the moon with time, death, and renewal reinforces the existential weight of this loss.

This disorientation resonates strongly with Shakespeare’s “Sonnet XXXIII,” where the sun’s concealment symbolises emotional betrayal. In both poems, celestial disorder mirrors inner fragmentation. Yet neither poet relinquishes love; instead, both attempt to preserve the beloved through memory and symbolic endurance.

In “Love Can,” Osundare encapsulates love’s ambivalence:

Love can pin you to the floor  
While your head caresses the clouds  
Feed you with stars  
Bathe your wound in the milk of the moon (TM 6)

The juxtaposition of pain and exaltation reflects Freud’s understanding of love as simultaneously wounding and healing. The “milk of the moon” invokes the nurturing mother archetype, while stars signify transcendence. This fusion mirrors Shakespeare’s ambivalence in “Sonnet XXXV,” where love and hate exist in psychic conflict, yet devotion persists.

Shakespeare’s acknowledgment that even the sun and moon are subject to eclipse reinforces the idea that imperfection is universal. Osundare echoes this understanding by portraying love as both elevating and grounding, painful yet sustaining.

## 6. Conclusion

Universal symbols, unlike private or culturally bound ones, create a sense of fellowship between the writer and the reader because they appeal to shared human experience. Although they are drawn from natural elements such as the sun, moon, and stars, which all humans encounter, their significance is not diminished by time, place, or culture. This study has shown that both Niyi Osundare and William Shakespeare rely on such celestial symbols to articulate love, desire, loss, and emotional attachment in ways that remain accessible to diverse audiences. Although separated by centuries and cultural contexts, the two poets demonstrate striking similarities in their symbolic choices, using the permanence and vastness of the cosmos to elevate human love beyond the transient conditions of everyday life.

In Shakespeare’s *Complete Sonnets*, celestial imagery often idealises love, presenting it as constant, enduring, and capable of resisting time and decay. In the poems, the sun, stars, and heavens function as metaphors for constancy, admiration, and the desire for immortality in love. Osundare, on the other hand, employs similar celestial symbols in *Tender Moments* but adapts them to a more intimate and sensuous context, blending erotic desire with natural imagery rooted in lived human experience. That is, while Shakespeare’s usage often leans

towards idealisation and abstraction, Osundare's celestial symbolism is more tactile and emotionally immediate, reflecting his poetic engagement with the body, nature, and affection.

Despite these stylistic differences, both poets use celestial symbols as universal codes through which private emotions are externalised and shared. Through the psychoanalytic framework employed, the study reveals that these symbols function as outlets for unconscious desires, fears, and longings, allowing love to be expressed indirectly yet powerfully. In this sense, celestial imagery is not merely decorative but serves as a psychological and symbolic bridge between inner emotion and poetic expression.

Ultimately, the study demonstrates that Osundare and Shakespeare employ universal celestial symbols to connect human love with the enduring rhythms of the cosmos. Their poetry affirms the power of universal imagery to transcend cultural and historical boundaries, showing that literature remains a shared space where deep human experiences of love and desire can be communicated across time.

## References

- Abdullahi, K. A. 2012. Poetic Style and Social Commitment in Niyi Osundare's Song of the Market Place. *De Gruyter*, 1, No.2: 73-82.
- Abegunde, C. T., & David, S. D. (2025). Adaptations of Shakespeare's Tragedies: A Comparative Study of Othello and Ahmed Yerima's Otaelo. *Àgídígbo: ABUAD Journal of the Humanities*, 13(1), 137–148.
- Abrams, M. H., & Harpham, G. G. (2005). *A Glossary of Literary Terms* (8<sup>th</sup> ed.). Thomson Wadsworth.
- Addo, E. N. (2015). Analysis of Sensual and Sensuous Imagery as a Vehicle for the Messages in Niyi Osundare's Nature Poems. *International Journal of Multi-Disciplinary Academic Research*, 3(1), 28–42.
- Alabi, O. S. (2021). Between the Praise and Defense of Nature: An Eco-Critical Discourse of Niyi Osundare and Tanure Ojaide's Eco-Poetry. *International Journal of Language and Culture*, 1(2), 2–7.
- Alu, N. N. (2008). Style and the New Poetic Revolution in Niyi Osundare's Poetry. *African Research Review*, 2(3), 62–84.
- Bamigboye, O. 2019. A stylistic Reading of Selected Poems From Niyi Osundare's 'A City Without People'. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, 9, No. 9: 1081-1087.
- Barber, A. H. (1989). *Celestial symbols: Symbolism in doctrine, religious traditions and temple architecture*. Horizon Publishers & Distributors.
- Booth, A., & Mays, K. J. (2010). *The Norton Introduction to Literature: Shorter Tenth Edition*. W. W. Norton & Company.
- Chadwick, C. (2018). *Symbolism*. Routledge.
- Cetera-Włodarczyk, A. Unsphered, Disorbed, Decentred: Imagery and Cosmological Change in Shakespeare. *Journal of Early Modern Studies*, vol. 10, no. 2, 2021, pp. 1–15.
- Childs, P., & Fowler, R. (2006). *The Routledge Dictionary of Literary Terms*. Routledge.
- Cirlot, J. E. (2005). *A Dictionary of Symbols*. Routledge.
- Cuddon, J. A. (2013). *The Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms and Theory*. Penguin Books.
- Elgezeery, G. M. A. 2013. Memory and Home coming in Niyi Osundare's 'The Eye of the Earth'. *English and Literature Studies*, 3, No.2: 62-67.
- Ferber, M. (2004). *A Dictionary of Literary Symbols*. Cambridge University Press.



- Foakes, R. A. (2010). Shakespeare's imagery. In M. de Grazia & S. Wells (Eds.), *The Cambridge companion to Shakespeare* (pp. 223–230). Cambridge University Press.
- Freud, S. (1961). *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (J. Strachey, Trans.). W. W. Norton.
- Freud, S. (2010). *The interpretation of dreams* (J. Strachey, Trans.). Basic Books. (Original work published 1900)
- Fromm, E. (1957). *The Forgotten Language*. Grove Press.
- Frye, N., Baker, S., & Perkins, G. (1985). *The Harper Handbook to Literature*. Harper and Row.
- Jabbi, B. (1985). The Structure of Symbolism in A Grain of Wheat. *Research in African Literatures*, 16(2), 210–242.
- Jeff, D. G. (2009). The Eye of The Earth: Niyi Osundare as a Poet of Nature. *African Research Review*, 3(2), 66–77.
- Lacan, J. (1977). *Écrits: A Selection* (A. Sheridan, Trans.). W. W. Norton.
- Meireles, R. C. (2005). The Hermeneutics of Symbolical Imagery in Shakespeare's Sonnets (Master's thesis). *Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul*.
- Ndifon, E. J. (2022). Vision and Imagery in Niyi Osundare's Poetry. *African Journal of Social Science and Humanities Research*, 5(5), 139–152.
- Nwagbara, U. 2015. Nature in the Balance: The Commodification of the Environment in Niyi Osundare's 'The Eye of the Earth'. *Nordic Journal of African Studies*, 22, No.3: 196-212.
- Odinye, I. E. 2015. Influence of Yoruba Concepts and Worldview on Niyi Osundare's 'The Eye of the Earth'. *Interdisciplinary Journal of African and Asian Studies*, 1, No. 1: 1-9.
- Ogunrotimi, O., & Afolayan, S. 2018. The Artist and His Art: An Approach to Selected Poems of Niyi Osundare. *Annals of Language and Literature*, Vol 2, No.1: 1-7.
- Olaluwoye, L., & Ekueme-Ugwu, C. 2020. Aspects of Style and Meaning in Selected Poems of Niyi Osundare. *KIV Journal of Humanities*, 5, No. 1: 159-164.
- Osundare, N. (2006). *Tender Moments: Love poems*. University Press Plc.
- Ramadhan, E. (2013). The Images of Nature in Shakespeare's Sonnets (Master's thesis). Çankaya University.
- Schricks, W. (1951). *Solar Symbolism and Related Imagery in Shakespeare*. Antwerp: De Sikkell.
- Shakespeare, W. (1991). *Complete sonnets*. Dover Publications. (Original work published 1609).
- Walker, R. (1955). The celestial plane in Shakespeare. In A. Nicoll (Ed.), *Shakespeare survey: Vol. 8. American Shakespeareana* (pp. 109–117). Cambridge University Press.
- Whissell, C. (2017). Sound symbolism in Shakespeare's sonnets: Evidence of dramatic tension in the interplay of harsh and gentle sounds. *English Language and Literature Studies*, 7(4), 1–14.
- Wosu, O. O. 2022. Emerging Trends in Poems of Niyi Osundare. *ANSU Journal Of Language and Literary Studies*, 2, No.2: 1-9.
- Yulianda, N. (2022). An Analysis of Figurative Languages Used in William Shakespeare's Sonnets. *Eliterate: Journal of English Linguistics and Literature Studies*, 1(3), 1–10.