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**MAN ENDANGERED SPECIE: A STUDY OF PROFESSOR TONY AFEJUKU'S A  
GARDEN OF MOODS**

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**ABSTRACT**

This paper is an attempt to explore Professor Tony Afejuku's poetry: A Garden of Moods, as the poets conscious attempt to portray man's earthly journey as an inevitable exercise in futility. It is my attempt to show how greatly incapacitated man is in a journey he is compelled to undertake. To quote Adolf Hitler (2007) "My whole life has been nothing but one long struggle, and all that it takes to keep on in a wasted journey: man on earth. This truth: the nothingness of life, Afejuku tries to explain, maintaining Richard M. Nixon's (1993) postulation that "the truth should be brought out – no matter who was involved" (P. 176). The thrust, of this piece, therefore, is to show that man on earth is a gathering of dirt in a waste paper bag.

**INTRODUCTION**

*What are the roots that clutch, what branches grow  
Out of this stony rubbish? Son of man,  
You cannot say, or guess, for you know only  
A heap of broken images, where the sun beats,  
And the dead tree gives no shelter, the cricket no relief,  
And the dry stone no sound of water. Only  
There is shadow under this red rock,  
(Come in under the shadow of this red rocks),  
And I will show you something different from either  
Your shadow at morning striding behind you  
Or your shadow at evening rising to meet you;  
I will show you fear in a handful of dust. (Pages 63-64).*

T. S. Eliot's postulation above in his poem titled "The waste land" serves as an introduction to our talk on Tony Afejuku and his exploration of the nothingness of life. T. S. Eliot above did ask "what are the roots that clutch, what branch grows/out of this stony rubbish? Son of man". (P.51). Our earthly journey is akin to the stony rubbish that can't yield anything good. The meaningless of life seems to be Tony Afejuku's main concern in his collection of poetry titled A Garden of Moods. Afejuku did begin his collection with "These elegies..." and the very first poem he calls "Fear of unrealized ambition" (P.2). Life indeed is an realized ambition. The fact that humans from Adam, sojourn planet earth oscillating within various realms of thought process, and on each occasion feeling very bad and wishing things were better shows how disillusioned man has been.

Fyodor Dostoevsky, the Russian author and Franz Kafka, the Czech author, wrote with great vigour talking about the nothingness of life – existentialist thrust. Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia discusses Dostoevsky and Kafka thus:

*Dostoevsky's notes from underground details the story of a man who is unable to fit into society and unhappy with the identities he creates for himself...*

*Kafka created often surreal and alienated characters who struggle with hopelessness and absurdity, notably in his most famous novella, The metamorphosis, or in his master noval, The Trial (P. 3 of 20).*

These writers among others did show that everything about human being is a collection of waste paper bags. Tony Afejuku in his A Garden of Moods helps to further the discourse – life is a waste. This is the thrust of my exploration of Afejuku's collection of poetry for right from the title of his collection to the thematic posits of the thirty-eight poems that make up A Garden of Moods. The Poet succinctly portrays man as a prisoner, a helpless being in the hands of God, or gods and the various forces or powers that rule the world, and control the affairs of men. His posit authenticates Westaphal (1987) postulation that "it is not ours to choose whether we shall be," (P. 95), the choice is beyond us, for even when some people claim that it is ours to choose who we will be, such a choice is still dependent on the intention of the one who decides whether we should be or not.

#### THE POET AND SOCIAL REALITY

The poet is an indispensable human resources in the development, and sustenance of such, in every society. His perception, of the ideals in any given society, and the explanation of social realities helps in the proper administration and management of the human and material resources of societies where the poet is acknowledged. This is due to his objective presentations of the happenings in our world. This accounts for Emerson's perception of the poet as an indisputable "emperor in his own right", (XXIII). Nancy Sullivan (1978) cites Emerson as saying that:

*The poet has a new thought; he has a whole new experience to unfold; he will tell us how it was with him, and all men will be richer in his fortune. For the experience of each new age requires a new confession, and the world seems always waiting for its poet.", (P. XXIII).*

Emerson's postulation above remains a statement of facts for every society, from the genesis of the world, to its current revelation. Where Poets are allowed to flourish, and their legislations understood, accepted and utilized for the good of humanity there is an overwhelming positive development. The poet as a writer serves as the conscience of society, creating the necessary checks and balance needed to move humanity forward progressively. Allwell Abalogu Onuka-agu and Ezechi Onyerionwu (2009) in their text 21<sup>st</sup> Century Nigerian Literature authenticates the views above by positing that:

*art has proven to be a most effective medium of achieving change, stability, progress and even order in society. Most artists beyond seeking to create beauty and entertainment for their audience, have used the medium of their art to express their opinion about their immediate and other societies. These opinions range from those seeking to point out certain practices that the artist thinks cannot predicate growth and development of the society, to those constituting outright protest against real enemies of society, (P.20).*

Wordsworth as cited by Elizabeth Drew (1960) did declare that his poetry was to teach the young and the gracious of every age, to see, to think and feel, and therefore to become more actively and securely virtuous.,” (P. 102). Each time one reads poetry, one shares the emotional state of the Poets with him, as one sees very glaringly the realities of the moment, making comparism there and there, and consciously seeing the need to act or react. The acting and reacting of the members of the society as a result of the Poets prompting brings about the desired change. Nwagabara (2006) in an article demonstrates the relationship between poetry and social reality thus:

*Poetry largely presents an avenue for interpreting human tendencies and communicative essences as a way of giving vent to charged human emotions as well as promoting development through structured and contrived social relations and interactions (P. 396).*

Poetry like other genres of Literature serves as a means of venting charged emotions, about particular situations in the life of an author and his society. The intention of the poet is to expose those situations and policies in society which are inimical to human development and peaceful co-existence, William Boyd (1995) puts it succinctly thus:

*...the most important thing to me is that I've used my talent as a writer to enable the Ogoni people to confront their tormentors I was not able to do it as a politician or a businessman. My writing did it. (Introduction by Boyd. 1995 XV.)*

This is what the poets of the world are doing daily. They try to enable their readers to confront their tormentors whoever they may be (see Albert Camus 2000). This is why Afejuku uses his *A Garden of Moods* to show the helplessness of man whether he is the tormentor or the tormented. Man is a weakling as the totality of his earthly quest even in his self acclaimed fulfillment remains an exercise in great futility. *A Garden of Moods*, which is professor Afeju's first published collection of poetry is made of thirty-eight poems. In it the Poet tries to depict man as a being toast into the world incapacitated by its creator and circumstances around him, even before the commencement of his earthly mission, and absolutely left without a choice for the choice he is claimed to make on earth are the choices made for him by the forces he cannot comprehend which holds him hostage eternally.

### **AFEJUKU AND THE ARIDITY OF LIFE**

Tony Afejuku is indeed an existentialist. His articles in newspapers, literary out puts, and even his life style attest to this. His collection of Poetry, A Garden of Moods, which is an exploration of the meaninglessness of our earthly journey gives credence to his belief – the futility of life. His first poem “Fear of unrealized Ambition” in A Garden of Moods demonstrates the barrenness of life. To him:

*As his imagination rolls he see  
Himself not realizing the thing is the labour of ages:  
To achieve a little  
He takes his exit by licking the hemlock –  
O, better not to live at all, if this is life:  
To live and carry dreams that mocks you to your unwilling grave!  
(P.3.)*

The poet in very succinct terms graphically presents man’s life as one bedevilled by harsh agonizing labour, with little or no profit. To the Poet, “to achieve a little is a labour to of ages” This is the reality of our world. Imagine the energy expended on the action of life not for a day but for “ages.” Yet, on a comparative analysis, the gains accruing from mockish “labour of ages”, is noting but a little thing, which harasses man to his “unwilling grave”. The brazen unproductivity of life and its attendant disillusionment, the poet explains when he states that humans die “licking the hemlock”. This state of life where humans are “walking corpses” in a “waste land” apology to T. S. Eliot, and Ola Rotimi, Afejuku tries to state further, in “Looking Forward to Grief and “Baba in his Princely state”. The hardship in life, the humiliation one faces daily, the betrayals, the heartlessness of men in all walks of life, make one feels the journey called life were better not begun. That man lives his life with a burden, he carries all through life like a hunch back, or the over blown scrotum which announces her victim when he is kilometers away, even when he would have wished not to be noticed, makes everything called life a worthless venture. This pitiable and unpalatable state of man, Afejku presents thus:

*...my imagination has fear that my father  
May cease to be;  
When it sees him lying dead in bed;  
Everything in me is cold  
And I see myself too as dead and gone...  
Embalmed darkness rolls around me  
To see the only friend and  
Affection I have seen and known  
Eternally buried in the ground (P.10)*

In a world that is highly over populated, where seas of human walk the streets daily, if the poet could talk about an “only friend and affection” he had seen, something, then, is absolutely wrong with such a world – an absurd world. The absurdity is that which is the

bane. The poets' choice of words also gives credence to this unmistakable vainness of this world. "Embalmed darkness" which "rolls around me" talk about the eternal nature of the plague – fear which is the eternal companion of the walking corpse called man. "Williams Blake in his "Holy Thursday" in his Songs of Experience corroborates it thus:

*and their sun does never shine  
and their fields are bleak and bare  
and their ways are filled with thorns:  
it is eternal winter there (P.33).*

That Tony Afejuku calls it "Embalmed darkness," (P.33), and William Blake sees it as "eternal winter" (P.33), while W. B. Yeats sees it as "A terrible beauty" (P. 83), and the fact that these Poets live at different periods in history are enough display of these absurdities for us to appreciate their degree of disillusionment. These three Poets belong to different areas of our literary history, yet they talk about the endemic nature of our futility.

Elizabeth Drew (1960) reminds us that the poet is

*A man alive in a certain time and place, influenced by a particular social, intellectual and physical environment, writing out of a particular life situation, endowed by nature with an individual temperament, creating his poem, maybe, in one mood among the many he had lived through. (P. 103).*

Afejuku, the poet truly lives many moods and in all, he comes to the same conclusion as Paul Verlaine (1966) opined that "nothing had changed" (P.23). This is why in Afejuku's many moods in A Garden of Moods, nothing seems to have changed from the ageless posit that man is on a fruitless journey. In "Baba and his princely state", the poet shows that even in the grave, as in real life, man is daily fed on Judas' Kiss.

*If baba in his state could turn round  
a little and spare a glance  
for him to see  
he will hear how some  
Friends', brothers', sisters and relations'  
sympathies' and cries of grief and loss  
are false and forced,  
and will make the departed doubt whether  
he was truly loved and missed by even  
the children and grand-children  
who knew true grief and loss when he went...(P. 11)*

That the pretence one experiences daily in life is carried to ones grave makes the world funnily wicked to be good. Judas when collecting his due having sold his master Jesus Christ to the Jews told them: "The one I Kiss is the man; arrest him" (P. 1533). So he did for the bible says going at once to Jesus, Judas said, "Greeting Rabbi and kissed him" 26 V. 48 and 49, (P. 1534). That was Judas Iscariot betraying the Messiah of the World. The fact that such a Great Messiah could be so cheaply betrayed, greatly, beyond all reasonable doubt

explains the meaningless of the totality of everything called life. Hence, the metaphysical poet, Andrew Marvel could simply say:

*Then worm shall try  
That long preserved virginity  
And your quaint Honour turn to dust;  
And into ashes all my lost  
The grave" a fine and private place, But none I think do there  
embrace (P.251)*

Andrew Marvel addresses the vain nature of man and all he stand for in To His Coy mistress, Women guide their virginity jealously. No woman in real life, no matter her degree of insanity ever leaves her 'count' open. It is usually covered no matter how tethered the cloth might be. Yet this highly preserved and jealously guided, "worms shall try". In deed, here lies our emptiness. And this hollowness, Afejuku in pursuit of his argument moves further to advance in "Travllers Soliloque" thus:

*I have sailed the world over,  
meeting no friends but foes,  
on land or sea or air.  
Looking for fire-wood to bring home from strange lands.  
Scorpions and scorpions I meet on land.  
They stung and poisoned me, (Page 42).*

The poet like all existentialists did explain that everywhere is bad and uncomfortable. "In the seas, roaring waves and cursing sharks threatened me" he added. And even "sunk my vessels and swallowed me whole". "The fogs led me pastry and crushed my craft" he went further to posit. The Zenith of it all came when he returned home to find that "home is no more home..." To "his people", he is "a family son, not the son of the "tribe", hence the lament: "O! Every thing is in deluge" (P. 42). Here we find Afejuku like Lenrie Petes, returning home after a bloodless war to find that "all our loves and tears" are "determined by the spinning of the coins" (P.69). Or how else, could one explain that one was not received as a son of the tribe by one's community simply because one was fruitless in a bloodless battle – an absurd materialistic society. One would have expected the people to celebrate that one of them had returned a live though highly wounded. Rather there is a denial of sonship. And like Kwesi Brew in "The Mesh" "he came to a cross road" (P. 42) confused by a world, he call his own.

This unholy state of life is enough to make a writer sleepless. Albert Camus (2000) in the Myth of Sisyphus did explain the committed writer's predicament, thus:

*I cannot keep from being drawn towards everyday life,  
towards those whoever they may be, who are humiliated and  
debased. They need to hope and if all keep silent or if they are  
given a choice between two kinds of humiliation, they will be  
forever deprived of hope and we with them. It seems to me*

*impossible to endure that idea nor can he who cannot endure it  
lie down to sleep in his tower... indeed I see many who fail to  
feel it, but I cannot envy their sleep*

Professor Tony, like Albert Camus and other committed literary artists the world over, are daily drawn towards everyday life, towards the oppressed in every nook and cranny, talking about their humiliation and pains. He cannot endure to go to bed when lions walk the streets in broad day light, birthing "a terrible beauty", (P. 84) as W. B. Yeats postulates in *Easter, 1916*. This is why Afejuku's poems provoke one to thought conscientising and sensitizing the people in order to understand that all our earthly struggles end in naught hence it is needless doing wrong. Wole Soyinka (1996) posits that: the man dies in him that keeps silence in the face of tyranny (P. 13). And men like Afejuku have refused to keep silent. Professor Afejuku commenting further stressed the idea of the wastage of human struggle in "Perhaps (for B) thus":

*Perhaps you are seeing me from there;  
Laughing and smiling and singing and weeping  
For my still being silly and carrying the heavy  
World on my head suffering frustrations...(P.12)*

Within the existentialist circle, the do-or-die approach which is characteristic of our capitalist world is greatly abhorred. The questions usually asked are where is he talking all these money to? How many houses or cars will he be buried with? Will he even remember his beautiful wives and children when death walks to him? Thomas Hardy a great pessimist in *The Mayor of Casterbridge* sees happiness as an occasional episode in a general drama of pains." (P. 420). This is a wise saying. The truism makes it an act of stupidity for anyone to want to acquire the whole world. The poet mockishly explains:

*The absurdity of the various contraries in life. Imagine laughing  
and smiling and singing, for what you may ask? Simple answer -  
carrying the burden of the world on his head suffering  
frustrations. (P. 12).*

So, it is an abysmal display of insanity when one sees our politicians and various office holders squander the resources meant for the development of our nation. Afejuku frowns at these social vices, condemning it in its entirety. This accounts for a large portion of his *A Garden of Moods* being devoted to explaining the meaninglessness of the various crimes men commit daily in their quest for power and material things. Ekanpo Enewaridideke (2009) in "Ebi Yebo's purid poetic portrait of a putrid nation" states that politicians are voted into office on the strength of their promises but they selfishly violated their own promises within a short time," (P. 48) because they failed to understand and accept that naked we came into this world, and naked we shall return as the Christian creed puts it. Afejuku in the pursuit of his ideology: the nothingness of life moves a step further in "The snake Charmer", and shows that not even charm can charm life.

*To the gathering came he,*

*Banging and shoting, demonstrating  
With charms grotesque to nature.  
This was him again – The Magician...  
And no change of beat could rouse them...  
Then with a sudden and surprising jerk  
The adder was on his master's arm  
And the congregation gasped with awe:  
But alas, it was too late, as the charmer tried  
To drop him down.  
The scissors – like fangs stabbed home,  
And there lay the corpse of the mighty (P. 44)*

Even those who are regarded as being mighty due to their prowess in trying to charm life are daily flawed when they are about to beat their chest on their mastery of the incomprehensible codes of life. The poet talks about "to the gathering came he.../This time the drum sounded and sounded.../ The bizarre, grotesque, sinister charms/doing nothing". Afejuku seems to be saying that man whether as a reincarnate of a previous being, or his various struggles or attempts to comprehend and conquer life in a single earthly journey ends up a great failure for even in his might, falls mightily. In his fall we see the bizarre, grotesque, sinister charms, doing nothing. For fear of failing and falling mightily like the mighty even in their sinister charms, men fell they must leave their abode and go roaming a while/travel the world over and pick" their destinies. This, they do with all enthusiasm like "the Fulani snake Charmer", only to find themselves covered with debt, a dead wood a broken reed.." This is indeed unfortunate as one realizes too late in life that "the shit here, is anywhere," (P.46) as professor Afejuku would put it in "The City".

## **CONCLUSION**

Afejuku from his first poem "fear of unrealized Ambition" to "Death", a total of thirty eight poems in A Garden of Moods demonstrates how much man is plagued by evils, pains and betrayal of all sorts and the inevitability of pains even in death – where peace remains elusive. Afejuku's poetry falls in line with Egudu's description of Clark, Kofi Awoonor, and Lenrie Peter's Poetry. According to Egudu (1977):

*To John Pepper Clark, life is a scene of tragedy: to Kofi Awoonor it is full of rabid dogs and oppression: to Lenrie Peters it is diseased in all its parts. In Clark man struggles and gods for help and protection; in Peters he suffers from the sickness of life and tries to run away from it. Peter sees life as plague ridden, physically, morally, and intellectually. There is no assurance of permanent security either in this life of "centuries plagued" or in death, which merely "deludes" men, (P. 93).*

Afejuku, like all these poets in their poetry, presents man as one struggling again a hurricane, an act which no matter how much he tries to resist, brakes him at the end. The



fact that even in death man remains an endangered specie makes him a fool to have even embarked on a journey whose outcome has been fixed against him even before the journey began. Man is a mere fly in the hands of wanton boys. This is why it seems unfortunate for man remains a mere tool in the hand of a supernatural God or god that compels him to under go a journey he seems ill-prepared for. Tejan Sallah (1995) corroborates the incapacitated nature of man by saying that:

*They have been largely nurtured by harsh economic and political environment of the nineteen seventies and eighties, a period of galloping inflation, Lilliputian growth, structural adjustment skill. Skill flight mounting external debts, crumbling infrastructure, stubborn droughts, boarder conflict religious/sectarian class, impatient armies and self-seeking coup d'etats. In such bleak times of distraction and deprivation of the majority...(Pp. 15 - 16).*

The word is disillusionment. Man remains greatly disillusioned about the state of things that he calls on death to come and put an end to this terrible beauty. Afejuku in "Death" the last poem in his collection urges death to come and finish up the exercise thus: "Death come for me now,/come and claim me/You've taken too many/people dear to lose/worse more, at the/pinnacle of their/fame when the world needs them/more than you. I hate you calling, refusing, dragging me/when I'm thriving (P. 51). Even the "thriving", Afejuku mentions here is like soldiers on parade standing on one spot and constantly raising their legs and singing – "left-right, left-right", without making a single progress. No forward march. The fact that the poem "death" is the last in his collection – A Garden of mood seems a deliberate attempt by the authors, to show that the totality of man's struggle is an exercise in death trapped tunnel. Everything ends in death. In conclusion, therefore, Tony Afejuku is an existentialist who show cased his mind-set: the nothingness of life in his A Garden of Moods, a garden overgrown with weeds that choke life out of man leaving him helpless and at the mercy of an inconsiderate god.

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