

Grief, Desire and Memorial Transience in Tony Afejuku's *An Orchard of Wishes*

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Abstract

While Tony Afejuku's poetry has received critical attention for its treatment of love, elegy and public concerns, little critical work has focused on the way in which *An Orchard of Wishes* structures grief, desire, and memorial consciousness in the symbolic ecology of the orchard. This study explores emotional ecology and human transience in *An Orchard of Wishes*. The study, which is based on the theory of affective ecocriticism, analyses in detail three selected poems: "Sweet Grief," "Passion Orchard" and "Epitaph." The analysis focuses on imagery, diction, tone, lineation, address, horticultural symbolism and the connection between private mourning and public memory. The study shows that Afejuku's orchard is a cultivated emotional field where maternal loss, ancestral inheritance and political death are intertwined. More specifically, the discussion traces the movement from maternal bereavement in "Sweet Grief" through the damaged ancestral inheritance of "Passion Orchard" to the political mourning of Ken Saro-Wiwa in "Epitaph." It argues that images of ripening, food, soil, flowers, blood and burial give bodily and environmental form to emotions that move between personal and communal history. By bringing close textual analysis into conversation with affective ecocriticism, the study shows how the orchard becomes both a memorial field and a measure of social decline. The poems consequently preserve the dead through acts of lyrical remembrance while exposing the fragility of human and communal aspirations. The study ends by suggesting that the collection offers a poetics of earth, fruit, flowers, memory and witness through which fleeting human life may be recovered.

Keywords: Tony Afejuku, *An Orchard of Wishes*, affective ecocriticism, grief, desire, memorial poetry.

Introduction

In Tony Afejuku's collection, *An Orchard of Wishes*, the orchard is more important than the fruitfulness that it promises. The title implies ripening, desire, cultivation and hope, but the poems immediately show that the

orchard is also a place of mourning, political wounding, ancestral memory and public death. The orchard is thus more than just a beautiful natural enclosure. It is a place where wishes grow beside wounds, and beauty never separates itself from loss. This study brings the symbolic field back into focus to explore the ways in which the collection creates interrelated conditions of human transience: grief, desire, and memory. The problem underlying this study is a critical one. Afejuku's poems have been read for love and death, for politics and social concern, but *An Orchard of Wishes* has yet to be read with care as one emotional system. The poems in the collection are frequently about personal loss and national loss, about tender feelings and collective loss, about nature and history.

A reading that deals with these concerns individually will miss the internal relation among them. The orchard image provides a means for the critic to read them together. It allows grief to be remembered, desire to be inherited, and public death to become a wound sown into collective consciousness. This study explores the representative poems "Sweet Grief," "Passion Orchard" and "Epitaph" in *An Orchard of Wishes*. The three poems provide a well-choreographed movement. "Sweet Grief" starts with personal grief and turns the loss of a mother into a sweet sorrow. "Passion Orchard" focuses on collective inheritance and the loss of a cultivated ancestral field. "Epitaph" is a work of political remembrance, as it takes private grief and the plight of the Ogoni people and turns them into political grief. The scope is deliberately limited to these poems because they illustrate the collection's organisation of emotion, place and transience. Close textual analysis is the method used in the study. Imagery, diction, tone, repetition, lineation, address, metaphor and the material vocabulary of the poems are emphasised.

The selected excerpts are not meant merely to illustrate but to evoke feelings and thoughts; they are not meant to be added after the argument has been made. The theoretical approach is affective ecocriticism, which allows the study to take into account the emotion that flows through the orchard, earth, fruit, flowers, blood and burial. The study argues that *An Orchard of Wishes* builds an affective ecology in which human life seems fragile, but memory lives on in the poet's transformation of natural and material images into lyrical forms of witness. In *An Orchard of Wishes*, Afejuku presents the orchard as a symbolic and affective space in which grief, desire and public memory play out, making human transience visible through images of ripening and decay, blood, soil, flowers, and rebirth. The collection does not require the reader to make a

choice between the private and the public. It demonstrates that both occupy the same field of wounds. The collection also warrants special mention because of its different affective movement compared with *A Garden of Moods* and *A Spring of Sweets*. Desire is not as fluid as the spring and mood does not move as freely as the garden in *An Orchard of Wishes*.

The prevailing picture is of the cultivation of inheritance. Planting, care, remembrance and patience are required in the orchard. This makes the collection particularly sensitive to the gifts that have come from the dead and to how the living respond to those gifts. The poems in this study show the orchard to be a gift and a responsibility. Afejuku's treatment of transience in this collection also does not consist only of a contemplation of death. The ideals of the community, the hopes that are inherited and the public loyalties pass away with human life. The collection therefore extends the register of mortality into social and historical realms. A country can decay just as a body can die, a dream can fail, an ancestral field can lose its promise. These enlargements account for the choice of poems to be analysed slowly instead of only in thematic terms.

Theoretical Framework

This study adopts affective ecocriticism as its theoretical framework. The theory is part of a new trend in literary and cultural studies that combines ecocriticism's concern with the environment and affect theory's concern with feeling, embodiment and response. It draws on some of the early work of ecocriticism, particularly the work collected in *The Ecocriticism Reader*, edited by Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm. Glotfelty describes ecocriticism as 'the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment' (xviii). This early definition is still relevant because it helps the critic to consider rivers, gardens, animals, soil, weather, trees and landscapes seriously. It does not treat nature as decoration. It questions how literary language represents the material world and how the material world enters human thought.

The theory also emerges from a dissatisfaction with readings that separate environment from emotion. A river, orchard, garden, spring, corpse, dust, flower or bird can all be the subject of a poem, but these images may evoke feeling as well as provide background description. Thus, affective ecocriticism examines the relations among body, place, mood and image. It inquires into the way a text makes a reader feel in an environment, how the environment carries grief, desire, fear, love or

anger, and how human bodies sense their relation to nonhuman matter. The method is appropriate for poetry because poetry is often able to capture perception and feeling in an image. The titles and images of Afejuku's poems continually bring human emotion into contact with cultivated or damaged natural spaces, and such a frame is particularly suitable for his poems.

In *Affective Ecologies: Empathy, Emotion, and Environmental Narrative*, Alexa Weik von Mossner gives this critical movement a contemporary and systematic form. She explains that 'environmental narrative, broadly defined, includes any type of narrative in any media that foregrounds ecological issues and human-nature relationships' (3). While Mossner's focus is on narrative, her assertion could also be applied to lyric poetry because poems also create environments that readers can imagine, feel and inhabit. Afejuku's poems are not always long stories, but they do convey emotional worlds. His orchard, garden and spring are not bare settings. They emphasise the connection between human and natural worlds by bringing grief into the earth, desire into fruit and sweetness, violence into blood and air, and death back to dust.

Mossner also believes that the concept of embodied cognition can be useful in the study of environmental literature because texts invite readers to 'participate on the sensory and emotional level' (3). This is relevant to the current research. In Afejuku's poetry, pressure is often applied through the senses. Readers hear the sound of the rifle, see blood, feel the wet earth, taste the sweetness, smell death and see time pass by. These sensory elements carry affect. They also make transience bodily. Human life is not a mere philosophy but something experienced through the senses. The body is the medium of the poem's knowledge of loss.

In addition, affective ecocriticism highlights 'emotionally powerful renderings of human-nature relationships' (8), as Mossner puts it. This is useful, as it helps to hold both sides of the argument together. The critic has to read the emotion and its relation to the material world simultaneously. Grief takes the form of soil in Afejuku's poetry, love takes the form of water, sorrow takes the form of plants, violence takes the form of blood and vultures, desire takes the form of orchards and springs, memory takes the form of flowers and ancestral fields. The theory allows for a reading beyond theme-spotting. It enables the study of the affective structure of the poem in terms of its images, tones, bodies and spaces.

Careful statements of the main tenets of affective ecocriticism can be made. First, emotion is embodied; it shows up in the senses of the body

and in the reader's imagination of bodily states. Second, the shaping effects of the environment are felt; the river, garden, orchard, spring, grave, dust and weather do not exist outside the feeling of the poem. Third, human and nonhuman matter interact; plants, rivers, birds, blood, fruit, soil and corpses are part of the emotional pattern of the text. Fourth, affect is trans-scalar; a private sorrow can relate to family, nation, ethnic history, public violence or ecological damage. Fifth, the form of the poem is important; line breaks, repetition, rhythm, metaphor, diction and voice help to structure the flow of feeling in the poem.

Obviously, there are some strong points to the theory. It keeps the critic from turning nature into ornament and emotion into confession. It enables a more flexible yet controlled narrative of the movement of poetry from the inward to the outward, and back again. It also recognises the reader's body as well as his or her mind. A weakness is that it might be over-extended. A critic can impose an environmental meaning on images that do not support that meaning, or can make all emotions into ecological arguments. This study avoids that defect by using affective ecocriticism only when feeling, soil, water, plant life, body, weather, blood, dust or seasonal change are present in Afejuku's poems. The theory is appropriate for the present study because it captures the poet's habit of making human transience visible through natural and material forms.

There are two related histories of critical approaches that can be used to trace the origin of affective ecocriticism more fully. Ecocriticism first challenged literary study to take the land, environment and human responsibility seriously. In its later cultural and literary applications, affect theory challenged criticism to acknowledge that feeling is not merely a private interior property. Emotions circulate between bodies, things, institutions, pasts and places. Affective ecocriticism is the name given to this assemblage of histories. It treats environment as felt and feeling as materially situated. This union is particularly useful for poetry, as lyric language frequently creates a rich experience of encountering an image as a meeting of body, memory and place.

The theory also enables the critic to regain the moral force of the language of the senses. A poem that makes the reader see blood, smell dust, feel warmth or imagine damp earth does more than decorate an idea. It organises response. It helps the reader to understand the meaning by feeling it. Affective ecocriticism does not give up on formal analysis in this respect. It requires more formal analysis as the line break, the verbal echo and the image carry the affect. Afejuku's poetry is rewarding

for this approach, for his poems frequently pack large historical emotions in the form of small sensory figures: ripe fall, mango light, air burial, clipped wings, dust that beckons.

The other principle of the theory is that of the relational nature of subjectivity. A man or woman speaker in a poem is not an isolated individual. He is shaped by ancestors, rivers, soil, war, lovers, corpses, plants, nation and sacred memory. The affective self is thus permeable. This is not to say that the self ceases to exist. It means that the self feels through its relations. The persona becomes visible in Afejuku's poems in the things he mourns, smells, tastes, touches, remembers and addresses. The orchard, garden and spring are not separate from him. They are the material forms through which his feelings become understandable.

Affective ecocriticism also helps to prevent the false dichotomy of private and public poetry. A mother's death can seem private, but when the imagery of communal ritual, food, guests and floral memory is added, it is social. A massacre can seem like a public event, but the exposed body and the final gasp make the reader feel the pain up close and personal. A love poem can be intimate, but the hurt land becomes a part of the lovers' connection. The theory is therefore appropriate for Afejuku, since his poems are constantly shifting between the private and the public, without stating the shift as a programme. The movement is carried through images.

The theory's limitation requires one further comment. Affective ecocriticism is flexible, and can lead the critic to read all emotional images as environmental images and all natural images as emotional images. A responsible application requires textual restraint. In this study, then, the claims are restricted to places where the connection in the poems becomes apparent. The theory is a tool that must be used when Afejuku presents grief in the shape of cake and flower, when he brings the smile of a dead woman to a garden and when he gives mortality form through air and dust. It helps to explain what the poems already say.

Review of Related Scholarship

Over time, critical engagements with Afejuku's poetry have focused on the themes of love, loss, political rage, ecological remembrance and lyricism. These studies have opened new avenues, but they tend to separate one issue from another. Through affective ecocriticism, the present study bridges what previous studies have tended to divide. It reads love beside death, public violence beside private feeling, natural imagery beside bodily response. This does not cancel previous readings.

It expands on them and restructures them in terms of the emotional contexts evoked by the poems.

One of the most helpful starting points is to read Edafe Mukoro's study of Afejuku's love poetry. Mukoro locates the poet 'from the perspective of love' and focuses on the ways in which he employs poetic tools to convey traditional love themes (122). He pays particular attention to the private emotional pressure in *A Garden of Moods* and *An Orchard of Wishes*. Later, Mukoro comments that the poems 'take the reader into private relationships and experiences with different mistresses' (123). This focus helps to explain one aspect of Afejuku's poetics. The present study is different because it does not consider love as a separate theme. It explores love in relation to other elements of an affective ecology, such as desire and grief, memory and public suffering, and the passing of life.

Clement Chukwuka Idegwu reads *A Garden of Moods* through existential anxiety and human helplessness. He argues that 'the meaningless of life seems to be Tony Afejuku's main concern' in the collection (77). Idegwu's reading is forceful, as the poems frequently come from a world of death, frustration and betrayal. His work also portrays the poet's world as one in which 'life is a waste' (78). This interpretation is correct in its emphasis on the harshness of many of the poems, but it could lead to the misreading of Afejuku's poetry as being darker than it is. In the present study, attention is given to despair, but also to the counter-movements of memory, tenderness, sweetness and lyrical recovery. Afejuku's poems are not just about man's futility. They ask how to bear the burden of grief, how to sustain love, how poetic form can survive history's wounds.

Adebayo Oguntuase's interpretation of *A Spring of Sweets* is important, as it highlights range. The collection draws 'generously from our environment; life, love, death, religion, politics, agitation, advocacy' (42), Oguntuase says. He also says that it is 'not monodirectional and monothematic' (42). This recognition of variety is significant, particularly for a poet who writes about love, family, nation, religion, ecology and mortality. The present study extends this point further and asks how this diversity is organised. Affective ecology is the answer suggested here. Afejuku's variety does not disperse haphazardly. It collects around emotional places and material images in which the poems meditate on transience.

The study of Afejuku is enriched by the contributions of Clement Eloghosa Odia and Esther Iria Jamgbadi, who add a more recent

ecocritical perspective. In reading *A Spring of Sweets*, they claim that the poems expose 'two main ecocritical spaces' that can be used to comprehend the Niger Delta environment (124). They also claim that Afejuku 'spatialises Warri River as well as oil companies as ecocritical spaces' (124). Their work is significant in that they acknowledge that Afejuku's poetry assigns place a shaping role. The present study agrees with this insight but takes a different approach. It does not read space only as an ecological or geographical construction. It reads space as an affective construction; that is, the river, orchard, garden or spring as a medium of feeling, memory and bodily awareness.

The present study is also supported by scholarship on Nigerian poetry in general. The way poets turn private emotion into public criticism, particularly when addressing military rule, the decay of the nation, the loss of the environment or communal suffering has been commented upon by many critics of modern Nigerian poetry. Afejuku is a part of this tradition, but his achievement lies in the horticultural and sensory pressure of his idiom. He seldom presents public concern in plain statements. He folds it into pictures of fruit, flowers, rivers, dust, body and weather. This habit is the reason his poetry needs an analysis that can hold emotion and environment at the same time.

These gaps form the basis for the present study. Love, existential anguish, public commitment, diversity, didacticism, aesthetic design and ecological space are some of the themes that have been explored in Afejuku's poetry by existing scholarship. Fewer efforts have been made to examine a complete emotional landscape in a single collection, in which death and human frailty are experienced. This study thus provides a focused reading of each collection in turn. It demonstrates the poetics of feeling through material images in the selected poems and the poetics of human transience that this arrangement creates.

For *An Orchard of Wishes*, Mukoro's study is of special interest because it forms part of a larger discussion of Afejuku's love poetry. His interest in private feeling helps in the understanding of "Passion Orchard," but this study broadens the definition of passion. Passion is not just erotic or romantic but also includes the intensity of feeling in inheritance, historical disillusionment and the need for renewal. The orchard is transformed into a field of love, history and loss.

The available criticism on Afejuku's elegiac imagination also sets the stage for the present reading, as *An Orchard of Wishes* features poems of mourning, memorial address and public lament. The connection between elegy and environment is still to be developed. This study is thus a

reading of mourning as an ecological arrangement as well as a form of emotional content. A field of soil, fruit, flowers, blood and fragrance includes the dead mother, the wounded ancestral orchard and the murdered public figure. The originality of the collection is the way mourning takes shape in the images of cultivated matter.

Mukoro's work is also important for its attention to the formal resources he uses to treat love. He calls attention to the imagery, address and poetic management of desire. The present study embraces this formal emphasis and extends the emotional field. Love in Afejuku is not confined to the relationship between lovers. It is often shaped by the land, the betrayal of the nation, inheritance from the ancestors and death. This is because Afejuku's love language can sometimes be more wounding than erotic.

Idegwu's existential reading is still relevant, for it has given serious consideration to the gravity of Afejuku's mood. His argument that *A Garden of Moods* shows that man is powerless against forces beyond his control is echoed in many of the poems in this collection. But this study does not succumb to the conclusion that helplessness exhausts the poems. Afejuku portrays the human being as fragile, but he also gives fragility memorable form. The poet's art is to turn helplessness into address, image, rhythm and witness.

Oguntase's study is also helpful because he argues that *A Spring of Sweets* is a study of diversification, didacticism and aestheticism. Here, what his study refers to as diversification is the affective range. Afejuku's poems are love poems, national poems, family poems, death poems, ecological poems, and sacred poems. The present study is different in that it seeks the deep organising principle in that range. The principle is that of sweetness and transience: the poems make life sweet because it is transient, not because it is secure.

Odia and Jamgbadi's account of ecocritical spaces helps to place Afejuku in recent environmental literary criticism. Afejuku's poetry is indeed space-conscious, as their reading of Warri River and oil companies as ecocritical spaces attests. The present study is close to this insight, but shifts the focus. It offers not only an ecological reading but also an affective one. Because of the feeling that they carry, the garden, the orchard and the spring matter, as does the river of Warri. They are places of remembrance, wounding, desire and death.

The studies make it clear that there is a need for separate collection-based studies. A study of Afejuku's poetry in a single collection enables the critic to slow down and see the movement within the book, while a

combined reading reveals the continuity of Afejuku's poetic imagination. The emotional grammar is different for each collection. *An Orchard of Wishes* focuses on cultivation and memorial desire, *A Garden of Moods* focuses on fleeting feeling, death and social harm, *A Spring of Sweets* focuses on sweetness in the face of time and dust. The following series of studies is an elaboration of that slower approach.

Analysis

The analysis is structured around the movement of the collection from private mourning to inherited passion to public memorialisation. Each section starts with the context of the poem and then reads the excerpt that is set out as an affective scene. The guiding question is how the orchard, in its various incarnations, makes the poems sensuous, historical and morally charged.

“Sweet Grief” and the Affective Ecology of Maternal Loss

“Sweet Grief” is one of the most telling emotional paradoxes in *An Orchard of Wishes* and stands near the beginning of the book. Grief is not described as a uniform state of sadness. It brings sweetness, ritual, food, memory and bodily disturbance. The poem starts with the speaker's realisation that a loved one has left and that there is nothing that humans can do to stop the fall. The use of the words ‘season,’ ‘departure,’ ‘ripe fall,’ ‘hopes’ and ‘dreams’ puts death in the cycle of the ripening of nature. The poem is not yet a dirge; bereavement has already become a seasonal occurrence. The speaker's language of this season of loss is one of falling and dissolving:

The times rolled by
The prolonged season of departure
Came... rather suddenly
And nothing happened
To halt the ripe fall. (An Orchard of Wishes 2)

The opening phrase has a rolling motion. It doesn't just pass; it comes with a force that can't be halted. The ‘season of departure’ implies a natural progression, but the adverbial phrase ‘rather suddenly’ disrupts any sense of comfort that might be taken from a natural progression. All life ripens and death is expected, but it is shocking because no ripening prepares the mourner for the instant of fall. A tension is at the heart of Afejuku's poetics of transience. The poem is aware of death as an

inevitability, but doesn't allow nature to offer comfort. Affective ecocriticism can assist us to read the fall as natural and emotional. The dead person falls like fruit but the fall strikes the speaker's interior world.

The following movement further explores the connection between sadness, sweetness and decay. Afejuku's diction transforms dreams and aspirations into bits and pieces of food. Mourning is surrounded by sugar, flies, ants, vultures and carrion. This is not merely picturesque. It establishes an affective context that exposes sweetness to contamination. The mourner tastes the sweetness, but it has been touched by decay. Grief is thus made edible and repulsive in the poem. Its emotional life is based on contradiction: it is the pain of holding on to the beloved that forms the basis of the mourning, and the pain is the only intimacy that is left.

The persona's naming of the emotional state is the fullest expression of the central paradox of the poem. The poem is not afraid to be sentimental, but it is made more complex by the juxtaposition of grief and ritual hospitality. The mourner's grief turns into a cake that is served to guests, mourners and sympathisers. This strange image turns private grief into a public ritual of consumption. The speaker's grief is no longer confined to him, but it is offered to others in the guise of funeral sweetness:

My grief is sweet,
Like an over-sweetened cake,
To present happy guests—
Mourners, sympathisers, all, in line
(*An Orchard of Wishes 2*)

The word 'sweet' does not make grief disappear. It thickens it. Afejuku understands mourning as a social performance in which the bereaved are surrounded by food, visitors and sympathy. The image of the cake is disturbing because it makes grief consumable. The guests are 'happy' in the midst of mourning and that happiness reveals the uneasy relationship between ritual and feeling. Funeral services can unite people, provide them with food and build a sense of community, but they can also turn grief into a spectacle. The bitterness of the poem is in this double movement. The ritual which is meant to console the mourner's heart is in itself a danger to it.

This reading can move beyond the psychology of one mourner with the help of affective ecocriticism. Biological processes and social rituals

collide in the world of the cake, flies, ants, birds, fruits and carrion. Sweetness attracts mouths, insects and memory. Decay attracts them too. The setting of the poem is not passive, therefore. It presses upon feeling. Grief is manifested in the speaker's body in the form of food, insects, ripened fruit and the body's vulnerability. The poem in this way turns grieving into an ecology of appetite and loss.

Later in the poem, the speaker turns to direct apostrophe. The speaker addresses the dead as 'my heart,' 'my beauty,' and 'my mother.' These phrases are not casual greetings. They restore the dead woman's place in the speaker's emotional body. The mother is both heart and beauty; she is an internal organ and an aesthetic presence. The language of the poem then shifts towards flowers. The dead mother becomes petal, flower and rose. This floral image does not cheaply romanticise death. It demonstrates the speaker's attempt to preserve the mother's tenderness in a natural form associated with smell and touch.

The elegiac tenderness of the poem gathers when the flower image becomes a memorial figure:

My mother,
You the petal and flower of delight
That blossomed in the heart
Of the wounded,
(*An Orchard of Wishes* 3)

The mother is not merely remembered as one who gave birth. She 'blossomed' in the injured. The line implies that she had life-giving qualities. She entered the hearts of the afflicted and filled them with joy. The image is ecological because a human life takes floral form in other human bodies. Grief not only mourns her absence; it follows the path of her presence in others. The emotional essence of the mother lives on as a flower. Affective traces remain in those who have been cared for.

"Sweet Grief" is then a multi-layered maternal space of season, fall, food, insects, cake, flower and heart. The poem does not provide an easy consolation. It shows sadness as sweet because love is still there, and sweetness as vulnerable because the beloved is no longer. What makes this poem so good is that it doesn't make sorrow easy. Grieving is grown, eaten, polluted and stored in the orchard of wishes.

The lineation of the poem is also notable. Afejuku frequently breaks lines in such a way as to make them incomplete, and thus to interrupt the experience of grief. The pause after 'What a dirge' creates a space before

the addressee is named. The speaker appears to calm himself down and then goes back to the dead, using the repeated vocatives, 'my heart' and 'my beauty.' Repetition is not a failure of language here. It is the ritual work of grieving. The speaker who has lost the loved one has to repeat the name of the loved one, as the dead cannot respond.

The mourners are part of the affective ecology of the poem as well. They are in lines and queues, as part of the sociality of death. Their presence reminds us that personal grief is a communal practice from the outset. Mourning in many African settings brings people together through food, visits, speech and ritual duty. Afejuku presents both comfort and unease in this situation. The mourner needs comfort, but the presence of others can also expose grief to performance. The tension is captured in the poem through the sweetness of the funeral cake, which is not quite sweet.

By the time the mother becomes a rose, the poem is no longer about eating, but about smelling. Food can be consumed and swallowed, but the fragrance remains. This change helps to explain the emotional flow of this poem. The body of the dead mother cannot return, and the dish will be eaten at the funeral. But the flower motif implies a more nuanced form of survival. Her affective presence remains as fragrance, softness and remembrance. Her memory is thus preserved, but not without a hint of fragility, a hint of death.

The title of the poem is worthy of being considered a mini-thesis. "Sweet Grief" identifies an emotional state that seems unachievable until the images in the poem teach the reader how to live in it. Grief is sweet because the lost mother is still loved; it is grief because there is no sweetness that will bring her back. The poem thus evokes an ambivalent atmosphere, one that can only be grasped through contradiction. Hence, the importance of Afejuku's diction of cake, flower and rose. In each image, contradiction is given a body.

The poem also conveys the message that mourning is not only the feeling of the mourner but also what the mourner must do. He has to speak, feed, remember, welcome guests, call the dead and preserve the image of the beloved from being lost. These actions socialise and materialise grief. The mother's death has become a ritual and an object in the world. In this way, the poem is able to make the personal loss available to communal recognition without giving up its inner pain.

“Passion Orchard” and the Wounded Field of Inheritance

“Passion Orchard” broadens the emotional spectrum of the collection from personal loss to collective legacy. The title of the poem already implies that the poem is about feeling and cultivated land. Passion implies intensity, desire and suffering; orchard implies planting, fruitfulness and care. The poem thus invites the reader to learn about historical experience as something sown and grown by ancestors and founders. It starts with a community voice. The ‘we’ of the poem speaks from inheritance, not from isolated desire. The first scene sets up a cultivated world that is a product of the work of the ancestors:

We plant and grow
In our orchard made by our ancestors
In not infertile season
Of blessed rain of bliss
(*An Orchard of Wishes* 12)

The repeated language of growth in the poem gives it a ceremonial tone. ‘We plant and grow’ combines action and outcome. The orchard was created by the ancestors and the community is already saturated with memory. The negative formulation of the phrase ‘not infertile season’ is used to emphasise possibility. The soil is suitable for fruit. Rain is seen as a blessing and ‘bliss’ gives weather emotional value. Affective ecocriticism helps us see climate, ancestry and communal feeling as intertwined here. Rain is more than a meteorological detail. It’s a positive gesture of hope.

In the first movement of the poem, the poet extols the virtues of work. Founders remove weeds, look for sapful roots and plant wind-resistant seedlings. These details give the orchard political significance. Community does not survive on wishes alone. It requires cultivation, selection, protection from strong winds and patience. The founders’ singing and dancing make labour a ritual. The orchard is thus an ecological and cultural space. It’s filled with soil and song, seedlings and communal memory. Afejuku’s passion is directed towards the work that makes continuity possible.

The festive spirit is not long-lasting. The emotional shift in the poem occurs when the speaker compares the present to the labour of the founders. The heirs face unexpected change and the orchard is a field of disappointment. This change is introduced into the poem by a sudden question:

Who amongst us inheritors
Can applaud the too sudden change
The times bemoan
And mock us
With the memories
(*An Orchard of Wishes* 12)

The question carries accusation and bewilderment. The inheritors can't applaud the change, as it has hurt the orchard's promise. Time is not neutral; it 'bemoan[s]' and 'mock[s].' Time is personified, giving it an affective force. It laments and mocks. The recollections of the founders turn painful because the present cannot honour them. Human transience now appears not only in the form of death but also in the form of the decay of inherited dreams. It is possible for a community to be given a fruitful field and yet not maintain its fruitfulness.

This historical anxiety is enhanced by the ecological language of the poem. Strength is suggested by the words 'sapful roots' and 'wind-resistant seedlings' but the present mood is one of damage. Drought is not the only cause of destruction of the orchard. The orchard has suffered moral and historical decline. The speaker is caught in a dilemma between the past and the present. This position produces the passion of the poem. Passion is not simply joy. It is the pain that results from love of inheritance and the sight of decay.

The poem also poses a bigger question: What is memory? In "Passion Orchard" memory is not merely recollection of the past. It is a living force that makes judgements about the present. The founders' mango dance and wine song become standards which are used to measure the present. Time is thus an ecosystem in the poem. Past and present press against each other. It is at this intersection of temporal pressures that the orchard is found. The land recalls the work that created it and the speaker feels guilt for not upholding what they have been given.

Later, the feeling of penitence over inherited promise is heightened. The rhythm of the poem slows down as the speaker becomes aware of the change in memory from celebration to rebuke:

Bequeathed us
Now turn penitent
Too too soon?

Our orchard air
Like a merciless bayonet
(*An Orchard of Wishes* 12)

The repetition of the phrase ‘too too soon’ has a childlike quality, yet it is not to be taken lightly. It communicates shock at premature decline. Later, the air in the orchard becomes ‘like a merciless bayonet’ and thus turns into a weapon. Now the violence of history has taken its toll on the natural environment. Air should sustain breath; here it cuts. This is a powerful affective conversion in the poem. The community’s life is wounded and the environment becomes militarised. The orchard is now the scene of an assault, having been blessed with rain.

“Passion Orchard” thus extends the study’s argument. The transience of the human body is not the only concern. It includes the passing of communal ideals, the fading away of inherited labour and the humiliation of memory. The orchard provides Afejuku with a language for this process. It allows him to demonstrate the intermingling of desire, ancestry, regret and historical injury.

Another difference from “Sweet Grief” is the use of a collective pronoun in the poem. There, the speaker speaks in intimate address; here the speaker speaks as a part of a group. The change from ‘my’ to ‘we’ expands the space of feeling. Passion is tied to a community that has a cultivated world and is responsible for its deterioration. The orchard, then, is a moral space in Afejuku. It poses the question: What do inheritors do with what founders plant?

The ancestral dimension adds spiritual depth to the poem. Ancestors are more than just historical figures. They are presences whose work and creativity remain active in the present. The founders are ‘inspired by our ancestors’ muses,’ so poetry, cultivation and ancestry are intertwined. The orchard can thus be interpreted as a metaphor for literary legacy as well as for communal legacy. The poet himself is a sower in a field sown by the voices before him.

One of the most striking things the poem does is to capture the violent shift in the air in the orchard. The ordinary meaning of air is breath and life; the bayonet suggests stabbing and militarised power. Afejuku demonstrates the weaponisation of air in times of crisis, even in the act of breathing. The community does not merely witness violence. It breathes an atmosphere of violence. Affective ecocriticism is especially helpful here because it explains how the environment becomes the medium of historical pain.

The poem can also be interpreted as a reflection on cultural and political leadership. Founders work, sing and plant; inheritors face decline and ridicule. The contrast implies that natural destiny alone does not explain the failure of the present. The failure is related to stewardship. If those who inherit an orchard do not take care of it, it will die. Afejuku thus makes horticultural imagery into a language of ethical responsibility.

“Epitaph” and the Memorial Ecology of Public Death

The collection’s journey from grieving and inheriting to public death continues in “Epitaph”. The poem mentions Ken Saro-Wiwa and the Ogoni struggle, but it is not a political statement in plain argumentative prose. It takes the form of an epitaph. This form is important because an epitaph is an inscribed form of remembrance. It marks a body that has vanished and it provides the dead with a continued existence in language. Afejuku's form links individual death, communal agony and the hope of future moral repair.

The first line of the poem is very stark. It announces the departure, names the deceased and immediately turns individual grief into collective grief:

He is gone
Ken my Ken our Ken
And agonies and agonies
Embrace Ogonis
As earth eats Ken
(*An Orchard of Wishes* 23)

The first sentence is bare: ‘He is gone.’ It carries the finality of news that comes after the loss of hope. The next line enlarges the dead man's significance through possessive repetition. ‘Ken my Ken our Ken’ moves from intimacy to community. The speaker claims him personally and collectively. The dead man belongs to the mourner but also to a people. The plural ‘agonies and agonies’ rejects singular grief. Pain multiplies. It embraces the Ogonis, and the verb ‘embrace’ is cruelly transformed because what holds the people is suffering. Burial is consumption as the earth ‘eats’ Ken. Soil participates in political mourning.

Affective ecocriticism is valuable here because the poem's public grief traverses earth and body. The dead are not reduced to abstraction. The body falls back to the earth and the earth becomes a part of the

elegiac scene. The environmental image of the poem does not offer tidy consolation. Earth does not receive the dead kindly; it eats. The violent verb implies that death at the hands of tyrants is not natural death. It is death made brutal by politics, and the earth is forced to devour its witness.

The poem does not dwell on disappearance. It turns towards rebirth, but it is a conditional rebirth. For the dead to be properly restored to memory, the future must become 'unevil'. The moral yearning is evident in the next few lines of the poem:

Who is gone
And who must be reborn
In times unevil when
There's no tie and die
And die and tie
(*An Orchard of Wishes* 23)

The phrase 'must be reborn' carries moral urgency. Afejuku does not merely wish to remember the dead. He argues that such death must not be the norm of political life and demands a historical order that will put an end to this. 'Tie and die' and 'die and tie' form a bitter verbal play that compresses execution. The repetition mimics the circular logic of violence. The body is bound to die; death is tied to political cruelty. The wordplay thus enacts the poem's condemnation of this grotesque mechanism.

The memorial ecology of this poem is most apparent here. Rebirth is envisioned through changes in atmosphere, flowers and fragrance. The poem shifts from earth that eats to images of dawn and flowers. These images do not blot out the killing. They make the remembrance of the dead an ethical imperative for another world. The poem asks language to do what history has not done: to bring justice, restoration and fragrant renewal.

The last few lines of the poem leave the reader with the paradox of the collection. *An Orchard of Wishes* knows that wishes are broken, bodies are murdered and communities are wounded. But the poem continues to wish. The memorial act itself is a way of resisting. Afejuku's epitaph does not allow death to remain silent. It plants the dead in language for a future reader to find the pain, anger and hope of the dead.

The poem is short and thus has a greater memorial effect. It doesn't tell the whole story of Ken Saro-Wiwa, the Ogoni struggle or the

workings of military power. It compresses them into a few charged images. This compression is part of its lyric power. The form of the epitaph is based on the premise that the reader knows that a life can be contained in a short inscription. Afejuku takes that assumption and then enlarges it by making one death represent a people's agony.

The phrase 'Ogoni' functions not only as an ethnic marker but also as the name of an affective community. The agony that embraces Ogonis makes the people the body around the dead. Public death therefore has a communal nervous system. If one person is cut down, many feel the cut. The poem's grammar of possession, 'my' and 'our,' further reinforces the idea that memory is not just the speaker's. It is shared, challenged and ethically required.

The final prayer for 'dawnful fragrances' is a simple expression of hope. It does not suggest that death has been conquered. It envisions a world in which the circumstances that caused such death will no longer be present. Flowers and fragrance are important because they provide an alternative atmosphere to that of execution. The old world ties and kills; the desired world smells of dawn. The politics of the poem is thus always intimately bound up with its sensory imagination.

Conclusion

The chosen poems demonstrate the need to read *An Orchard of Wishes* through both its natural imagery and public memory. If the orchard is read only as a metaphor of desire, the critic misses its elegiac weight. If it is read only as political lament, the critic misses its tenderness. These elements are made to occupy the same field; the power of the collection lies in this. In this study, I have explored how *An Orchard of Wishes* is an affective orchard of grief, desire and public memory. "Sweet Grief" presents a sensory experience of maternal loss through sweetness and decay. "Passion Orchard" presents inheritance as a cultivated field scarred by time and history. "Epitaph" presents public death through a memorial ecology of earth, agony, rebirth and flowers. In the three poems, Afejuku brings human transience to the fore through natural and material images. The study contributes to criticism of Afejuku by demonstrating that the orchard is not just a title image. It is the deeper symbolic structure of the collection. Through the orchard, the poet joins private mourning, public history, desire and decay. Affective ecocriticism helps to make this structure clear, as it explains how emotion flows through soil, fruit, flower, food, blood, weather and body. *An Orchard of Wishes* offers a glimpse of the fragility of life and of the

art of remembering in poetry. What time removes, the poem replants in language.

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