

# Ayi Kwei Armah and the origins of the African diaspora

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## Introduction

Listen then, sons of Mali, children of the black people, listen to my word, for I am going to tell you of Sundiata....

In this there is nothing accidental. The griot being a historian of the black people is quite aware of present divisions among his people; but he is also aware that before the divisions there has been unity. To the griot the tribes and petty nations of the day are a mere degeneration from something better, something higher.

(Ayi Kwei Armah, "Sundiata, An Epic of Old Mali")

The account of black history by the griot or *imbongi* who functions as the recorder of societal norms and values, and perhaps more importantly, historical happenings of grave consequence to the entire populace underscores what Armah describes as the relationship of art to political power. The wo/man who wields political power could be "the Deed", as the griot Balla Fasseke informs Sundiata in the famous epic of Old Mali empire, but the artist is "the Word". The relationship between "the word and the deed" is one of mutual complementarity - a symbiotic process that separates deeds from words only to create confusion. The griot functions as the conscience of the society, while at the same time s/he edifies the political class in times of peace and inspires them in difficult times. Within this comprehensive package of the relationship of art to politics - Armah suspects a mediation. The much discussed audience participation in African art is arrived at as a result of the fact that the griot or *imbongi* relates to his/her audience in the same symbiotic way in which s/he relates to the political class. "Unmediated" is the term Armah uses to explain the fact that the voice of the griot: is the voice of an artist whose spirit is not caught in alien traps, an artist who knows precisely who his people are, what his art consists of, why he practises his art, and for whom.

Physical and spiritual contact with the outside world or what is often regarded as clash of culture begins the mediating process in alien influence. What is clear however, is that even before this contact or clash, the black world and its socio-cultural and political moorings like any other world of its kind experienced internal divisions and con-

flict. Thus there is no pretension or attempt to blame any alien force for the following serious calamity that has befallen the black world in the account of the griot:

I know how black people divided into tribes, for my father bequeathed to me all his learning; I know why such is called Kamara, another Keita, and yet another Sibibe or Traore; every name has a meaning, a secret import<sup>2</sup>.

The process of ideological signification which this division triggers even if it is precarious, remains balanced in the outlook of the griot, 'who is no useless parasite prattling about his single ego'. On the other hand, "the griot knows precisely who his audiences are, and they are not some tight little tribe; they are the black people."<sup>3</sup>

Armah's role as a modern equivalent of these historical griots and *imbongi* has been designed to continue this long tradition of dismantling all 'tight little tribal' affiliations and speak directly to black people in general. Thus whether carrying out a reevaluation of African independence which he regards as a mystification, or reacting to equally out/dated issues such as "Our language problem" - Armah maintains the belief that "African writers are born to an impressive legacy of problems, from dependence on foreign publishers to a parallel dependence on foreign languages."<sup>4</sup> The themes, images, symbols and narrative patterns of African writing could be African and the readership of these works essentially African or black, but as long as the languages we use outside our little ethnic homelands remain European, Africa will always be tethered to the shackles of imperialist domination.

Unlike those who have called upon Africans to write in their respective national languages, Armah agrees that although a thousand linguistic flowers would bloom, in the specific field of African literature alone, however, if this call were answered, the end result would be more chaos and misunderstanding among Africans and their black counterparts in the Diaspora. Angela Smith's *East African Writing in English*, opens with a graphic account of the confusion that we might expect if the call to write in national languages were heeded without removing first the major obstacles to African unity. At a conference called "New African Writing" in 1984 Ngugi wa Thiong'o gave the keynote address:

He was unpretentious but eloquent as he praised enterprising publishers in Zimbabwe who employed people to translate from one African language to another, from Gikuyu to Kiswahili for example. He spoke with mounting intensity for a long time. Eventually he finished and the Chairman invited questions. From a darkened row at the back of the auditorium came a voice speaking Xhosa, an African language that much of the audience and Ngugi did not understand, asking an extremely long question. Confusion was over-

taken by laughter. Ngugi laughed with the rest of the audience, guessed the meaning of the question, and answered in English. The questioner proved to be Lewis Nkosi...<sup>5</sup>

Unlike Lewis Nkosi who understands and has just acted out the confusion that 'tight little tribal' affiliations could generate but translates this understanding as 'one of the benefits conferred by imperialism', Armah believes that the primary solution to Africa's language problem will come only:

When Africans scrap the old colonial system with its border posts, flags, anthems, the whole cancerous overload of embassies, ministries and governments - all as expensive as they are useless - and create something human and intelligent-a unified Africa -in its place.<sup>6</sup>

A united Africa - Armah maintains - would then need to tackle and resolve the issue of one central language that would operate as "the international medium, around which the smaller national and ethnic languages would orbit".

The primary aim of this introduction to "Ayi Kwei Armah and the Origins of the African Diaspora" is to chronicle as many as possible of the critical and polemical premises informing what Derek Wright has described as 'the literary ancestry of the (Armah) histories'. All of Armah's six novels are discussed in some detail in the main body of the essay but the ones that articulate in creative terms 'the origins of the African diaspora' are *Two Thousand Seasons*, *The Healers* and the latest one *Osiris Rising*, and they are discussed in greater detail.

Meanwhile, it is important to note that the most significant literary ancestry to Armah's histories is the postcoloniality of Africa and the black world. Armah's entry into the literary limelight with the publication of his controversial first novel *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* created ambivalent responses around the book and its author. Literary theories sprang up that described the work as existentialist, Marxist, Fanonian, and sometimes mythological. As a work of transition exploring the 'gap' which Anthony Appiah has described in theoretical terms as "the Post- in postcolonialism,"<sup>7</sup> Armah's first novel is understandably interventional.

In an article published in 1973 entitled "Marx, Politics and the African Novel," Ben Obumsele describes *The Beautiful Ones* "as a work deriving much of its background from Marx and Fanon."<sup>8</sup> Obumsele's observation attempts to situate the novel in the realm of critical discourse at a time when it was probably impossible to write a positive appraisal of Armah's first novel, especially when one of Africa's foremost and respected novelists, Chinua Achebe, had described the novel as 'a sick book': "Sick not

with the sickness of Ghana but with the sickness of the human condition. The hero pale and passive and nameless - a creation in the best manner of existentialist writing, wanders through the story in an anguished half-sleep..."<sup>9</sup> Following the same track, Ben Obumsele's critical focus slips as he urges that the novel "is best read as a myth."<sup>10</sup> Obumsele argues that the background that furnishes Armah's intensely paranoid heroes could be located between the solipsistic adaptation of Marx's theory of alienation as this informs Fanon's theory of revolution, because:

In Fanon Marx is altered in two fundamental ways: first to accommodate the subjective angle of a psychiatrist and a Sartrean existentialist, and secondly, to accord with the first loyalties of the spokesman of the black revolution.<sup>11</sup>

The critical persecution that arose as a result of these essential discourses in ideological signification between what are now regarded as novels of the first and second stages in African literature, could have drowned any voice that was not convinced of its vision and ideopractical relevance. At least, one brilliant writer of a novel similar to Armah's, Yambo Ouologuem the author of the equally controversial *Bound to Violence*, could be said to have fizzled out, creatively, under the impact of many negative public and critical opinions. Armah on the other hand, has taken the entire signifying process in his stride, regarding it as an integral part of what his second novel *Fragments* describes as the "cargo mentality" prevalent in Africa's neocolonial situation.

In the same manner, Anthony Appiah has argued that Ouologuem's novel "like many of the second stage (novels) of which it is a part, represents a challenge to the novels of the first stage: it identifies the realist novel as part of the tactic of nationalist legitimation and so it is - if I may begin a catalogue of its ways-of-being-post-this-and-post-that - postrealist."<sup>12</sup> The thrust of Armah's argument and critique of the postcolonial situation among other writers of these novels of the second stage was directed at the neocolonial socio-political elite in general, and this does not exclude those described by Appiah as the writers of "the originary African novels" such as Chinua Achebe. The earlier writers "naturalised realism" and worse still, the younger Armahs and Ouologuems - for example - could not acquiesce in the struggle of these pioneering elite to "naturalise a nationalism that - by 1968 - had plainly failed."<sup>13</sup>

In an article published in 1969 entitled "A Mystification: African Independence Revalued," Armah made a critical assessment of the much advertised "African revolution" and concluded that its intense focus had reached an apocalyptic frenzy "since warlords began replacing prophets, and order became more a matter of guns and fear than of lies and hopes."<sup>14</sup> The conclusion of Kofi Owusu's article "Writers, readers, critics and politics" - for example - links virtually every one of Armah's titles or plot summaries in

his first five novels to the precarious African present - arrived at after several years of independence. Owusu agrees that it could be true that:

Things did fall apart in Africa during the colonial era. It is obvious after years of political independence that the centre cannot hold. The fragments of the "larger meaning which has lent sense to every small thing and every momentary happening years and years ago," have not all been salvaged and brought together yet. While dispossessed Africans await the birth of the beautiful ones and/or the arrival of healers, madmen and specialists, meanwhile reign supreme. Finding the way - our way - and identifying those buses going our way - the way - are literary as well as socio-political, problems. As less privileged Africans ask why they are so blest, they expect their writers to attempt within the confines of art, to provide answers, however inadequate or noncommittal.<sup>15</sup>

The most important ancestry of Armah's novels, short stories, critical and polemical works remains the demand of the people or "what they expect their writers to attempt within the confines of art." In an essay entitled "One Writer's education," Armah articulates the gradation of his mounting consciousness. Looking back to the period when the black revolution was more than a frivolous indulgence, he observes how as a student in Harvard University in the 1960s, his perception changed from that of an expatriate scholar from an African tribe/state to that of a patriotic African affected by the assassination of the then radical leader Patrice Lumumba, of the Central African republic of Congo, among other catalytic events:

The assassination of Lumumba created in me the kind of deep-running sadness usually provoked by some irreparable personal loss. The reason is not really hard to find. I had long had a sense of myself not simply as an Akan, an Ewe, a Ghanaian or a West African, but most strongly as an African. It was as an African, then, that I contemplated, then understood, Lumumba's murder.<sup>16</sup>

Against this background of an intense African gaze or focus, Armah maintains like the griot or *imbongi*, that while his parameters remain the 'confines of art' - "in discussing philosophy and values I am merely doing my work as an African artist; examining my people's values and pointing, when I can, to our way."<sup>17</sup> Occasionally this intense gaze leads to paranoia and the venomous sting in Armah's art achieves what many have termed "a racist thrust". However, it is only fair to point out that Armah's venom is usually directed first and foremost, at the African/black parasites who in times past and present, collaborate with alien forces to perpetuate the domination of their societies. At least two out of Armah's six novels to date, *Two Thousand Seasons* and *Why Are We So Blest?*, have been read persistently as racist tracts. Coterminal with Armah's intense African/black gaze or focus and a possible explanation for some of his favourite themes

are what he perceives to be the definable differences between the African world view and those of the alien forces that have wandered through the African socio-cultural and political landscape. In one among several instances, Armah articulates with the venom preserved and stinging, not only what exactly is meant by "Our Way", but perhaps more importantly, what "Our Way" is not; all done as the writer claims, for the sake of retrieving some racial pride in the African cultural psyche:

We have not found that lying trick to our taste, the trick of waking up sure of knowledge of things possible to think of, things possible to wonder about but impossible to know in any such ultimate way. We are not stunted in spirit, we are not Europeans, we are not Christians that we should invent fables a child would laugh at and harden our eyes to preach daylight and night as truth. We are not so warped in soul, we are not Arabs, we are not Muslims to fabricate a desert god chanting madness in the wilderness, and call our creature creator. That is not our way.<sup>18</sup>

This articulation of what "Our Way" is not, and the images, language and symbolism used in portraying the characteristics of insights that are inimical to "our way", many would object, contain too many racial diatribes. Armah's invectives are, however, predicated on history and are often portrayed against the backdrop of the cultural, economic and political affronts that the African/black world has suffered for many centuries. In his book length study of *The Novels of Ayi Kwei Armah*, Robert Fraser entitles the first chapter "The Context (of) Liberation and Resistance". Fraser observes how the "American and Black revolution" or the period "when the Kennedy and Johnson administrations felt the full brunt of the Civil Rights movement" coincides with the time Armah was a "high school student, undergraduate at Harvard, from where he graduated summa cum laude in Sociology. He was later at Columbia and briefly, on the staff of the University of Massachusetts."<sup>19</sup> In his "One Writer's Education" article, Armah rejects the 'summa cum laude' often attached to his Sociology degree and the claim widely paraded that he was at one time or another under the direct tutelage of the Martiniquan revolutionary and psychiatrist Frantz Fanon. Armah acknowledges being influenced by Fanon's ideas but most of the other claims he regards "as flattering but untrue...some of the information is potentially misleading and part of it is simply wrong."<sup>20</sup> What emerges from these critical/polemical dialogues is that Armah prefers to practice his art within the confines of the modern equivalent of the historical "griot (who) knows precisely who his audiences are," and not a "useless parasite prattling about his single ego." In "The Caliban complex," Armah discusses the West Indian novelist George Lamming's *The Pleasures of Exile* and examines the African/black historical and contemporary dilemma in a global context. He explains further that what motivates him into a discussion of philosophy and the co-text to his major works remains, "pointing when I can, to our way".

The appropriateness of using Armah's works as a means of articulating "the Origins of the African Diaspora" could be seen therefore, to come from a recognition of the historical perception of the African/black reality that pervades his writing. The general thrust of his work lends itself as a means of explicating the crucial role of "the Other" or the "mutilated self" through a vernacular theory of literature. In "the Caliban complex," for example, Armah examines 'the coded message' implicit in Hegel's theory of history, among others, and its overall intention "to inject steady doses of confidence into the Western psyche":

Broken down, the message goes somewhat thus: "we Westerners are lords of the earth, deservedly. We will continue in that status because no group has made a contribution to the intellectual storehouse of the world remotely comparable to ours. The Asians, damn their eyes, have left a record of achievement we can't ignore. But we can say boldly that they only came to prepare the ground for our ascendance. As for the Africans, we can deny them any and all achievement. As a significant factor, they do not exist."<sup>21</sup>

The task of being an artist and coming from a race which does not 'exist as a significant factor' has meant for Armah the challenge of soliciting from history what constitute precisely - not only the nature - but also the reasons and consequences of this dismissal from a world forum. *Two Thousand Seasons*, for example, portrays some of the reasons why Africans could be denied 'any and all achievements' as a direct consequence of the abandonment of an 'African way' and how this would lead to the enslavement of Africans for 'two thousand seasons' Armah returns to the historical premise in *The Healers* and analyses in creative terms, the wars of attrition fought among the Africans themselves and articulates the factors responsible for the 'African conquest' against the background of these wars. *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, *Fragments*, *Why Are We So Blest?* and *Osiris Rising* elaborate on the fact that nothing is learnt and everything is invariably lost as a result of the conquest of the African continent by alien forces. Thus the significantly few Africans who learnt the 'ways' of the enslavers/colonialists also masterminded the logic that leads the society further from the 'African way'. These elite are the direct descendants of the ostentatious cripples or inept leaders in *Two Thousand Seasons* who sold their fellow Africans into slavery in times past. In a contemporary sense they exist as the Koomsons (Minister plenipotentiary) in *The Beautiful Ones*, the Brempongs (civil servant extraordinary) in *Fragments*, and in a diasporic sense they are the middle class turn-coats in the America of *Why Are We So Blest?* and *Osiris Rising*. Regarding all of them as victims of "the Western Weltanschauung," Armah concludes that a critical overview would reveal that educated Africans and their Black counterparts in the diaspora exist - "not only in New York but also in Port Elizabeth, and Durban and Mombasa; not only in London but also

in Windhoek and Port Harcourt and Abidjan" - to the detriment of their postcolonial societies:

For in the main, colonial and neo-colonial education, meaning the education of West Indians, of Afro-Americans and Africans within the framework of Western assumptions, proceeds on the premise that the non-Westerner has no culture or literature comparable in historical depth with Western culture or literature; and that if the non-Westerner is to become really cultured, literate and historically conscious, it will inevitably be through his assimilation into the mainstream of Western civilization.<sup>22</sup>

Bearing in mind how this understanding of socio-cultural and historical issues has influenced Armah's art I would like to return to the premise of the intense African/black gaze or focus. The 'gaze' returns over and over to the domain of the historical griot from which Armah's novels, short stories, and polemics pick up the use of 'narrative parody' to articulate a view of the world that is essentially African and black. Litotes and pastiches are also present in Armah's narrative formula, and perhaps the most latent among the narrative characteristics which this study appropriates from Henry Louis Gates' discussion of the text of blackness vis-à-vis Ismael Reed's African-American novel *Mumbo Jumbo*, is chiasmus. The combination of these rhetorical tropes, including ambiguity, is what Gates refers to as 'the ironic reversal of Blacks as simianlike'<sup>23</sup> Just one example should suffice in illustrating this overall pattern of creative signification and figuration.

Armah focuses on the theme of the mythical discourse of the griot in his article "Sundiata: An epic of old Mali". In the account of the griot Balla Fasseke, a few of these narrative elements (ambiguity, litotes, chiasmus, and rhetorical troping) are already present. Another important element is the various manifestations of the carnivalesque essence.<sup>24</sup> In Armah's art, the aspect of carnival often expressed is the power of those marginalised and confined in any hegemonic discourse which only a dialogic interface between 'the high' and 'the low' could unmask. A final element is what in the Foucaultian sense could be regarded as the importance of the intellectual's attitude towards power, knowledge, truth, consciousness and discourse, because:

The intellectual's role is no longer to place himself "somewhat and to one side" in order to express the stifled truth of the collectivity; rather it is to struggle against the forms of power that transform him into object and instrument in the sphere of "knowledge," "truth," "consciousness," and "discourse."<sup>25</sup>



Thus like the griot Balla Fasseke, Armah removes himself from the over-trodden path of 'banal history' which is often designed to celebrate events such as the history of sea routes, wars and change of government. The "truth" that is often stifled in such hegemonic discourses is that of the collectivity - of those who shape history like the ugly, hideous and monstrous woman who apparently gave birth to the legendary Sundiata. In the account of the *imbongi* - Sundiata's father is told that he is fated to marry a spectacularly ugly woman, who will give birth to a great son:

Oh, that woman! She is ugly, she is hideous, she bears on her back a disfiguring hump. Her monstrous eyes seem to have been merely laid on her face, but, mystery of mysteries, this is the woman you must marry, Sire, for she will be the mother of him who will make the name of Mali immortal for ever. The child will be the seventh star, the seventh conqueror of the earth.<sup>26</sup>

The rhetorical trope of ambiguity implicit in the very idea of this spectacularly ugly woman giving birth to the legendary Sundiata is an integral part of a narrative pattern. The elements of uncertainty and ironic understatement inherent in its nature articulate the overriding belief of a view of the world that the griot portrays. According to Gates, "'marking', 'loud-talking', 'specifying', 'testifying', 'calling out (of one's name)', 'sounding', 'rapping', and 'playing the dozens'" are all recognisable units within the black rhetorical trope often subsumed in the rituals of signifying.<sup>27</sup> How Armah's art has been affected by this overall pattern of signification against the backdrop of the origins of the African Diaspora will be the object of focus in the subsequent parts of this essay. Armah's creative articulation of the "African Diaspora and its Origins" will be discussed under the following subtitles: "'Two Thousand Seasons" of slavery and colonialism", "Myths of Origin and the discourse of "The Healers"', and "Intellectuals and the "Fragments" of Postcolonialism" respectively.

## **"Two thousand seasons" of slavery and colonialism**

...cultures must be liberated from the destructive dialectics of history, and imagination is the key to this....the folk character of Anancy, the spider man, from Akan folklore...provides the key to an imaginative recrossing of the notorious "Middle Passage" through which slaves originally crossed from Africa....<sup>28</sup>

The Priestess Anoa's oracular voice articulates the discourse of "the Way" in *Two Thousand Seasons*.<sup>29</sup> I would like to begin with the pattern of rhetorical trope that exists in this (chronologically) fourth novel of Armah. The signifying ritual of the novel is perceived against the background of unprecedented violence and marked departure

from everything that is comparable to the mode of the conventional novel which many critics have read as “unlike anything which the general reader has ever approached before.”<sup>30</sup> The premise of Fraser’s critical puzzlement is made clear by the critic after having examined in chronological order the first three novels by Ayi Kwei Armah:

Those familiar with the earlier novels are likely to be, not merely surprised, but also alarmed. While there was plenty in those previous works to challenge one’s social and cultural complacency, there is nothing in their technique to disorientate someone versed in the development of twentieth century fiction...None of this, however, can be said of the peculiar handling of the intractable material in *Two Thousand Seasons* which, to the reader conversant with modern naturalistic fiction, seems to mark an entirely new departure...Wole Soyinka’s difficult and convoluted study of urban moeurs, *The Interpreters*, seems almost tame and conventional by comparison.<sup>31</sup>

Fraser’s critical discomfort about *Two Thousand Seasons* runs for two printed pages and one can only capture parts of the entire argument. Another aspect of the critic’s concern is what he considers the marked difference between the novels Armah wrote before the advent of this strange book which is called *Two Thousand Seasons*:

The reader who turns straight from *Why Are We So Blest?* to the opening pages of *Two Thousand Seasons*, Armah’s fourth novel, is immediately struck by the crucial difference. Where before there was a clear narrative structure which, though flexible and involved, moved between fixed and definable points, here we are treated to a fictional panorama which apparently recedes into the far distance. Where before we enjoyed a highly distinctive evocation of a particular historical period, normally the late 1960, here we are confronted with immense and almost immeasurable tracts of time. Where before our attention was arrested by specific and intriguing personalities, here we are obliged to make our way through many pages before happening on a use of the third person singular, let alone a proper name. Most importantly, where before we searched in vain for an instance of recognisable authorial intervention, here we find the writer taking upon himself a role of obstructive commentator from the very first sentence.<sup>32</sup>

At several points in Fraser’s reading of *Two Thousand Seasons* he approaches and abandons critical paths through which the novel’s pattern of rhetorical trope can be realised. However, because Fraser, like any other critic, has approached the novel from his own antecedents he chooses to situate the novel in what he calls “the history of recent French language fiction”<sup>33</sup>. Another six pages are used to invent a ‘literary ancestry’ for *Two Thousand Seasons* in which Fraser achieves a plausible reading of Yambo Oulougem’s controversial novel *Bound to Violence* and Andre Schwartz-Bart’s *Le Dernier des Justes*. Ostensibly, the fact that Armah could be ‘marking’, ‘specifying’,

'sounding' or 'testifying' to - like the griot Balla Fasseke in the epic of Sundiata - particularly threnodic events in his society's history is set aside in order to illustrate a much preferred critical tendency: "to 'place' the writing in some literary or oral current with which one has some familiarity"<sup>34</sup>. But at moments when Fraser abandons his own subjective critical viewpoints he comes close to realising Armah's major intention in this novel:

Indeed almost the first thing one notes about it is that the audience at which it is aimed is envisaged very carefully. The third person, singular or plural, does not come easily to Armah's pen here, being more or less reserved for those with whom he is out of sympathy, the 'destroyers' or the 'predators'; nor has he much recourse to that constant standby of the 'romantic' European artist, the first person singular. In fact the verbal forms of the prose style in this book are reserved almost exclusively for first and second person plural.<sup>35</sup>

Thus when read as a "threnodic essence" - explicating a view of the world in which the 'first and second person plural' rather than the 'first person singular' predominate - Armah's major argument in *Two Thousand Seasons* achieves an important value as a means of articulating the "Origins of the African Diaspora". One of the primary conclusions that could be drawn from the novel's overall aesthetic is that the trauma of the Middle-Passage may be a political issue, but it is also socio-cultural as well as economic. Before "things fell apart" in Africa - that is before slavery and colonialism - something collapsed first within the African "system" itself which is the "African way". In *Two Thousand Seasons* nothing else is given the active value of a singular verbal form other than "the way" and everything is made virtually subservient to it - including the gods and the ancestors. Anoa the priestess herself is demystified before being reinstated to the exalted position of a praise-worthy ancestor and ostensibly nothing about her approaches the familiar heroism in which mythological figures are often shrouded as the book articulates more of the effects rather than the causes of the unusual insight granted the child prodigy Anoa:

We did not have long to wait. We did not have to wait at all for the beginning of the unfolding truth of Anoa's utterance. The truth was unravelling itself even as she spoke. Under the calm surfaces of the fertile time a giddy equilibrium swallowed all lasting balance. Control became an exile. As for the guidance of the way, it was far - distant as the bones of the first ancestors (p.18).

Armah's prose style in *Two Thousand Seasons* - especially in the prologue and the first movement which articulate the discourse of "the way" - strives to capture the pre-colonial structure of African societies, the demise of which the passage above laments. The

image of 'spring water flowing to the desert' with which Armah opens the prologue is not merely conveying an implicit warning - but designed to portray ambiguity and helplessness at the same time. What follows this ambiguity is also not just rhetoric but a forgone conclusion, "where you flow to there is no regeneration" (p.xi). "Loud-talking", "marking", and "specifying" - among other rhetorical tropes - prompt the entire discourse to crescendo levels and produce equally ironic understatements or litotes: "Hau, people headed after the setting sun, in that direction even the possibility of regeneration is dead. There the devotees of death take life, consume it, exhaust every living thing" (p.xi). Before the prologue has run its course, it becomes clear gradually that the polarity of good and evil has attained an overwhelming proportion expressed through the jumbled but not confused layers of symbols and images. The images are designed to identify tendencies inherent in those that remain committed to the "African way" - "unforgetful of origins, dreaming secret dreams, seeing secret visions, hearing secret voices, of our purpose" (p.xv) - and those whose vision is prone to being blurred, who would follow the paths of the predators and the destroyers, such as the ostentatious cripples and their askaris. In the face of the interwoven chain of calamity that is to come, the omniscient narrator explains how:

Easy then the falling slide, soft the temptation to let despair absorb even the remnant voice. Easy for unheeded seers, unheard listeners, easy for interrupted utterers to clasp the immediate destiny, yield and be pressed to serve victorious barrenness. Easy the call to whiteness, easy the welcome unto death (p.xiv).

As a threnody - the lament continues as the novel plunges into everything that could be retrieved from what Fraser calls "remembered history". "We are not a people of yesterday" (p.2) - but the need to articulate two thousand seasons of racial degradation and abuse of the denizens of this society has become real. In the society with which Armah is concerned in *Two Thousand Seasons* - according to Kofi Awoonor - "The ceremony of invocation and libation, brings the dead, the living and the unborn together in a communion. Like other minor deities, the ancestors can be both praised for achievement and rebuked for failure."<sup>36</sup> While Armah's concern in this novel is aimed primarily at apportioning blame and praise to undeserving and deserving ancestors respectively - it is also designed to point out that the living, the unborn and the departed ones cannot escape their history: "Until the utterance of Anoa the reason itself for counting seasons had been forgotten" (p.2). Integral parts of the socio-cultural trauma that is to come bear the weight of the burden imposed by this forgetfulness. Allied to this is the society's unsuspecting openness to strangers. Thus when the beggarly predators first appeared among the people, "haggard they came, betrayed and lonely in their hunger of soul and body...we pitied them" (p.19).

Like the trauma of the Middle-Passage that it articulates - *Two Thousand Seasons* also occupies a middle-ground in Armah's fiction. The Middle-Passage motif - according to Lemuel Johnson - "is directly presented as a metaphor for dispossession, displacement and exile."<sup>37</sup> The mythical landscape of the novel's discourse presents a people surrounded by hostile 'neighbours' on both sides: the predators from the desert to the left and the destroyers from the sea to the right. As the middle-ground in Armah's fiction however, *Two Thousand Seasons* speaks calmly to a present directly affected by past misadventures and future opportunism which many people from these troubled landscapes are bound to exhibit. Concluding the discourse of "the way" Anoa's equally troubled demeanour warns of the treachery of those who in times past and present have led the society farther from "the way". The treachery of these ones also preoccupies Armah in his other works:

You too will know the temptation to be takers. Some among you will succeed too well. Their soul voided out of them, they will join the white destroyers but only in the way of dogs joining hunters. The rest - all of you, your children, their children, their children after them and generations after them again and again, all will be victims till the way is found again, till the return to our way, the way (p.19).

As a racial epic, one of Armah's major preoccupations in *Two Thousand Seasons* is to "give due acknowledgement to the power and charm of the African oral tradition: but he will have none of the social stratification that the tales put forward."<sup>38</sup> Isidore Okpewho's "Myth and Modern Fiction: Armah's *Two Thousand Seasons*" studies the revision of traditional norms and value which Armah and the younger members of the African/black literati have championed from perspectives diametrically and ideologically opposed to those of the writers of the "originary" African/black texts. The formal intention of many of these younger writers is not to invalidate the world views which the tales portray but to inject doses of revolutionary consciousness into the otherwise moribund conclusion their predecessors arrived at also from the premise of these tales. In the process, the power of the "Other" or those occluded in the discourse of these predecessors is often forcefully projected by the younger writers. Armah's *Two Thousand Seasons*, for example, as a work chronicling the horror and remembrance of the Middle-Passage maintains an essential focus which can be described as a programmatic replacement of everything that came before it.

However, the basic tendencies which Okpewho delineates among writers who creatively adapt the oral tale/mythology clarifies some primary issues. The first tendency is called "tradition preserved" and a second equally moribund perspective is labelled "tradition observed". Between the third and the fourth tendencies, the ideologically sig-

nifying approach is revealed through the use of two potentially radical outlooks; the first is called "tradition refined" and the second, "tradition revised". The classic example of the tendency to refine tradition - according to Okpewho - "can be seen in the creative work of Wole Soyinka."<sup>39</sup> In the act of revising tradition however, "perhaps no recent work better demonstrates this urge to review the old mythic tradition and furnish new hopes than Armah's *Two Thousand Seasons*."<sup>40</sup> The iconoclastic role which the early Soyinka served in confronting the colonialist's religious/mythological outlook with an African alter/native might be reminiscent of the zealous process which Soyinka's work began - but in continuing to revere the tradition based on the Obatala/Ogun/Sango triad - the new radical writers simply do not think that Soyinka has gone far enough:

Some of them have embraced the Marxist-Socialist outlook as the only solution to Africa's socio-political problems. From this point of view, the old tales are dismissed outright as indices of the intellectual infancy of the race - where the oppressors of the race would like it to remain - or else as devices by which the ruling class of the traditional society perpetually kept the masses in servitude. What is needed now is a programmatic replacement of these tales and their symbols by new ones, or at least a thorough reassessment of the parameters of the old mythology so as to reassert the rights and claims of elements of the society who have been for too long dispossessed.<sup>41</sup>

Working within the matrix of the tradition - Armah's programmatic replacement of these tales and symbols is related to what I have described as the pattern of rhetorical trope and signification which Gates' theory elaborates. Dwelling on a mode of critique or iconoclasm that is critical of not only the enemy without but also that within Armah's novel denigrates the pattern of remembrance that is trained to speak of "the journey of an imbecile as if the gigantic waste meant some unspoken glory for our people" (p.62). When such a line of attack is embarked upon in *Two Thousand Seasons* a trope of ambiguity is substituted for litotes or ironic understatement to explain the fact that the success of those who came from afar to plunder the African landscape has always been facilitated and maintained by the mindless leadership of the indigenous socio-political élite. In the following particular instance - the search light of the chronicler is directed at a figure that resembles Mansa Musa I of the ancient empire of Mali:

Have we forgotten the stupid pilgrimage of the one surnamed - O, ridiculous pomp - The Golden; he who went across the desert from his swollen capital twenty days' journey from where we lived; he who went with slaves and servants hauling gold to astonish eyes in the desert? Have we already forgotten how swiftly the astonishment he aimed in his foolishness turned to that flaming greed that brought us pillage clothed in the idiocy of religion? Now among us, even now humans with a reputation for wisdom in the knowl-

edge of our people who yet remember that journey of an imbecile as if the gigantic wastage meant some unspoken glory for our people (p.62).

The expression of incredulity at what could be termed a celebration of 'banal history' continues as the aftermath of that 'moron journey' brought "the desert white men's attack on us" (p.62). It is these revellers therefore - these ostentatious cripples among the black people - that proclaimed the wealth of their society to the outside world and they are the ones who bear the brunt of Armah's bitter invectives:

In the further aftermath of that stupid crossing other white men, their eyes burning with uncontainable gluttony, came roaming the sea, searching to find a road to the source of all the wealth the ostentatious travellers had displayed hundreds of seasons back (p.62).

Armah's creative articulation is thus an invitation - according to Lemuel Johnson - for us "to contemplate a multi-form Middle-Passage by the Oracular Okyeame voice with which Anoa opens the novel...*Two Thousand Seasons* provides us, accordingly, with a most comprehensive vision of the catastrophic reaches of slavery."<sup>42</sup> However, when compared to other works which have focused on the excruciating trauma of the Middle-passage - Armah's direct attack on the predatory forces might occupy a less offensive position than - for example - the following elegantly studied ironies and memory of Robert Hayden's poetry. The persona in the poem is obviously from another race and graphically portrays the vanity of the "nigger kings" and consequently that of himself and his collaborators and the joint atrocities which they have perpetrated on an unsuspecting populace:

Aye, lad, I have seen these factories...

Have seen the nigger kings whose vanity  
and greed turned wild black hides of Fellatah,  
Mandingo, Ibo Kru to gold for us.

And then there was one - king Anthracite we named him..

He'd honour us with drum and feast and Conjo  
and palm-oil glistening wenches deft in love,  
and for tin crowns that shown with paste,  
red calico and German silver trinkets...<sup>43</sup>

It is to prove therefore that the African landscape is not merely peopled by "nigger kings" like Anthracite - procuring glistening wenches for unabashed predators offering

calico and German silver trinkets in return - that Armah proffers the band of youths as the revolutionary vanguards who represent a counter-force to the framework represented by these combined predatory forces. These ones with unpolluted but troubled consciousness retire to the fifth grove where they sought and found their teacher and pathfinder - the legendary Isanusi. In *Two Thousand Seasons*, after the "dance of love/initiation" the polarity between order and disorder, progress and reaction assume a more urgent dimension. Those on the path of progress retire to the grove while instruments of reaction like prince Bentum "were sent beyond the seas with some white traders to their country":

A cold place where his soul, so we heard was voided out of him at once, an alien language forced into his throat, and a name to make dogs bark in derision was given him: Bradford George. That was not the end. Before it was time for him to return to Poano to the big stone place there the white men thrust on him a wife - ah, cruel ruse (p.91).

The omniscient narrator's description of this process of cultural colonisation which begins from an economic base motivated by greed continues as Isanusi - leader and inspirer of the band of youths propagating a return to the "African way" - enumerates the demands of the invading colonial power. "It was in Koranche's time - disastrous time that the white destroyers came from the sea" (p.74). Welcoming the colonialists and endorsing their demand - Koranche proceeds to brutalise the mass of the people who dare to oppose his alliance with "the destroyers". Integral parts of the demands made by the destroyers include - unhindered access to the natural resources of the land such as gold, iron, silver and copper - and like every colonising mission "there is a hunter among the white men and a trader" (p.82). The new economic system preached by the colonial power also includes abrogating the land ownership system which is communal - and the general principles of "the way" would have been obliterated completely - "when you will call your brother not Olu but John, not Kofi but Paul, and our sisters will no longer be Ama, Naita, Idama, and Ningome but creatures called Cecilia, Esther, Mary, Elizabeth, and Christiana" (p.83). At this point in the novel, the narration also resolves one of the early ambiguities of the entire story; Anoa's prophecy of an impending doom which would come as a result of abandoning "the way": "enslavement, the infusion of violence into every drop, every morsel of sustaining air...water...food" (p.17).

Another historical antecedent to these events is an earlier invasion spearheaded by the Arab predators from the desert. Like the background account that it represents - Armah's narrative technique in dealing with the Arab invasion and conquest is a quick re/articulation of the major strands of this phase of the African experience. The "lech-



erous predators” controlled and supported an empire ruled by fear and their inglorious reign stumbled from one ruler to another:

Who asks to hear the mention of the predator’s name? Who would hear again the cursed names of the predator’s chieftains? With which stinking name shall we begin?...Hussein, twin brother of Hassan the syphilitic. Hussein had long since given up the attempt to find his phallus into any woman’s genitals...he swallowed the ninth date of his three circuits before he went to embrace his slave owner god...Faisal: He had insisted on having his favourite askari with him in the palace...Not indeed for the askaris normal duty against justice armed, but for reasons even sweeter to the predator’s lechery...Hussain had lived under a terrifying anxiety all his life: the fear that he might chance to live through one day and leave some carnal pleasure unexamined... (pp.21-23).

The revolt of gallant African women succeeds in driving the predators back to the desert only after they have gained significant converts among the people. Some that escaped from the women’s revolt also stage a come back, led by a fanatical old man: “Abdallah was his name. He brought his message to us shrieking dementedly, turn slave or perish” (p.27).

It is against these predatory forces that Armah proffers the band of youths, drawn from every part of Africa to defend the general principles of “the way” eroded by centuries of slavery and colonialism. Even when they sometimes yield simplistic binary opposition the forces and counter-forces are nevertheless sustained by vivid images and symbols; what Derek Wright describes as the “lustreless demagogic jargon - (of) ‘our way, the way’, ‘the destruction of destruction’, ‘the unconnected consciousness,’”<sup>44</sup> is rather perceived in this study as Armah’s rhetorical trope or what has been described earlier as ‘the ironic reversal of a received racist image of the black wo/man as simianlike’

In the discourse of blackness - according to Henry Louis Gates, “signifying” means modes of figuration itself. All these “ritual” elements, including what one does “when one signifies, as Kimberly W. Benston puns, one “tropes-a-dope”<sup>45</sup> - are important if one is to account for the “automatized” discourse which Armah de-familiarises to propound the basic tenets of “the way”:

Our way is reciprocity. The way is wholeness. Our way knows no oppression. The way destroys oppression. Our way is hospitable to guests. The way repels destroyers. Our way produces before it consumes. The way produces far more than it consumes. Our way creates. The way destroys only destruction (p.39).

In this group of ten short sentences alone the word "way" is mentioned as either "the way" or "our way" ten times. This recurrent repetition and the numerous exclamations such as "Hau" - the ironic understatements or litotes, and the hyperboles all point to the fact that Armah is engaged in this novel in what could be best described as a "ritualised discourse". Apart from the quasi-biblical language employed as it is to deautomatize a familiar articulation of "the way" - another aspect of Armah's programme is the defamiliarisation of the complex but equally familiar terrain of Africa's recent and the not-too-recent historical experiences.

"Stubborn continuity" has certainly plagued the African whether s/he lives in the homeland or in the Diaspora. The notion is thus embedded deeply in history. Within the black profane discourse - and especially within the African matrix - "the child doomed to die and be re-born" is known to the Yorubas and Ibos of Western and Eastern Nigeria as "Abiku" and "Ogbanje", respectively. When "stubborn continuity" is perpetually reincarnated it wears the mask of a "wicked tormentor" and an ominous but "evil cycle of birth and death"<sup>46</sup>. Whenever this recurrent cycle is set on a course of metaphorical evocation of racial experience(s) - automatization and defamiliarization could play prominent roles in unmasking the true intent of the various stages. The cycle of fertility and regeneration is rather familiar and routine to the African/black sensibility; in Ifa divination poetry any disturbance in the ritual cycle leads to infertility, barrenness and sometimes outright sterilization in which:

Pregnant women could not deliver their babies;  
Barren women remained barren.  
Small rivers were covered up with leaves.  
Semen dried up in men's testicles  
Women no longer saw their menstruation.  
(Wande Abimbola, cited in Johnson, (1980: 72)

Unlike the articulation of the writers of the "originary" African texts - it is the broken or disturbed cycle or "the line of the Great Ancestors (that) has...been warped, if not actually broken" - that is responsible for the debilitating African present. Isanusi, Anoa, Damfo "the Healer", Asamoa Nkwenta the Asante warlord, the sage Naana of *Fragments*, and Ama Tete of *Osiris Rising* who completes the normative rites of passage - are some of these "Great Ancestors". The Middle-Passage motif is also strongly pre-

sented when we turn to *The Healers* and listen to another aspect of Armah's persistent voice. In *The Healers* as well as *Osiris Rising* - the pattern of articulation does not succumb to the pressure of political disenchantment but "insists again and again that the rites of passage - conception and birth especially - have been profaned or violated."<sup>47</sup>

## Myths of origin and the discourse of "The healers"

Did you remember to tell your listeners of what time, what age you rushed so fast to speak? Or did you leave the listener floundering in endless time, abandoned to suppose your story belonged to any confusing age? Is it from the time of the poet Nyankoman Dua, seven centuries ago? Or did it take place ten centuries ago, when Ghana was not just a memory and the eloquent one before you still sang praises to the spirit holding our people together? Is it of that marvellous black time before the desert was turned desert, thirty centuries and more ago? Or have you let the listener know the truth: that this story now is not so old - just over a century old?...What of the place?

(Ayi Kwei Armah, *The Healers*<sup>48</sup>)

He came to Africa to fulfil a dream of power. You tell him of a group devoted to criticising power - tearing it apart. That's a threat to his dreams. Don't you know: out there in America we're power-hungry. Truth we've had our fill of. We want to escape it. In America truths about origins can stink. Can you imagine a nation built on genocide and slavery having much use for historical truth?

(Ayi Kwei Armah, *Osiris Rising: A Novel of Africa Past, Present and Future*<sup>49</sup>)

The evocation of a premise - albeit a historical one - for the discourse of "the Healers" above represents another instance of Armah's commitment to practice his art along the lines of the ancestral and oratorical griot who has always functioned as a recorder of events of inestimable value to the entire populace. The therapeutic nature of "the Healers" vocation like that of the griot is predicated on a well defined, even if ambiguous relationship to political power. According to Damfo, "if we (the Healers) did have a disease, a blind fear of power...that would be our misfortune..." (p.270). It is important to understand therefore, that a "Healer" does not necessarily cringe before or away from political power. On the other hand, his/her relationship to power and the political class is at best inspirational. Like the griot - the Healer exists in a symbiotic manner to the wo/man who wields political power. However, everyone must live and abide by the general principles of "the way" which, while preaching communal coexistence also assigns specific role(s) to specific individuals. If absolute power could be said to cor-

rupt absolutely, so does manipulative power. Thus:

We healers do not fear power. We avoid power deliberately, as long as that power is manipulative power. There is a kind of power we would all embrace and help create. It is the power we use in our work. The power of inspiration. The power that respects the spirit in every being, in every thing, and lets every being be true to the spirit within. Healers should embrace that kind of power. But that kind of power - the power that comes from inspiration - can never be created with manipulations. If we healers allow the speedy results of manipulation to attract us, we shall destroy ourselves and more than ourselves, our vocation (p.270).

Armah articulates these vivid premises, those of the griot and the healer and their relationship to political power, for reasons that are of practical significance to the entire discourse of the African Diaspora and its origins. The griot employs hyperbole, litotes, rhetoric and other figurative elements used in the signifying ritual, to eschew from his/her nature what could be regarded as "banal history". In this regard the griot in times past is not unlike the modern writer Ayi Kwei Armah, who declares unabashedly: "I am an African, an artist, a scholar. As far as our written and unwritten records go, it has been the prime destiny of the serious African artist to combine the craft of creativity with the search for regenerative values."<sup>50</sup> Armah could be seen therefore, to have entered this historical discourse to voice his conviction that "history" and in this sense, the banal version of "history is rotten through and through"<sup>51</sup>.

Armah's overriding purpose in *The Healers* and *Osiris Rising* could also be said to include at least a modification - if not actual revision - of the views of the writers that preceded him on the matter of "healing" the black race's harassed socio-cultural and political psyche. The suggestion in the previous section that "the line of the Great Ancestors" has been warped if not broken, could be recalled at this stage to lend credence to Armah's insistence that what ought to be addressed is the disturbance in the rites of passage and in this sense the cycle of conception and birth that have been profaned and violated by slavery and colonialism.

For it is when the dynamics of social-textual relations - one of which is how to wean the society back from enslavement to false idols indigenous or foreign - are critically examined in *The Healers* and *Osiris Rising* that Armah's deautomatizing discourse assumes a patriotic thrust. For instance, no "recorder" of Asante, Akan or African history "as is" recorded the existence of a class of people known as "healers". The inspirational role "the healers" play along with those of the griot is also the main subject of Armah's novels. Their purpose - like those of the band of youths in *Two Thousand Seasons* - is to formulate a body of thought systems around the subject of weaning the society back to the basic tenets of "the way". Becoming a healer and possessing the instinct

to be one is an enabling device which Armah weaves around the conditions of commitment to "the way" espoused in the earlier novel.

The young Densu of *The Healers* and Asar of *Osiris Rising* display this essential healing attribute from the beginning of the novels and it is not surprising that by the time the stories end they have become revolutionary fighters with healing instincts. Uncomfortable with the idea of wrestling an opponent to submission for the sake of satisfying an individual ego, Densu, for example, abandons the field of contest even when his chances of winning are as bright as anyone else's. When eventually the child willing to grow into an adult 'healer or thinker' starts asking questions they are the sort of questions that many had taken for granted, questions that are at the heart of the society's imminent openness to alien contamination and defeat. Ostensibly he got no answers from them:

The older people, most of them, had not given much thought to that kind of question really. When Densu asked them what the games were for, some said they did not understand the question itself. Others asked Densu a question to answer his: They asked, because at Esuano the remembrance of a larger community had become a faint remnant from a forgotten past. There were people who knew stories of a time when the black people were one. Even when found, they were rather silent, as if the question raised in their minds a regret that overwhelmed their tongues (p.6).

As the events unfold it becomes clear that the cause of the society's overriding sense of complacency is the ascendancy of a feudal oligarchy. The inordinate ambition of people like Ababio and their preparedness to stop at nothing in order to eliminate whoever opposes their way to corrupt power is soon revealed as a malaise just developing among the people. At the height of the carnage and when asked to account for the lives he has unjustly impaired or terminated during his short reign as king at Esuano "Ababio said almost purring the words: 'how can a king be a murderer? If a king wants a man killed, that man becomes a traitor. And traitors are not murdered. They are executed - for the benefit of the people'" (p.301).

In the same manner, Asar would rather lose Ast to a more ostentatious rival called the Deputy Director of Security - backed by all the corrupt apparatus of the neo-colonial state - if that was Ast's preference. But Ast - perhaps the most formidable and sensitively drawn of Armah's African-American female characters - has a background that was spent under the tutelage of her legendary grandmother Nwt - who taught her to read as a fourth birthday gift: "At ten Ast wanted a bicycle. Nwt promised her one if she'd let her teach her to read ancient Egyptian hieroglyphs. Her parents called the bargain mad, but it opened doors to her soul" (p.7). Ast's Pan-Africanist outlook has been

cultivated under a barrage of paradigmatic questions with which Nwt answers her probings into the racial past: “Do you know that our people were sold into slavery?” That question raised more intractable questions in Ast’s mind. Who sold us? What did such a betrayal mean? Was it dead history? Or did it still have the energy of news - with the power to shape the future?” (p.1) - a pattern of questioning which has led Ast to develop a strong aversion for the tremendous wealth of the country she was born in. Ostensibly, the book, *Journey to the Source*, which on the surface narrated one man’s search for lost origins - “but below that search lay a slier story, centred on the way the author used the truths he found” (p.2) - might have acted as the immediate catalyst to Ast’s return to Africa - but perhaps more significant was the article - entitled “Who We Are and Why” - that Asar left as his signal for leaving with no farewell. “Who We Are and Why” chronicles the primordial sources of Africa’s woes and examines how a recourse to one of the continent’s oldest source - the Isis-Osiris myth cycle - remains the only panacea for Africa’s recovery:

In a people’s rise from oppression to grace, a turning point comes when thinkers determined to stop the downward slide get together to study the causes of the common problems, think out solutions and organise ways to apply them.

For centuries now our history in Africa has been an avalanche of problems. We’ve staggered from disaster to catastrophe, enduring the destruction of Kemet, the scattering of millions ranging the continent in search of refuge, the waste of humanity in the slave trade organised by Arabs, Europeans and myopic, crumb-hungry Africans ready to destroy this land for their unthinking profit. We have endured the plunder of a land now carved up into fifty idiotic neo-colonial states in this age when large nations seek survival in larger federal unions, and even fools know that fission is death (pp. 9-10).

Thus like the narrative structure itself - the characters of Asar and Ast are derived from the Isis-Osiris myth cycle. Armah’s thesis in this fairly complex tale oscillates between what the leading African Egyptologist Cheikh Anta Diop - perhaps the only Black African of his generation to have received training as an Egyptologist - describes as “the African Origins of Civilisation” and the rhetoric of power:

The ancient Egyptians were Negroes. The moral fruit of their civilisation is to be counted among the assets of the Black world. Instead of presenting itself to history as an insolvent debtor, that Black world is the very initiator of the “western” civilisation flaunted before our eyes today. Pythagorean mathematics, the theory of the four elements of Thales of Miletus, Epicurean materialism, Platonic idealism, Judaism, Islam, and modern science are rooted in Egyptian cosmogony and science.<sup>52</sup>

Abbè Emile Amèlineau (1850-1916) - according to Diop - was the great Egyptologist who excavated Osiris's tomb at Om El'Gaab near Abydos - "thanks to which Osiris could no longer be considered a mythical hero but an historic personage - an initial ancestor of the Pharaohs - a Black ancestor - as was his sister Isis."<sup>53</sup> To comprehend fully therefore, the agonising death of Asar or Osiris at the end of *Osiris Rising* - "one needs only to meditate on Osiris - the redeemer god - who sacrifices himself, dies, and is resurrected to save mankind, a figure essentially identifiable with Christ."<sup>54</sup>

Thus it is reductionistic to leave the sort of inner dialogue within the Akan/African system above untouched and concentrate on one enabling device. Just as Wole Soyinka claimed for *Two Thousand Seasons*, *The Healers* and *Osiris Rising* are "not a racist tract(s); the central theme is far too positive and dedicated and (their) ferocious onslaught on alien contamination soon fall into place as a preparatory exercise for the liberation of the mind."<sup>55</sup> Because a whole racial socio-cultural psyche is involved in *The Healers* and *Osiris Rising*, it is important that Armah should creatively articulate these social-textual relations that are of little significance to the recorders of history "as is"; the difference between the two viewpoints is the irreducible difference between the discourse of "the healers" and "banal" history.

## Intellectuals and the "fragments" of postcolonialism

VAGINA SWEET...But..MONEY SWEET PASS ALL...To the left there are others, a bit harder to make out at first. WHO BORN FOOL...SOCIALISM CHOP MAKE I CHOP..COUNTRY BROKE. The man feels the last of his innards come down and when he has finished enjoying the relief it gives him, he wipes his bottom, pulls up his trousers and jumps down, buttoning up on his way out. Near the door the large challenge assaults him again: YOU BROKE NOT SO? That, and the two companion statements following, make him smile. PRAY FOR DETENTION...JAILMAN CHOP FREE. (original capitals)

(Ayi Kwei Armah, *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*<sup>56</sup>)

At least one of Armah's six novels to date carries in its title the ironic understatement that the preceding sections have been trying to describe. *Why Are We So Blessed?*<sup>57</sup> is one among three novels by Armah that chronicles the "fragments" of the postcoloniality of Africa and the Black world. Our "blessedness" exists in the novel in the most ironic sense of the word. The threnodic focus of the story could be described as a graphic portrayal of apparent and potentially patronising attitudes towards African/black intellectuals by philanthropists and equals alike. In this (chronologically third) novel of Armah, the writer moves from the ancient/historical terrains of *Two Thousand Seasons*,

*The Healers* and *Osiris Rising* to the contemporary scene of the black world's post-coloniality. *Why we are so blest* is probably not as defined - neither is it as emphatic as didactic thrust of "the way" - but one of the novel's many ironic understatements exists in its definition of what it means to be an "Africanist":

"One who specializes in Africa," he said. "Africa is now an area justifying advanced study, you know." His smile ended in a little frown. He sounded uncertain. He was the first American I had seen without a lot of confidence. He said he would be one of my teachers at Harvard (p.119).

With these words Modin Dofu, the nineteen-year-old prodigy from a West African state - meets Professor Henry Jefferson - an Africanist. The meeting happening after Modin has just been taken through a course on "blessedness" upholds the major irony of the entire story. "Why Are We So Blest?" is the title of an editorial in the Sunday Times celebrating America's Thanksgiving Day or what in the words of another character, Ron, constitutes the editor's and "Mike the Fascist's" way of disseminating the simple message that "there's no nation like America, and Ayn Rand is the American philosopher" (p.97). Integral parts of Armah's narrative viewpoint in this novel are the attempts to chronicle the extent to which America and its Commonwealth, as an alternative force, represent a thesis or antithesis to the British Commonwealth, for example, or even the Arab form of colonialism with which Africa and the black world are infinitely familiar. Armah situates the entire discourse in the black cultural psyche as it operates abroad rather than at home in order to de-familiarise the notion of blessedness, using the American Commonwealth. Thus:

Very little of the story is set in subsaharan Africa, but is polarized between two locations: the East Coast of America and the Muslim Maghreb...The problem is not so much one of physical as of moral equilibrium. For although the plot is brought to a climax in the torrid vastness of the Saharan wastes, the ethical judgements brought to bear on it derive from America in the years of racial confrontation.<sup>38</sup>

"Mike the Fascist" searches frantically through the jumbled facts and figures in the Thanksgiving Day editorial for what its author refers to as the framework of the "vulgar imagination". Automatised and routine, Modin Dofu reminds Mike that "anyone who can write a whole article on Thanksgiving and leave out the mass murder of the so-called Indians is a street-corner hustler, nothing better" (p.99). Again, the premise for what follows and the antecedent of the dialogized polemics in *Why Are We So Blest?* could be found in Armah's 1967 article "African Socialism: Utopian or Scientific". The authorial viewpoint interrogates the validity of the extent to which a significant section of the emergent intellectuals who set Africa and indeed the black world



on a course of postcolonial relation to the rest of the world have come to recognise in the American Commonwealth a "oneness with whatever has been pure in the Western tradition: the perfect symmetry of the Olympic ideal, the unsullied wholeness of that Christian Eden ignorant of the fall from Grace" (p.99). The Olympus instinct propelling these intellectuals to action or inaction has been extracted from the "savage paradise" of the exterminated Indians and made complex by the European ancestors of the Americans. According to Mike - the modern framework "has two poles now, and many gradations and permutations in between" (p.100). Those who realise the American dream to the full and are, therefore, truly "blest" occupy one pole, while the ones who never had any "luck with their pluck" are "the blest among the blest". This convenient package of ideological signification is the realisable American setting of *Why Are We So Blest?*: it has "got heavens - and hells, as you say - built into it. After all it wouldn't be Graeco-Christian if it didn't" (p.100).

The symbols and images that Armah employs in articulating what one might describe as the gradation of consciousness from Greek mythology is equally revealing. "Olympus" - the highest mountain in Greece, believed in Greek mythology to be the dwelling place of the greater gods - and "Tartarus"<sup>59</sup> - an abyss under Hades where the Titans were imprisoned and the wicked punished - explain more than anything else the status of the truly blest and those who are "the blest among the blest". The irony might be profound but it is not just rhetoric that is involved when Mike refers to this gradation that begins with Olympus, below which as he says "there are plains of mediocrity". Mike calls this disproportionate framework a "superior arrangement" "to just a primitive paradise" which his ancestors wrenched from the Indians and re-moulded in their own image.

Armah's deautomatizing intention is equally vivid in the pseudo-biblical language of the entire discourse. Within the framework of the narrative parody of the novel the biblical "passover" is substituted for the American "crossover". Armah's narrative parody and grim ironies are intended to show that the new world economic but also socio-cultural order preached by the American Commonwealth attracts many gregarious imbibers or "crossovers". A few of them are generously referred to as "most of these foreign students - Africans, Asians, Latins (who) talk all the time about what they'll do to overturn the system once they get out of here" (p.101). In Mike's candid view, the prefrontal leucotomy which American formal education is expected to perform for these ones is designed to guarantee that "nobody goes through the struggle...so that they can fall back into the communal dirt" (p.101).

Modin Dofu's refusal to be fixated on one mythology coupled with his desire to steal "fire" from Olympus (symbolised by American formal education in the context of the novel) meets with abysmal failure partly because, as Mike informs him, "no one has the idiotic ambition to make the crossing twice". Heroism has already come to Modin within the framework of Olympian justice and in the mythology he would be "a crossover": "one of those who rise from the plains to live on Olympus. A hero. Part man, part god. Therefore more interesting than either" (p.101).

However, Armah's grotesque realism in *Why Are We So Blest?* recognises more than one mythology. The cycle of regeneration and fertility well known to the black cultural psyche at home and abroad is equally against social and philosophical fixations. In Armah's second novel *Fragments*<sup>60</sup> Naana's healing vision which many critics have erroneously referred to as disturbed reveries recognises the danger inherent in "stubborn continuities" and prescribes for the individual and collective psyches stunned by the traumas of the Middle-Passage the virtue of "return". In *Fragments* as in the other novels by Armah the socio-cultural context of "the return" is the ever-present search for a return to "the African way" articulated in *Two Thousand Seasons*. Thus when in *Fragments* Naana's grandson, Baako, goes the same way as Modin Dofu in the name of Olympian justice, like "the Healer" in waiting Naana pronounces the traditional vision that would guarantee the prodigal's return to the demands of "the way":

EACH THING that goes returns and nothing in the end is lost. The great friend throws all things apart and brings all things together again. That is the way everything goes and turns round. That is how all living things come back after long absences, and in the whole great world all things are living things. All that goes returns. He will return (p.1).

In his search for abiding "Myth of Origins" within the black profane discourse Henry Louis Gates Jr. locates in Esu-Elegbara and the Signifying Monkey the exegesis of 'the return' as part and parcel of "the inner workings of black culture (including) its linguistic and musical resources."<sup>61</sup> Gates describes his fascination with black language as stemming from his father's enjoyment and absolute control over its manipulation. This mastery over language rituals extends to an ability to 'analyse them, to tell you what he is doing, why and how.' If Naana's articulation above could be situated within the ritual setting of that pattern of language usage at home, the framework of that reference abroad is summarised by Gates and both look to the trauma of the Middle-Passage and its manifestation in the black world's postcoloniality. Thus:

It is amazing how much black people in ritual settings such as barber shops and poll halls, street corners and family reunions talk about talking. Why do they do this? I think they do it to pass these rituals along from one generation to the next. They do it to preserve the traditions of the "race"<sup>62</sup>.

Modin Dofu has got much of this 'racial' self-preservation in him as he insists on knowing whether or not within the framework of Olympian justice African people (he insists on calling them Africans) forcibly brought to America are also 'blest':

'Are the African people here also blest?'

'We call them Negroes, chum.'

'Africans. Are they also outside the scope of your article?'

'Not if they have class. Look, the piece is titled 'Why Are We So Blest?' The guy didn't set out to write about the underprivileged' (p.99).

This parody of the entire notion of "blessedness" also underscores the basic premise from which the novel derives its title.

The "Cargo" motif is even stronger in *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*. Driven to the depth of despair in the face of an opulent display of sterile materialism around him - the Man is moved to wonder "if anything was supposed to have changed after all, from the days of Chiefs selling their people for the trinkets of Europe" (p.149). However, it is Modin's summation in *Blest?* that links the colonial framework to the post-colonial as it will be seen in the subsequent chapters of this study; the 'post' in post-colonialism is the gap between the colonial framework in which enlightenment and civilization served as the prime disguise for imperial domination. If these two notions were "factors" then, the game in postcolonial "factorship" according to Modin has substituted "enlightenment and civilisation" for modern designs in this sense, progress and development. As a significant factor the intellectual's role has also assumed a pre-eminence which is as debilitating as the role of those Chiefs who sold their people during slavery and colonialism for the trinkets of Europe:

Factors then, scholarship holders, B.A.s, M.A.s, Ph.Ds now, the privileged servants of the white empire, factors then, factors now. The physical walls stand unused now. The curious can go and look at them, as if slavery belonged to past history. The distinction has reached higher, that is all. The factor's pay is now given in advance, and sold men are not mentioned, not seen in any way. Their price is given the factor for some mythical quality of his dead spirit. His murdered intelligence is praised. The easier for the givers of these scholarships, this factor's pay, to structure the recipient's lives into modern factorship (p.161).

However, Armah's overriding concern in *The Beautiful Ones* is designed to show how the distinction between slavery, colonialism and postcolonialism, especially the ways individual and collective lives are structured into "modern factorship," has only

reached higher. The narrative parody that accompanies this high level postcolonial factorship is reinforced by images and symbols that leave the subtle mythological framework of Olympus, Tartarus and blessedness of *Blest?* for "the gleam" or attractions of the Atlantic-Caprice among other tall buildings beaming with lights that attract the rich and drive the poor to fits of despair. In the postcolonial arrangement the controlling ideology that is crudely formulated and described as "African Socialism" is revealed as a pack of lies and thunderous words or at best "a crude attempt(s) to amalgamate selected elements of the socialist tradition and the African experience." (Armah, 1967: 8)

Armah parodies the wish-fulfilment socialism oscillating between "two poles of perfection, Eden and Heaven" in *The Beautiful Ones* through the juxtaposed sets of imagery and symbols: the gleam at the top cynically subsumes the decadence, ignorance, poverty, disease, death and decay below and they all combine to structure individual and collective lives into significant or insignificant factors. In this arrangement the written "Word" or the pseudo-biblical language of the text is designed to articulate another automatized view of the world; "*The last shall be the first. Indeed it is even so*" (p.104, original italics). One of such "last" becoming first by sheer postcolonial contradiction and expediency is the Minister plenipotentiary and hero of socialist labour, the honourable Joseph Koomson. Koomson's rise from an ordinary dock worker hauling loads along the wharf to the position of a minister through political party sycophancy and opportunism has led him to possess the proverbial flabby soft hands: "ideological hands, the hands of revolutionaries leading their people into bold sacrifices" (p.131). The crucial question remains, "should these hands not have become tougher than they were when their owner was hauling loads along the wharf?" (p.131).

Koomson's odyssey might be exceptional and intriguing but he is just one among many who has been to "Olympus" and is satisfied with the status of "part man, part god" articulated in *Blest?*. At the very top of this arrangement is the old man himself - the President - who as we are informed by his minister plenipotentiary "does not believe in it (African socialism)" (p.136). As the chronicler's focus achieves a crescendo level the reader is confronted with the praise singing mentality which the old man believes in and which seems "to be all the news these days. Osagyefo (redeemer) the President bla bla. Osagyefo the President bla bla bla. Osagyefo the President bla bla bla bla" (p.127).

The parody becomes dialogized when towards the end of the novel minister Koomson - forced to flee the capital as a result of a military coup d'état that has overthrown the corrupt and inept civilian administration - encounters an obstacle in the person of a

boatman whom Koomson had employed and who in times past revered and feared the powerful but corrupt minister. As a result of the coup "there was fear in the boatman's voice still, but it was not the fear of the weak confronting the powerful" (p.173). In the summation of the novel's lonely and agonized hero, the Man, this boatman "falling back upon the ancient dignity of formal speech" might not be admirable for demanding his own share from the proceeds of Koomson's corrupt earnings but perhaps more importantly the Man acknowledges the boatman's relief and realisation that "in front of him there was no longer a master but another man needing help" (p.174). It is the power of "the low" and their ability to confront the political unconscious of "the high" in profound dialogue that the boatman acts out when he informs Koomson that the minister might have been to Olympus and back but, "Ah, as for me I have been here (the plains). This is my humble place. It is you who have come some way. So my mouth is closed, as my ears are open, in order that I may hear what you bring with you" (p.174). If the language of the boatman and the dialogue he seeks to hold with Koomson could be regarded as crude, the habitues of the "Nim tree" where 'irritation' is automatically suppressed present the same dialogue from a different viewpoint also designed to articulate a postcolonial framework that has become automatized and routine. The Man:

moves under the shade of a nim tree, smiling at the loco workers already there. Between lip smacks, the talk is the usual talk, of workers knowing they have been standing at their fingertips, never going in. Between sighs and bits of laughter, phrases that are too familiar pepper the air. 'He's only a small boy...' 'Yes, it's the CPP that has been so profitable for him...' 'Two cars now' 'No, you're way behind. Three. The latest is a white Mercedes. 220 Super.' 'You will think I am lying, but he was my classmate, and now look at me.' 'Ah, life is like that,' 'Ei, and girls!' 'Running to fill his cars. Trips to the Star for weekends in Accra. Booze. Swinging niggers man.' 'Girls, girls, fresh little ones still going to Achimota and Holy Child' 'Those Holy Child girls!' 'Achimota too!' 'He is cracking them like tiger nuts.' 'Contrey, you would do the same...' 'True..money swine.' 'money swine' (p.110).

For these habitues of the nim tree driven to fits of despair by the display of sterile materialism around them symbolized and controlled by the attractive but unattainable "gleam" of the Atlantic hotel, socialism means only one thing, "CHOP MAKE I CHOP" (p.106). Their pathological scribbling on the walls of the office latrine do not merely create pathos but underscore the ultimate alienation of workers in a society where postcolonial contradictions have assumed bizarre dimensions. The lonely hero of the book complains to his friend Teacher in a chain of disquieting questions that the demands and desires of "the loved ones", his wife and children, are driving him mad. In the same pseudo-biblical language of "the first becoming the last" the Man articu-

lates the “part man, part god” status of those who have risen from the plains to live on Olympus: “But Teacher, what can I want? How can I look at Oyo and say I hate long shiny cars? How can I come back to the children and despise international schools? And then Koomson comes, and the family sees Jesus Christ in him. How can I ever feel like a human being?” (pp.92-93).

A similar postcolonial wasteland where individual and collective lives are sacrificed for the morbid ambition of the few climbing and wriggling their way to the giddy heights of “the gleam” is depicted in *Fragments*. As in *The Beautiful Ones*, cargo mentality and direction in *Fragments* is predicated on a revolving postcolonial paradox symbolized by the proverbial bird - Chichidodo. A cruel joke with which the Man’s wife taunts his refusal to take a bribe encapsulates the paradox: “Ah you know the chichidodo is a bird. The chichidodo hates excrement with all its soul. But the chichidodo only feeds on maggots, and as you know the maggot grows best inside the lavatory. This is the chichidodo” (p.45). In *Fragments*, Baako’s grandmother Naana places the chichidodo metaphor in perspective and sees it in terms of violation and profanation of the cycle of birth and conception. The tradition of bringing a child ‘outdoors’ on the eighth day underscores the metaphor and the modern interpretation and misuse to which it is being subjected. The ceremony is designed in the tradition to welcome a ‘stranger’ who has just arrived in the world of ‘the living’ from those of ‘the unborn’ Within the postcolonial framework of the new dispensation ‘outdooring’ a child has been turned into a profitable trade amidst feasting and soliciting contributions from generous donors.

This perversion of tradition reaches unspeakable heights when in order to coincide with the day workers’ salaries are paid the ceremony is brought back from eight to five days. The octogenarian Naana does not conceal her disgust at what is not just a violation but a reversal of the ritual cycle, done as Naana claims ‘to satisfy a new god’: “Five days. The child is not yet with us. He is in the keeping of the spirits still, and already they are dragging him out into this world for eyes in heads that have eaten flesh to gape at” (p.138). The Middle-Passage motif and the link between slavery, colonialism and the postcolonial game in ‘factorship’ is summarised by Naana still dwelling on the child no sooner born than it is mummified or turned into the proverbial ‘chichidodo’ by capricious members of a society driven by the desire to accumulate wealth and property even if another life is sacrificed in the process. Sparing neither the ancestors who trigger the process of violation and profanation of the ritual cycle nor their modern siblings Naana reveals her ageing but firm mind:

What is the fool’s name, and what the name of the animal that does not know that? The baby was a sacrifice they killed to satisfy perhaps a new god they have found much like

the one that began the same long destruction of our people when the elders first - may their souls never find forgiveness on this head - split their own seed and raised half against half, part selling part to hard-eyed buyers from beyond the horizon, breaking, buying, selling, gaining, spending till the last of our men sells the last woman to any passing white buyer and himself waits to be destroyed by his great haste to consume things we have taken no care nor trouble to produce (p.284).

Armah's writing, however, contains its fair share of aesthetic and artistic defects. I have not highlighted these since my overriding concern in the preceding sections has been to provide an accompanying critical framework within the black profane discourse that would account for Armah's creative articulation of "the African Diaspora and its Origins". Naana's overview and the socio-cultural angst it contains explain the peculiar mood of those who believe that the disturbance in the "line of the Great Ancestors" is primarily responsible for the "precarious black present". While those responsible for the "disturbance" from without receive blame so do their counterparts from within or those who according to Naana, "split their own seed and raised half against half".

## **Conclusion**

'Armah is to us what Faulkner was to the American South: a Jeremiah without Jehovah.' Though the prospective vision respects the deep-seated religious conscience and metaphysical urges of the race, it is not pronounced on the authority of any well-advertised pantheon. Here the fancy is at its freest.<sup>63</sup>

Armah's work could be said to perform two important functions for the open-ended discourse of the African Diaspora and the forces that aided the dispersal of peoples of African origin to different parts of the world. According to Henry Louis Gates Jr., "for all sorts of complex historical reasons, the very act of writing has been a political act for the Black author."<sup>64</sup> The point has often been missed by those who charge that besides the endless cultural and political permutations around the rhetoric of power by those they brand "Africanists": the theoretical tools such as "negation, denial, subversion, disguise, resistance, and interrogation" which they employ - according to these critics - are "always fluid, always evasive as they propound their own secret history that is so resistant to the technique of orthodox historical reconstruction."<sup>65</sup> On the contrary, the only reason why those who "apologise" for what has happened to Africa and the Black world through subversion, interrogation and rhetorical troping do so is that they are first and foremost excruciatingly bored and unimpressed with the strategies of "orthodoxy" whether it exists in history, literature, politics or religion. By dismantling assumptions about language and textuality - for example - those who oppose "ortho-

doxy" are able to "stress the importance of ideological construction in social-textual relations."<sup>66</sup> It is inevitable, therefore, that matters of social-textual relations must receive paradigmatic echoes in postcolonial texts even when they are being used to recall those relations as they occur in times past or present.

Secondly, this essay - concerned as it is with the "Origins of the African Diaspora" and the excruciating trauma of the Middle-Passage - is a response to the question raised in Henry Louis Gates' important introduction to *Black Literature and Literary Theory*:

If Western literature has a canon, then so does Western literary criticism. If the relation of black texts to Western texts is problematic, then what relationship obtains between (Western) theories of (Western) "literature" and its "criticism" and what the critic of black literature does and reflects upon?<sup>67</sup>

My primary concern in this study is far from a discussion of canonisation and the socio-cultural politics it entails. Rather I am concerned with the discourse of "Blackness" as it exists in Black texts from historical and contemporary perspectives. This essay on Armah's writing chronicles some of the origins of this discourse and attempts to point to the fact that "the relationship that exists between (Western) theories of (Western) literature and its criticism has got a direct bearing on what the Black writer and critic do and reflect upon". It is probably important - as Isidore Okpewho observes - that a framework which would chronicle "the Origins of the African Diaspora" should be at its freest and not pronounced on the authority of any well advertised pantheon.



## Notes

- 1 Armah, 1974, p.95.
- 2 Armah, 1974, p.95.
- 3 Armah, 1974, p.95.
- 4 Armah, 1985, "Our Language Problem", p.831.
- 5 See Smith, 1989, p.1.
- 6 Armah, 1985, p.831
- 7 See Appiah's 1991, seminal essay.
- 8 Ben Obumsele, 1973.
- 9 For detail see, Achebe, 1975, p.25.
- 10 Obumsele, 1973, p.112.
- 11 Obumsele, 1973, p.109.
- 12 Appiah, 1991, p.349.
- 13 Appiah, 1991, p.349.
- 14 Armah, 1969, p.141.
- 15 Owusu, 1986, p.883.
- 16 Armah, "One Writer's Education", 1985, p.1752.
- 17 Armah, 1984, p.36.
- 18 Armah, 1979, *Two Thousand Seasons*, p.3 (All page references to this edition).
- 19 See Fraser, 1980, p.5.
- 20 Armah, 1985, p.1752.
- 21 Armah, 1985, "The Caliban Complex," p.570.
- 22 Armah, 1985, p.570.
- 23 See Gates, 1990.
- 24 For a discussion of carnival and the carnivalesque see Stallybrass and White, 1986, and Abodunrin, 1995.
- 25 See Foucault, 1979.
- 26 The griot Balla Fasseke's account of Sundiata's birth, in Armah, 1974, p.52.
- 27 Gates, 1990, p.286.
- 28 See Ashcroft, Griffiths & Tiffin, 1989.
- 29 Armah, 1979.
- 30 Fraser, 1980, p.63.
- 31 Fraser, 1980, pp.63-4.
- 32 Fraser, 1980, p.63.
- 33 Fraser, 1980, p.64.
- 34 Fraser, 1980, p.64.
- 35 Fraser, 1980, p.68.
- 36 Awoonor, 1975, p.50.

- 37 For detail see Johnson, 1980, p.70.
- 38 Okpewho, 1980.
- 39 Okpewho, 1980, p.2.
- 40 Okpewho, 1980, p.3.
- 41 Okpewho, 1980, p.4.
- 42 Okpewho, 1980, p.63.
- 43 Hayden, "Middle Passage", cited in Johnson, 1980, pp.62-63.
- 44 Wright, 1989, p.232.
- 45 Gates, 1990, p.286.
- 46 Johnson, 1980, p.72.
- 47 Johnson, 1980, p.73.
- 48 Armah, 1980, *The Healers*, All page references are to this edition.
- 49 Armah, 1995, *Osiris Rising: A Novel of Africa Past, Present and Future*, All page references are to this edition.
- 50 Armah, 1984, p.35.
- 51 Fraser, 1980, p.28.
- 52 For details see Diop, 1974, p.75.
- 53 Diop, 1974, p.75.
- 54 Diop, 1974, p.xiv.
- 55 Soyinka, 1977, pp.111-112.
- 56 Armah, 1970, *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, All page references are to this edition.
- 57 Armah, 1975, *Why Are We So Blest?*, All page references are to this edition.
- 58 Fraser, 1980, pp.39-40.
- 59 I have derived both definitions from *The Hutchinson Encyclopedia*, 1988, pp. 877 & 1134 respectively.
- 60 Armah, 1974, *Fragments*, All page references are to this edition.
- 61 Gates, 1990, p.xi.
- 62 1980, p.xi.
- 63 Okpewho, 1980.
- 64 Gates, 1990, p.5.
- 65 See for example, McCaskie, 1990, p. 58. One of McCaskie's trenchant claims is that "Armah's historical figures satisfy very few of the canonical understanding or norms of novelistic character." Gates, 1980, p.45. again, the charge is futile since it is the boundaries of canonisation as an ally of history".
- 66 Ashcroft et al., 1989, p.165.
- 67 Gates, 1980, p.3.

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