In search of the better? The representations of Utopia and dystopia in Kofi Awoonor's *This Earth, My Brother…*

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Abstract

This paper is informed by the extensive corpus of African postcolonial critique that examines the after-effects of empire in ex-colonial societies. Thus, in the studied engagement of the Ghanaian ex-colonial state, this paper turns to Awoonor's *This Earth, My Brother...,* read as one of such commentaries on the rusted, conscienceless ex-colonial nation and the tones of negative burdens laid on citizens' existential quest for selfhood, self-actualisation and the assertion of identity. In such a circumstance, one may be lost between the real world and a wishful world; the real being the present state of affairs and the wishful being that for which they yearn. Through critical reading and analysis, we discuss the representations of utopia and dystopia in *This Earth, My Brother...*, in the light of the myriad features that these concepts offer. The paper argues that the extradiegetic Ghanaian nation has much to learn from Awoonor's diegetic lifeworld.

Keywords: Utopia, dystopia, disillusionment, hope, post-colonial Africa

Introduction

During the colonial period, there was the yearning for self-rule which resulted in freedom campaigns, some mild, others bloody. Political movements like the United Gold Coast Convention and the Convention People's Party of Ghana used relatively less-brutal strategies while others like the Mau-Mau Movement of Kenya used force where necessary. The hope was that the general living conditions of the people would be better when independence was attained. After independence, however, conditions did not change much. Sometimes, they were worse than what pertained in the colonial era. Indigenous governments became corrupt and intolerant of opposing views among others. African writers gave voice to these social upheavals. *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born* (1968), the Ghanaian writer Ayi Kwei Armah's debut novel, for instance gives a narrative of a nameless man who struggles to reconcile himself with the reality of post-independence Ghana; a reality of corruption and the conversion of the upright into corrupt, military dictatorships that reflect a maladjustment of the national apparatus in the early postcolonial era. It is the depiction of a similar betrayal of the hopes of the people and their search for the ideal world they desired that forms the background to Kofi Awoonor's *This Earth, My Brother...*

This Earth, My Brother... can be described as a damning commentary on how a corrosive, corrupt system or nation (albeit fictional) affects a person's existential quest for selfhood, self-actualisation, and identity. It is quite evident that by the end of the novel and by how the narration is rendered, the protagonist, Amamu seems to exist in two worlds – the first one being the fictional space of Deme and Accra which represents all the depressive conflicts facing the protagonist, while the second one is the fictional, psychological, mythical, yet supernatural world of the sea goddess, which symbolises an existence of less worries and an escape to the real values of human life of just loving and communing with nature and a supernatural existence.

These two worlds are the representations of utopia and dystopia in the fictional space of the novel.

This paper focuses on and discusses the representations of utopia and dystopia in *This Earth, My Brother...*, in the light of the myriad characteristics of which the concept of utopia/ dystopia offers. Nevertheless, the representations of utopia in *This Earth, My Brother...*are rather scarce to identify when compared to the plethora of dystopian representations, which perhaps make *This Earth, My Brother...* a dystopian novel.

Utopian/Dystopian literature

At the heart of utopian literature is social commentary: social criticism of what is and social suggestion of what could be. Its means are social reconfigurations of the real and the desired. In a utopian novel, the author imagines a society with a given set of social conditions, few in number, which are decidedly different from those of his own society: they are decidedly different because there is a discontinuity between the author's actual and his imagined society, but the difference is not so great as to render his imagined utopian society unrecognisable to his fellow citizens. The author then elaborates the consequences of his chosen set of social conditions in fleshing out the social arrangement of his utopian society.

The concept of a utopia, a place of ideal perfection, is an omnipresent theme in many literary works. This genre symbolises the qualities of optimism and imagination, which allows people to delve deeper into this creation of an ideal world. However, the idea of a utopian society hardly ever pans out, especially in literature, for quite frequently the perfect world to one person is just the opposite to another. Under this viewpoint, the world then becomes a dystopia, a perfect world gone wrong, which is why every piece of literature that pertains to the idea of a utopia holds within it the makings of a dystopia as well, for it is only a matter of perception.

The term "Utopia" which was first used by Sir Thomas More to describe his imaginary island, and which quickly spread to encompass an entire genre of literature, is a problematic term indeed. The word is, first of all, unclear in definition, for it stems from the two Greek words 'eu-topos' meaning "the good place" and 'ou-topos,' meaning "no place." Emphatically, though, are the myriad philosophical and social implications of duality expressed in this term. For how can a utopia be both a good place and a nonexistent place at the same time? Does the choice of this particular term imply that any society that strives for perfection is doomed inevitably to fail, or to cease to exist?

Euro-Western theorists, Darko Suvin and Fredric Jameson, have offered compelling insights into how we might properly characterise the worldbuilding/world-altering logics of literary utopia. Within the defining imperatives both Jameson and Suvin suggest, we find a peculiar preoccupation with how the literary *topos* (whether *dys/dus* or *ou/eu*) is fabulated in that liminal zone wherein the author's empirical world meets the anticipated/feared/the *not-yet* world. The *not-yet* world is a category we deploy here to explain the spatial and temporal (re) configuration that occurs in the act of creating literary *eu* and *dys* -topias. Literary *eu* and *dys* topias are elseworlds whose creations emerge from a subversion and critique of the temporal moment or given socio-historical circumstance. As *not-yet* worlds, utopia and dystopia symbolise a reconstitution of space (topos) and time such that the estrangement we experience in our encounter with such elseworlds result from an affective and cognitive distancing and recognition. Considered this way, dystopia and utopia are familiar impossibles and unfamiliar plausibles. They are worlds whose familiarity and unfamiliarity always exist simultaneously and in contingent relationship to our recognizable *realia*. The lifeworlds they fabulate inquire into the many ways human society proleptically critiques, particularly, the material relations (to allude to Ernst Bloch's Marxist reading of utopia) that exist in a given temporal moment.

In *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction*, Suvin explains his peculiar poetics for how we might interpret the assumptions that underlie science fiction (SF) as a critical literary mode. Suvin's poetics is relevant for our discussion of Utopia and Dystopia particularly for how they operate as speculative modes of re-imagining the author's empirical world. Extending the Blochian category of the *novum* as the radical interruption of the new, Suvin defines the *novum* as a "totalizing phenomenon or relationship deviating from the author's and implied reader's norm of reality. . .. [It is] totalizing in this sense that it entails a change of the whole universe of the tale, or at least of crucially important aspects thereof." (1979, p. 62) Considered this way, the *novel* works in utopia and dystopia by compelling the reader to notice the radical alterity of the worlds presented. Thus, whether we are interacting with an ideal perfect society or a world with seemingly inescapable or irreparable chaos, the text invites us to not only expand our horizons of knowing, but also defer our judgements of what is knowable or plausible. To extend this discussion of novum, Suvin posits two critical frames with which we might consider the fictionality or realism of the worlds we encounter in such speculative genres as SF. For the extrapolative, Suvin argues a kind of anticipatory rubric wherein the alterity of the world (its familiarity/unfamiliarity) logically proceeds from what we might consider as realistic conjecture drawn from/ based on the author's empirical world. Here, the defining imperative is that we are observing a world whose plausibility is premised on the fact that we can establish viable causality – this is a world that (possibly) does not exist (in the here and now) but could/ might exist. On the other hand, the analogic presents us with else worlds "not bound to the extrapolative horizon".

> The analogic model… is based on analogy rather than extrapolation. Its figures may but do not have to be anthropomorphic or its localities geomorphic. The objects, figures, and up to a point the relationships from

which this indirectly modelled world starts can be quite fantastic (in the sense of empirically unverifiable) as long as they are logically, philosophically and mutually consistent. (Suvin, 1979, p. 29)

The analogic model, as Suvin suggests, tends to operate outside the domains of the cognitive/realistic. In other words, the analogic hyperactivates the defamiliarizing imperative of such worlds as we might find in the lifeworld of a 'good place' or 'bad place'. For this, we could consider literary figurations of non-human/extra-human creatures, fantastic modelling of localities where the (normal) rules of causality and effect do not quite apply. However, Suvin (1979, p. 30) is quick to add that the analogic model falls within cognitive horizons insofar as its conclusions are concerned. In its hyper fictionalisation of bodies and spaces, the analogic reaches into the world of the mundane, our cognitive reality, such that we are able to reconcile the strange effects of the world we are observing with the world in which we live.

To turn to Jameson (2007) for a moment, while he acknowledges the estranging imperatives Suvin sets out in his treatise on Utopia as a primarily socio-economic subgenre of SF, in *Archaeologies of the Future*, Jameson is particularly properly characterising the material (pre) conditions of Utopia, both as literary vocation and ideology. Jameson explains the Utopian preconditions as emblematized first as vocation and second as material circumstance, in a sort of subject-object relationship. Jameson understands the counter-politics of the Utopian genre and frames the Utopia vocation as intended to imagine alternative social and economic realities. The Utopian vocation thus, functions as subversive praxis, and draws on the material conditions of the historical moment for its counter-storying. However, Jameson invites us to consider how the literary mode of defamiliarizing (both as extrapolative and analogic) might impinge on the cultural-political objective of reconfiguring

the lived temporal moment. For Jameson (2007, p. xv), "the more surely a given Utopia asserts its radical difference from what currently is, to that very degree it becomes, not merely unrealizable, but what is worse, unimaginable". The ambivalence of the Utopian text (as well as the dystopian text) lies in the tension between how extrapolative or analogic the narrative events are. The affective and cognitive distance we experience in the figurations of such worlds as Utopia or dystopia need not be such that we lose the coherence or readability of such worlds to ours. Jameson explains that the utopian vocation is impelled by such need to right a social ill or wrong.

> Yet in order for representability to be achieved, the social or historical moment must somehow offer itself as a situation, allow itself to be read in terms of effects and causes, problems and solutions, questions and answers. (pp. 13-14)

For Jameson, the utopian vocation is characterised particularly in the ways in which it attends to specific social dilemmas. They are motivated inventions that interrogate social-material existence by exploring the possibilities of what if, and what could/might be. Representability is effected precisely in that moment of spatial and temporal disjunction we find in literary utopia and dystopia. Jameson's construction of the Utopian enclave is also instructive to this paper. The Utopian space (and impulse) is already imbricated in the real social space. It exists as an "imaginary enclave" birthed by spatial and social differentiation.

> Such enclaves are something like a foreign body within the social: in them, the differentiation process has momentarily been arrested, so that they remain as it were momentarily beyond the reach of the social and testify to its political powerlessness, at the same time that they offer a space in which new images of

the social can be elaborated and experimented on. (Jameson, 2007, p. 16)

Even though Utopia functions as futurological, anticipatory and remedial figurations of the social-material moment, Jameson argues here that the temporal disjunction is momentarily "arrested" such that the counter-political object of imagining better worlds (*eu -topias*) is realised.

In *Utopianism in Postcolonial Literatures*, Ashcroft (2016) interrogates the fascination with the utopian vocation/ desire in anti-imperial/anti-colonial figurations of alternative spaces. What is particularly engaging about Ashcroft's attention to the utopian desire is the way in which it foregrounds critique of social life as a distinct category of postcolonial utopianism. Ashcroft explains that in fabulating utopias, "rather than foresee a particular utopia, the function of postcolonial utopianism is to open up space for political action that is buoyed up by the possibility, indeed the probability of social change. This is the probability Bloch calls "concrete utopia". (p. 10) Here, Ashcroft re-echoes the remedial and anticipatory logics of the utopian vocation. However, for Ashcroft, it is important that the utopian enterprise not slip into wanton fantastic figurations of alternative spaces whose imperatives stray from the object of social change. Another way of reading this argument is to consider Moylan's category of "critical utopias' 'and the proper status of the *ou-topos* (no place) – the perfect society exists 'nowhere'. In *Demand the Impossible*, Moylan (1986) explains that "critical utopias" in their alternative storying of social life "dwell on the conflict between the originary world and the utopian society opposed to it so that the process of social change is more directly articulated" (pp. 10-11). Critical utopias demand that the literary text (and artist) anticipate achievable utopias. Now, it is perhaps instructive to mention here that there is a Blochian antecedent to the category of "critical utopias" which is articulated in Bloch's (1986) famous three-volume work *The Principle of Hope*. For

Bloch, the utopian consciousness "does not get lost in an Empty-possible, but psychologically anticipates a Real-possible". (p. 144) The 'Real-possible' emblematizes that affective location where we can both acknowledge our temporal distance from the *eu-topia* (good place) but also entertain the visions of possibility that would drive the transformation of social life.

Overall, these utopian/dystopian worlds have many correlations with each other. For instance, they are regularly set in a distant time or place, and they are often the result of a cataclysmic event. In *This Earth, My Brother...* this cataclysmic event is represented by the colonial rule of the British in the Gold Coast and its territories and hence the yearning for indigenous rule, a better place and improved lifestyles. In many utopian books, a new government or changed government attempts to recreate the world after the horrible event so as to avoid the inherent problems of the previous society. Unfortunately, by attempting to avoid one set of problems, they inadvertently create a new type of social chaos. Clearly, in Awoonor's "poetic novel," there has been a change in the scheme of governance from the British colonial government to an indigenous government, which is trying to enhance the lives of its citizens, but rather slipping into a quagmire of corruption and decline in values.

A convincing, classical example of a utopia gone awry is that of the Garden of Eden in which lived Adam and Eve. In their story, they existed in a virtual paradise, and their cataclysmic event that dispelled them was the eating of the fruit from the tree of knowledge. However, even their utopia can be interpreted as a dystopia when seen through the eyes of Satan; it is all objective. By the same manner of perspective, the current governments that are occupying the world are also, in a sense, the dystopian products of the aforementioned catastrophic event. Invariably, a dystopia (or alternatively cacotopia) is a fictional society, usually portrayed as existing in a future time, when the conditions of life are extremely bad due to deprivation, oppression, or terror. Science fiction, particularly post-apocalyptic science

fiction and cyberpunk, often feature dystopias. Social critics, especially postmodern social critics, also use the term "dystopian" to condemn trends in post-industrial society they see as negative. In most dystopian fiction, a corrupt government creates or sustains a poor quality of life, often conditioning the masses to believe the society is proper and just, even perfect. Most dystopian fiction takes place in the future but often purposely incorporates contemporary social trends taken to extremes. Dystopias are frequently written as warnings, or as satires, showing contemporary trends extrapolated into a horrendous conclusion.

The term was coined in the late 19th century by British philosopher John Stuart Mill, who also used Jeremy Bentham's synonym, cacotopia.[1] The prefix *caco-* means "the worst." Both words were created to contrast utopia, a word coined by Sir Thomas More to describing an ideal place or society. Dystopia combined the *dys*, Greek word for "bad" or "negative" with *topos*. Thus, meaning "bad place." As some writers have noted, however, the difference between a Utopia and a Dystopia can often lie in an individual's point of view: one person's heaven can be another's hell.

Representations of Utopia in *This Earth, My Brother...*

It is an elemental disposition of humankind to fabricate imaginary Utopias, although their names for such places may differ. The word 'utopia,' which has become the familiar designation for such states, was More's creation. It is inevitable that people, recognising the manifold foolhardiness, corruptions, and inequalities prevailing in their society, should attempt to devise a better system for people living together.

In the first place, one major characteristic of utopia that can be seen in *This Earth, My Brother...*is the psychological factor. If one translates the concept of a Utopia and why one reads about such things in novels etc., to real life situations and apply the concepts of cognition and human mind behaviour; one can

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[1] Oxford English Dictionary

understand that Utopia provides an escape and that 'happiness' or extreme forms of it, is actually a Psychological Utopia that the person forms in their mind. Defining Psychological Utopia in a few words may be difficult and cannot be done. It needs to be explained. People, mostly delusional people, construct this bubble in their minds, in which they live, and they do not break for anyone. They are mostly extremely happy or extremely sad and frustrated from their life, and keep thinking that everything is okay, or they continue on with their life as it is, even though they need to do something about it. They live a monotonous routine in most cases and are pretty emotionless. These people are delusional, because they keep living their lives as they are whether they are extremely happy and things are good, or whether they are extremely disturbed and things are bad, but they do nothing about it. This is why they are delusional. They live in their own little world, cut off from reality, things and people around them.

Without a doubt, as observed in how the narration is done in Awoonor's novel with a prologue and almost every chapter having a corresponding (a) section or chapter, there are instances in the prologue in particular and the last (a) chapter (12a), and chapter 14 where we see the protagonist, Amamu refer to or commune with his "woman of the sea" who takes him to a most tranquil place. That tranquil location is the utopia for which Amamu has been yearning since his school days when he was using "Reader Six" (p. 4). It is only the protagonist, who recognises the "mermaid come[ing] from the sea" (p. 4), and the enchanted, utopian environment to which she leads him. A location in the sea where:

> First the whale, the rolling stone tree trunk deity, is the worshipper of thunder, dalosu, the seer and the unseen, the rider of the white horse of the air in the sky above his children ... the sand at the edge of the silver foam where they covet gold ... From the sea the worshippers emerged ... From their lips rose an ululation long,

echoing among the fallen walls behind the church bell. Then they would slap their hands over their mouths interrupting for split seconds the long cry. They were looking for the dead, in every corner, in every tin shack, in every fallen-down mud house. (4)

Again, getting to the end of the novel when Amamu becomes schizophrenic and walks a long distance from Accra to the beaches of Keta unconsciously, the narrator states that:

He sat down at its feet [an almond tree] gazing out to sea. A sudden calmness descended upon him. (p. 178)

This sense of tranquillity which Amamu feels when he gets to the beach at Keta reveals his contentment in the psychological utopia, which is doubly fuelled by the appearance of "the woman of the sea," who has finally come to take him away to the enchanted world of the sea:

... She rose slowly, head first, adorned with sapphires, corals and all the ancient beads her mother left her for her pubertal rites. She rose slowly from a dream sea. The sea was real: the sun was beating down hard and cruel. It was like a scene in that waking dream of fever. It seemed suddenly that the centuries and years of pain of which he was singled out to be carrier and sacrifice, were being rolled away, were being faded in that emergence. Here at last, he realised with a certain boyish joy, was the hour of his salvation. (p. 179)

Here, it becomes clear that various arguments about utopias being intangible conceptions are well-founded, in that we can affirm that in order for Amamu to enter his utopia he either has to become delusional or schizophrenic, and eventually die just to go with his "woman from the sea". Thus, utopias cannot be realistically attained. These moments of affective

detachment from Amamu's present temporal circumstances operate outside the domains of the anticipated or futurological. This utopia is not one that exists in some (unknown) future time. The psychological utopias are unlike what Suvin and Bloch, in their treatises on utopian methodologies, have described as a formulaic reordering of space. Amamu's utopia exists liminally and doubly, as expressions of the real and the unreal, constantly dissolving the boundaries of both. We are told "the sea was real", and also that "she rose slowly from a dream sea". Within the narrative province of the novel, the defamiliarizing imperatives of the genre simulate Amamu's momentary dream-states wherein he encounters the woman of the sea in a manner such that we are unable to reconcile Amamu's material lifeworld with the (sea) world which enchants and arrests his fancy. More importantly, these affective detachments (and encounters) with 'the woman of the sea' properly represent the category of utopia as *ou – topos* (nowhere/no place). Amamu's *eu -topos* (good place) exists nowhere. In its liminal and double ontology, it is a 'placeless place'. Properly depicted, the *ou* and *eu* topos have no Cartesian geographic coordinates and function outside linear conceptions of time.

It may be argued that for Africans, the indigenous belief systems postulate that the supernatural exists among the people in real time and as a result this lends credence to the linkage of *This Earth, My Brother...* to an eschatological sapience by Priebe (1974, p. 97) as he argues that Awoonor's poetic novel "establishes clear links between its hero's ultimate eschatological transformation and an implied social regeneration." Priebe sees Awoonor's protagonist, the lawyer Amamu, as a religious sacrifice who, because he represents "the greatest loss to the community, stands out as the most efficacious offering" and whose death "adumbrates an ultimate salvation for his land since he is better able as an ancestral force to effect the changes he had not the power to effect while living."

Additionally, in his discussion of the novel's scatology, he claims that the author's sardonic parody of a line from Eliot— "Fear death by shit trucks"- "reveals both the scatological and eschatological nature" of the novel's reality (p. 99). Believable though all this may sound in the light of African cosmology, it seems tenuously theoretical when put beside what is actually realised in the novel, where the social and spiritual, the natural and supernatural, putrefaction and deliverance, appear to be pulling in opposite directions.

Ultimately, the very fact that under tremendous frustration, lawyer Amamu deteriorates and becomes schizophrenic, frees him from all nuisances and encumbrances. This 'freedom' becomes the only available alternative he has to escape the reality of the pervasive decadence of his society in order to be with his "woman from the sea" who takes him to the wonderful marine landscape. Therefore the utopia of the sea deity is an escapist utopia and is realised both in the psychological sense, as well as seen in a supernatural/religious sense.

Representations of Dystopia in *This Earth, My Brother...*

Dystopia evinces a strong theme common in most fiction, especially science and fantasy fiction: the creation of a future time *(usually)*, when the conditions of human life are exaggeratedly bad due to deprivation, oppression or terror. This created society or 'dystopia' frequently constructs apocalyptic views of a future using crime, immorality or corrupt governments to create or sustain the bad quality of people's lives, often conditioning the masses to believe their society is proper and just, and sometimes perfect. It can provide space for heroism in disrupting the dystopian setting (e.g., John Savage in Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*). Most dystopian fiction takes place in the future but often purposely develops contemporary social trends taken to extremes. Dystopias are frequently written as commentaries, as warnings or as satires, showing current trends extrapolated to nightmarish conclusions. Dystopias mainly

depict the divergence between individual identity or ambition and the collective goals of the state, which crush or suppress any individual expressions. Walsh (1962, p. 143) justly asserts that "by weakening the sense of individual identity, they make it more likely that the average man will merge his own frail identity with the social whole and cease to demand that he be called by a name instead of a number". Walsh's assertion that the individual in a dystopia ceases to be known by name, shows the extent to which an individual may lose him/herself in the turbulence of the extreme decadence of societal norms and values.

Indeed, one of the compelling sites of inquiry for politically-situated or informed dystopia is the extent to which individual aspirations and welfare are somehow submerged under the crushing weight of the collective. In the European imaginary, we find a social realist impetus that is often foregrounded in the imaginings of literary dystopia. We find this iteration of collectivist dystopia in many Orwellian figurations such as *Nineteen Eighty-Four* where, in the repressive logics of the totalitarian, few circumscribe, surveil and control the majority. It is worth mentioning that in the fabulations of both utopia and dystopia, the category of the individual seems to somehow function as an aberrant or deviant variable to the realisation of these lifeworlds. As speculative locales, utopia and dystopia are intended to either be the hopes/wish-fulfilments of the majority or the fears/anxieties of same. A Utopia is most often presented as a world most people (if not all people) would like to live in, whereas a dystopia is very likely a social-political lifeworld that stirs anxiety and detachment. Now, this is not to suggest that literary utopias and dystopias always exist independently of each other. Indeed, in a lot of the literature, we would find that both speculative locales often resist easy definition/categorization because it is quite possible for utopic and dystopic affect to exist simultaneously in a given text. In *Dystopia: A Natural History*, an edited collection by Claeys (2017), he

explains how the construction of utopic lifeworlds is sometimes contingent on the marginalisation of and violence on particular groups of people; that "a utopia of opulence and consumption" could in some ways be founded on "a dystopia of scarcity and environmental degradation." (p. 6) Now, it is important to clarify that Claeys' attempt to read an affinity between dystopia and utopia is not to suggest that all utopias naturally generate dystopic affect. However, we think that it is pertinent to consider the subject relations that exist in the material worlds of these fabulations and in what ways we might interpret these subject experiences (like we observe with Amamu in *This Earth, My Brother…,* the Man in Armah's *Beautyful Ones*, and Baako in Armah's *Fragments*) individually as well as collectively. In African postcolonial literature, the trope of the 'equality and plenitude enjoyed by some at the expense of others' provides an interpretative rubric from which to properly read the social realist impetus of fabulations of political dystopia like the kind we find in Awoonor's text.

In *This Earth, My Brother...* there are many instances where most of the characters lose the very essence of themselves to the hardships and corruption of the society. Foremost in this catalogue is the protagonist, Amamu who, out of extreme frustration of a failing society, becomes schizophrenic. As a result, his behaviour was out of the normal and did not depict that of the lawyer he was. He could not even remember his name; the height of dystopian decadence. The rest of the characters, who are connected, in one way or the other, to Amamu also got their lives touched by this decadence. Some characters in the same category are Yaro, Amamu's houseboy and Adisa who is Amamu's concubine. Paul, the young pastor and the symbol of Christian religious/missionary zeal also falls prey to this dystopian consequence. Yaro's life changed for the better when he met Amamu and became Amamu's houseboy. At the end of events, Yaro's master goes mad so Yaro loses his job and all the comforts that came with the work. Adisa's life too changed

for the worse as her source of resources waned because Amamu does not exist in her world again:

> The night was thick. Adisa cried silently as they drove. For her, this was the end. The journey out of degradation has ended. (p. 178)

Paul, the young pastor with a lot of promise for the mission, impregnates someone out of wedlock. This brings shame to both his family and his church, changing him from being the hope of both entities to a source of shame. The lives of all these characters, in the end, became catastrophic. This cataclysmic transformation eats into the society at large.

This Earth, My Brother… can also be read as a dystopian work at the level of the society. The society that the work portrays starts as a hopeful one that has expunged the colonial administration and started to take care of its own affairs. Like Ayi Kwei Armah's *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, this society launches itself into chaos immediately after independence. The political class became corrupt, the citizenry became uncomfortable and turned towards illegal means of survival such as prostitution and the academic class only spew 'brilliant clichés' that do not necessarily answer the practical problems that their knowledge must help improve in the society.

A motif that spreads throughout the work and emphasises the societal rot are human excreta and dunghill. The nastiness of filth is an apt reflection of what the society has become, to the extent that, a young military man who trained to defend the nation, was killed by shit track. The manner of death of the soldier could be seen from two perspectives. First, the protection/safety of the society is taken away. The society becomes shelter-less and is now open to enemies. Secondly, the instrument of death, the shit truck, leaves much to be desired. A soldier must die a death of respect; in battle. For this soldier, it was different, and the death happened on the road, leaving a permanent reminder:

> City nights, night soil vans scattering suburban excrement on the dual carriageway. One killed a young army officer one dawn, smashed him; they had to extricate his body mangled from among the pile of excrement. Fear death by shit trucks. (p. 113)

The political elite, the epitome of most of what has gone wrong with this society, is not spared. The head of state himself has a 'shit track' in his/her convoy:

> The President is passing from the Castle to the Flagstaff House. About ten cars ahead was a municipal night soil truck carrying its load from the former European area of Ridge now occupied by senior African government officials. (p. 122)

Indeed, as has been mentioned already, post-independence disillusionment, like we find in Armah's *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born* and Awoonor's *This Earth, My Brother…* are veritable states of a failed utopianism. As we see in the depiction of Nima and parts of Accra, the dystopian realities, associated here with a failed political elite, materialise in Awoonor's deployment of topographies of disrepair and decay.

In chapter 9a, we see a vivid depiction of the dystopian society. Prostitutes and professional beggars work without disguise. Politicians give vain promises such as changing the most densely populated slum into a 'city within a city'; a promise that never got fulfilled because at the end of the novel, Nima was still booming with slum activities. Young ladies dressed half-naked, with 'lips coated in blood' hover around foreigners. There were big cars bought with government loans and used by people who speak pidgin. An adult man rapes a ten-year old girl with the excuse that it was a mistake: "When questioned he said it was a slip of the penis" (p. 113). He does not get punished for this crime. It is a land where "pussy is cheap," "liquor is

indifferent" and "the people suffer from a thousand diseases" (p. 114). This is the post-independent society that is in control of its own welfare. Clearly, this society is heading for doom. The novelist sums up the end of things: "Despair and Die" (pp. 115, 116,118). This portrayal becomes nightmarish as the novel moves to its climax.

Awoonor's stark description of space, particularly as it concerns buildings, houses, and other infrastructure is another interesting site from which to consider this fabulation of dystopia. His deployment of literary dystopia as social critique becomes even more marked in those instances where the differential material/subject relations are evoked in the description and organisation of space.

> We have many beautiful places in the country… behind those gullies, the people squat and defecate with an extraordinarily easy conscience. The churches and the cathedrals are the most solid-looking buildings in the area… they are made of stones while the dwelling houses of the people are a collection of crude mud houses designed to last exactly one tropical rain, and then must collapse under the erosive power of the torrential downpour. (p. 208)

The spatialization of material relations we find in the contrast between the apparent opulence of the 'churches and cathedrals' vis-à-vis the privation we find with the mud houses reinforces the argument presented earlier in the text about how the plenitude of some often rests or thrives on the deprivation of the many. The spatial proximity between the churches and the mud houses and gullies where people openly defecate might be read as Awoonor's critique of social-political systems that disregard the suffering of the many. We can only imagine that the stench from open defecation we observe here, transcends attempts at spatial detachment often via such means as 'sealing

off' or 'walling in' particular groups of people. The stench violates physical architectures of detachment and alienation, such that the disarming odour of excreta from the have-nots in this society saturates the world of the haves. Claeys, in his attempt to explain the tensions that might arise in this proximity between what seems a 'good place' (the churches and cathedrals) to a 'bad place' (the mud houses and spaces of open defecation), asks us to consider the human subject relations that would naturally emerge in such situations. He explains thus:

> How well people get along is a key marker of their anxiety or sense of wellbeing. We may be at ease with one another in a markedly hierarchical society, secure in our places if prosperity and tolerance prevail. Alternatively, we may be anxious, paranoid, and fearful in an egalitarian society where nonconformity is suppressed. So, we might portray the utopia/dystopia relationship in terms of a spectrum of anxiety, with relative peace, friendship, and the absence of fear at one end, matched by anxiety, paranoia, and alienation on the other. (p. 8)

What is particularly instructive here is that we are invited to observe how different material relations, evident in the spatial lifeworlds of the haves and have-nots, allow us to interpret the concurrent realisations of utopic and dystopic effects. The churches and cathedrals with their lavish stone-architectures might very well assume to be insulated from or closed off from the theatre of open defecation that exists outside of their space. However, Awoonor, intends for us to consider how the interrogation of physical spaces people inhabit allows us to appreciate the class antagonisms birthed in the literary imaginings of alternate worlds. In Awoonor's *This Earth*…, the malnourished, pot-bellied children who strut along the dunghills of Nima exist in spatial proximity to the "politicians, members of Parliament, directors of public corporations, party functionaries,

community of well-to-do-prostitutes" who reside in the new estate houses of Kanda fenced away from Nima "in respectable seclusion". (p. 194)

The novel does not give a single moment of hope to the society, except Amamu's woman of the sea who gives him solace in the transcendental. All that this work does is to spell the doom of this society. This could have two imports: 1) to warn the society about the hazards that it has bred/is breeding, 2) to reveal the possible consequences of the societal dangers. This is what dystopian literature does. From this point on, *This Earth*… is a dystopian novel.

Conclusion

Postcolonial literatures are mostly commentaries on nationhood, and meditations on both positive and negative psychological effects on citizens. When such works project positive futures, we may label them utopic, when the worlds and situations they fabulate are less than ideal, we may find a dystopia . Some works are able to capture these two ideological polarities. *This Earth, My Brother*… is an example of such works. This text straddles utopian and dystopian literature by depicting a society heading for doom, in the physical, but which contains in it characters that find assurance in the metaphysical. We postulate that the society of the novel, set in the early post-independence Ghana, is not very different from the Ghana of the 21st century. In the Ghana of the 21st century, there prevail physical hardships to which most of the citizens find spiritual solutions. For instance, instead of some citizens prevailing upon governments to build health infrastructure to take care of the sick, they rather prefer prayers as the solutions to sickness. They would visit prayer camps for healing but not the hospital. The warning that the dystopian aspect of this novel gave seems not to have the effect of changing the lifestyle of the society. One may say that the average Ghanaian does not even know that such a work exists because they might not like reading. This attitude

itself is dystopic. Is there any path for navigating a safer course? Literary awareness as a catalyst for development must become a part of public cultural life. This may intensify the appreciation of literature and guide society.

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