

THE JOURNEYING MOTIF IN
THE FICTION OF AYI KWEI ARMAH

by

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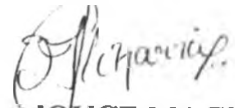
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DEDICATION

For my mother, Mary M Macharia, whose love and respect for education has brought me thus far.

And for my father, Celetino N Macharia, whose capacity for hard work and keen perception of people and events I shall always strive to emulate.

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ABSTRACT

In their depiction of the social, political and economic realities of the continent, the majority of Africa's writers tend to follow a chronological order of those events that have gone into making Africa's history. Chinua Achebe's works, for instance, move from a portrayal of traditional African society in Things Fall Apart to the era of nationalism in No Longer at Ease finally the depiction of post-independent Africa in A Man Of The People and Anthills of the Savannah.

The writings of Ayi Kwei Armah defy this tradition. If for nothing else, they are unique for the way in which the writer abuses the tradition of following the Gregorian calendar to discuss the events and periods that make up African history. Thus we find that Armah's first novel The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born is set in post-independent Ghana. Two Thousand Seasons which is Armah's fourth novel takes a large sweep from the unrecorded history of Africa through traditional African societies, slavery, colonialism and finally to neo-colonial Africa. Armah's latest work, The Healers, is set in traditional African society, highlighting the fall of the Ashanti empire in the nineteenth century.

It is in this way that Armah, the writer, feels free to transverse the canvas of Africa's past, backward and forward. This is where the idea of Armah's journeys comes from. The fact that they are repeated severally, both within and across the texts, raises them to the level of a motif: a symbol that draws attention to itself primarily because of its dominance. The motif is made even more significant because it stands for something other than itself. In this sense we analyze Armah's journeys as commentaries on social situations.

Indeed, Armah's journeys back and forth across African societies help him to create a moral picture of present-day society. At the same time, these journeys allow the writer to seek for reasons and solutions in the past as much as in the present. This narrative technique results in the creation of myths which are made tenable in the past and relevant to the present and future. The myths then have a seeming universality, they transcend the geographical and ethnic boundaries that currently divide the continent. This universality also relates to time, for myths can be seen to hold true in the past, the present and the future. Armah's seeming recourse to the past helps him to merge time and so to abstract it.

The overall effect of the myths is the creation of unity. It is a unity between all African states and more importantly, between black people the world over. The general conclusion is that Armah urges the use of indigenous methods in the resolution of current contradictions. Through his myths, Armah has been able to offer the social philosophy of black people and he urges its application to the moral rearmament that African societies need. By so doing, Armah casts aside Western ideology and practice as a means of offering black societies any meaningful social reform.

It is important for us to note how Armah leads up to the assertion that only collective action by the people can bring about the total transformation of a people. Thus we observe the disappearance of the lone-activist-protagonist who colours Armah's first three works. In his place emerges a core of united people dedicated to social reform. It is through the concerted efforts of these, characters in Two Thousand Seasons and The Healers that Armah tries to chart a moral course for the continent.

Joyce Macharia, 1988.

INTRODUCTION

1. RESEARCH PROBLEM

In order to define the research problem, it will be necessary to begin with a review of the term "motif".

The Concise Oxford Dictionary defines a motif as a "distinctive feature, dominant idea, in artistic or literary composition" (1982 ed.) In the field of creative writing, the motif provides the creative writer with the basic idea around which the rest of the narrative may be framed. It is in this regard then that Hugh Holman in his Handbook to Literature describes the motif as "a simple element which serves as a basis for expanded narrative" (1972 ed.)

Stith Thompson in The Folktale provides a motif - index applicable to folktales the world over. He describes the motif as "the smallest element in a tale" (45), and thereby concurs with Holman that the motif does indeed provide the "subject for detailed sculptural treatment". (Handbook to Literature 1972 ed.) Whether the motif is used to enhance the plot, or whether it remains purely descriptive and static, it is nonetheless indispensable to the story. Thompson goes on to describe a certain enduring quality about the motif, stating that it possesses a keen "power to persist in tradition" (The Folktale 45).

Another quality pertaining to the nature of motif is provided by Emmanuel Ngara. Ngara notes the manner in which the motif may be used to "symbolize something larger than itself" (Art and Ideology in The African Novel 77). Indeed, "The significance of the motif does not depend on its own meaning but rather on its role in the artistic structure". (The Great Soviet

Encyclopedia 1973 ed.) In this light, we can see that the motif operates like something of an extended symbol. It presents something by itself. At the same time, through varied and protracted use with the narrative, it represents other things and offers new levels of meaning. Thus it is that the motif dominates a work and consequently draws attention to itself.

This study sets out to analyse Ayi Kwei Armah's fiction using the motif approach that has been illustrated above.

II. AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The criticism of Ayi Kwei Armah's writing has tended to concentrate on his first novel, The Beautiful Ones are Not yet Born (hereafter referred to as The Beautiful Ones). Beyond this, critics have dealt with the two most recent novels, Two Thousand Seasons and The Healers, without relating these works to their forerunners. Works such as Robert Fraser's The Novels of Ayi Kwei Armah and Senda wa Kwayera's thesis which we examine in our literature review have tended to avoid a wholesome analysis of Armah's texts as one continuous narrative. Further, they have not tackled the core feature in Armah's writing which this thesis identifies and discusses. It is the aim of this particular study to fill this gap in criticism by placing Armah's writing, within the broader framework of one continuous and related production from The Beautiful Ones to The Healers.

In dealing with Ayi Kwei Armah's writing as one entity, this thesis will trace the development and significance of the journeying motif as a stylistic device. The study therefore aims to see how style can concretely enhance

the content of a work of art.

Since the motif inherently contains more than one meaning, this thesis aims at revealing how the journeying motif is used to carry the writer's views on African society's past, present and future.

It will be the added task of this study to gauge the appropriateness of the journeying motif as a stylistic device.

III. THEORETICAL CONSTRUCT

Emmanuel Ngora in his Stylistic Criticism and the African Novel postulates a theory of literature based on the 'dialectical interaction' between content and form. Proposing a new approach to the criticism of African literature, Ngora suggests that:

A major concern of stylistic criticism is to give due emphasis to the aesthetic aspects of literary works of art. It takes cognizance of the fact that a work of art must be objectively analyzed and evaluated in terms of an aesthetically sound set of parameters, and that the student of literature should be trained to take stock of these parameters if his study of literature is to be satisfactory and intellectually challenging(34).

Ngora does not however leave the student of literature to define his own "set of parameters". He prescribes his own which are: medium, mode language/dialect, content, field of discourse, participants / participating agents, audience and personal factors. These Ngora terms as the determinants of the linguistic format which is

the basis of form. While these parameters are somewhat restrictive, they nonetheless offer a sound basis for analysis. It is however Ngara's identification of what he terms "para-linguistic affective devices" (17) as important features in analyzing fiction, that this study will be based on. Para-linguistic affective devices include such features as symbolism, allegory, motifs and myths "which are not analyzable in terms of normal linguistic description" (17). These features are according to Ngara crucial to the understanding of the concerns and meaning or meanings of a literary text. Thus it is that this thesis bases its analysis of Armah's fiction upon the journeying motif.

This thesis will at the same time be guided by the findings of Hayden White in his study entitled Tropics of Discourse. White sets out to underline the role of story-telling and history in our lives. He declares that he who seeks to retrieve history

is neither an Anti-quarian fleeing from the problems of the present into a purely personal past, or (sic) a kind of cultural necrophile, one who finds in the dead and dying a value he can never in the living (4).

Rather, history teaches us how best to live in the future and in so doing, it is bound up with our morality, in much the same way that story-telling is. Hayden White goes further to discuss the similarities between the methodology of the historian and that of the literary artist. Since both these groups of writers

find themselves equally involved in a resort to their imaginations - the historical narrative is verbal fiction since its "contents ... are as much invented as found and the forms ... have more in common with their counterparts in literature than they have in those in the sciences".(42). Thus while history creates stories out of existing chronicles, stories in their turn create plots out of this same existing chronicles, they offer semblance of order and meaning to the tales of our past through a method called employment. Since the historian and the novelist are equally caught up in a resort to the imagination, Hayden White sees the historical text as no more than a literary artefact, without downplaying the greater scope for imagination that literature naturally offers. In the way it manipulates facts therefore, literature or the narrative provides a deeper level of reality that may not be available in the historical text. To term fiction a lie and history a fact is therefore grossly incorrect.

This approach helps us to discuss history, myth and the novel on the same plane. We are able to appreciate the similarities in their nature and the sameness of their goals. What Levi-Strauss (1958) concluded about the object of the myth remains true and sound for all these categories of writing, namely, that ~~they~~ exist in order to resolve basic contradictions in our lives through a manipulation of the events and situations that daily perplex us.

Further, Hayden White has underlined the historical narrative as being symbolic of greater things. Like the metaphor, the historical narrative "tells us in what direction to think about the events"(58).

This latent idea of texts as being symbolic is further

pursued by Frederic Jameson. In The Political Unconscious, Jameson declares that a text can never be autonomous, it is primarily univocal, giving a shared code. In this respect, we must note that any text or any story is applicable beyond the given locality. Its meaning is at once social and political for it gives us instances of man operating within a given social framework with his fellow beings. Within the text, reality has been decoded to the level of words. The reader must therefore see these words as signs and by stringing them together, he can amplify them to produce a picture of the reality under discussion. The text is then an instance of the writers "political unconscious" which we must interpret socially thus seeing his narrative as a "socially symbolic act". Jameson further detects a certain linearity within the political unconscious. In deciphering the meaning of a text, we need to take into cognizance, the pretext, text, and post-text or in other words, what existed before the text, within it, and after it. Jameson's technique of narrative interpretation lies at the base of this thesis, which sees Armah's writing as a continuous narrative production from The Beautiful Ones to The Healers.

Time is a crucial feature of Armah's writing. For a thorough investigation of Armah's conception of time and his use of it within the narrative, this thesis will rely on the findings of Roman Jakobson in a study entitled "Dialogue on Time in Language and Literature" (1985). Jakobson declares that in the study of the development of language, it is crucial to adopt both the synchronic and the diachronic approach. Further, we must note that "Synchrony contains many a dynamic element ..." (12) and so it is in no way static. By the same token, within diachrony, we must also consider specific moments in time thus paying heed to some

static elements. Within the study of literature then, it becomes important to consider the backward movement of time as well as regarding time as a discontinuous factor. In so doing, features previously relegated to a bygone era of writing may be considered within present evolutions, so that the past is seen to be active in the present and future.

Ayi Kwei Armah's seeming recourse to the past is a curious phenomenon which this thesis will try to understand following the guidelines of Roman Jakobson's study.

IV. HYPOTHESES

This study is based on a number of assumptions which the thesis will clarify and demonstrate. Firstly, we shall assume that a full appreciation of literature is only possible through a thorough examination of the dialectical relationship between form and content.

We shall also assume that since the motif succeeds through its recurrence, it necessarily signifies not only the power of the artists imagination, but also, his perception of reality and his social vision.

In seeking to interpret the present and so project a future, literature will be intrinsically tied up with the past, a comprehension of which it must display. At the same time, it may be possible through a certain narrative technique for the writer to create futuristic pronouncements while making journeys into the past.

V. LITERATURE REVIEW

There are few literary works on the African scene that

have received as much attention from critics as Ayi Kwei Armah's first novel The Beautiful Ones Are not Yet Born (1968). The work has been the subject of numerous book reviews, critical essays and even scholarly dissertations. The majority of the book reviews merely retell the story. Through the piecing together of a number of incidents, the work is termed as pessimistic (Jones 1971). In other reviews, The Beautiful Ones is analyzed under the label "Novels of Disillusion" (Ravenscroft 1969).

The majority of critical essays available on Armah's The Beautiful Ones have a tendency to deal with the work purely at the level of content. Henry Chakava offers an appropriate example. He starts off by terming the novel as "the first piece of philosophical enquiry in the history of African literature, and its variety of motifs is enough to establish the author as a literary enigma" ("Ayi Kwei Armah and a Commonwealth of Souls" 195). Chakava's essay deals with the reality depicted in Armah's novel. He singles out evil and corruption as the most prominent features of the world Armah deals with and ties them up with the dominance of filth throughout the work. Chakava sees evil and corruption as the basis of conflict between body and soul which "the man" represents. He traces "the man's" efforts to remain above the evil and corruption that has enriched the likes of Joe Koomson. "The man's soul is continually facing and surmounting temptation from the body" (Chakava, 201). Chakava does not think Armah's novel offers any hope for society. Corruption is depicted as an innate and natural process and whatever goodness exists in the world is only transient. Thus it is that the essay concludes that Ayi Kwei Armah offers no hope for tomorrow, the world is

evil beyond redemption. "Armah's imagination is focused on a divine world ... it is a metaphysical commonwealth of souls" (207).

Henry Chakava's essay offers us one level of interpretation. Having termed the writer "a literary enigma", he cannot hope to unravel the work in totality. He lays emphasis on the "Ibsenian analogy in which organic decay was used to symbolize moral decay" (207) and approaches Armah's depiction of filth and excrement from this angle. At the same time, Chakava notes the dam, the stream and the sea as images that may offer another view of morality and corruption. The analysis is rewarding. It starts off by admitting that Armah's The Beautiful Ones is open to a number of interpretations and then proceeds to give us one interpretation. This kind of approach will be useful to this study in which one motif - that of journeying - is used to unravel various levels of meaning.

In The Emergence of African Fiction, Charles Larson approaches Armah's The Beautiful Ones and Fragments as examples of the produce of second generation African writers. This second generation of African writers, Larson tells us, is distinguished by the novelist's serious reflection upon the post-independence problems of his specific country. Larson lauds Armah's break from the African past, for it is the mark of his universality. He commends Armah's infrequent use of "Africanisms" in what he terms a timeless tale.

Charles Larson's analysis is wanting in many respects. He seems to think that breaking away from the past is a virtue, and even imagines that one can deal with

"the current day scene, the immediate" (Larson 244) without any reference to yesterday. Larson appears to have misread Armah. The Beautiful Ones and even Fragments speak as much ~~about~~ the colonial past as they deal with post-independence Ghana. Larson's analysis does not take into cognizance the fact that a novel, any novel, is always in the present in the mind of the reader. In this regard then, it is hardly important whether a novel is set in traditional African Society, colonial Africa or independent Africa, it will always speak in the present. Larson's analysis is further made deficient by his reliance on the concept of "universalism" as the mark of great African writing. Ayi Kwei Armah in an essay entitled "Larsony or Fiction as Criticism of Fiction" (1977) makes an appropriate response to Larsons' kind of interpretation. In the essay, Armah has underlined his reliance upon his own mother-tongue in his writings. He thereby negates Larson's accusations that he has no ties with his African past. Given the recent trend of Armah's fiction, Larson's analysis becomes both negative and impotent.

Shatto Arthur Gakwandi in an essay entitled "Freedom as Nightmare" declares Armah's The Beautiful Ones to be " ... by far the bleakest picture yet painted by a novel about the sourness of African independence" (87). Gakwandi takes note of the sense of decay in society which is emphasized by the images of filth and squalor that pervade the work. Gakwandi cannot accept the society Armah has depicted. For him, it is a one-sided view of reality and like Achebe, he is "unwilling to accept the story at the level of social realism" (Gakwandi, 87). For Achebe, the novel is sick, "not with the sickness of Ghana, but with the sickness of the human condition" (Morning yet on Creation Day

25). Indeed, both Gakwandi and Achebe cannot accept that Armah's story is set in Ghana. The "particularization of the story to Ghana is an inappropriate move" (Gakwandi, 88). The audience is not convinced since the presence of "the man" would appear to underline the vagueness and universalism of the work, observes Achebe. For him, the work is no more than "a moral fable" (25) pervaded by foreign metaphor.

Achebe and Gakwandi are both guilty of prescriptive criticism. They come to Armah's work with set parameters of what a novel set in neo-colonial Africa should deal with. In effect, they fail to analyze what Armah has actually written and how he has done it. Achebe's attitude would appear to stem from his idealist views of "the novelist as teacher". In such an instance, the novelist's duty is to reproduce a society that will show his readers how best to deal with tomorrow's world by talking about yesterday's errors. It is not befitting then for such a novelist to revel in filth and excrement.

Both Achebe and Gakwandi fail to appreciate the different kinds of reality a society entails depending on who is looking at it and where he is standing. For this reason, the two reject the reality Armah offers. While Achebe does not bother to illustrate what is so foreign about Armah's metaphors, Gakwandi approaches them with a more analytical mind. Moving away from the bleak reality of Koomsons' greed and "the man's" predicament, Gakwandi looks at the novel's title in a bid to understand Armah's social conception. In the last scene, "the man" witnesses an act of bribery which somehow inherently contains a glimmer of hope held in the solitary flower that brightens up the

corrupt bus. In the same way that the melodious sound of the chichidodo singing on top of the latrine pit is enticing, so too is "the man's" honesty and moral uprightness in the midst of treachery and moral laxity. Isolated though these instances are, Gakwandi sees them as offering hope in the novel.

Gakwandi has made use of symbolism to unravel the reality Armah depicts. This approach is useful for it underlines how meaning may be derived from signs. In much the same way, this thesis will try to see how various signs scattered in a text may be linked together and seen as one journey leading from one point to another.

In Bernth Lindfor's (ed) Researches in African Literatures, Neil Lazarus offers an engaging study of The Beautiful Ones entitled "Pessimism of the Intellect, Optimism of the Will: A Reading of Ayi Kwei Armah's *The Beautiful Ones Are not Yet Born*". The study deals with thematic aspects of the text and clarifies some hazy points about Armah's depiction of Ghanaian history. It becomes clear that the moral laxity and treachery now prevalent in neo-colonial Ghana had been seen and rejected in the decolonizing years by the masses. Kwame Nkrumah was embraced by these same masses because of the honesty and sincerity that he exuded. He recognized the importance of ordinary folk to the struggle and accorded them their rightful place on the platform. It is the change in Nkrumah and his partymen in the independence years that has shattered Ghanaian morality. Lazarus terms this change as "Nkrumah's 'Judas Kiss' of Africa" (144). Lazarus's study underlines The Beautiful Ones as a moral work. It weighs "the man's" struggles to remain morally

invulnerable and so provide society with some moral fibre and the correct course. This thesis lays firm importance on Lazarus' analysis. It shall try to outline the moral position of Armah's protagonists and gauge their development and successes.

Gerald Moore's review of Ayi Kwei Armah's Fragments, begins by applauding the novel as superior to the first in 'quality, profundity and originality' ("Armah's second Novel" 69). The review however does not go on to make any useful comparison between the two novels. It reviews the various episodes that make up Fragments and outlines the cinematic device as a crucial aspect of the novels narrative technique. If one ignores the universal epithets that set off the review and which it does not justify, Moore's essay becomes useful only for its emphasis on narrative technique in Fragments.

It is Emmanuel Obiechina however, who deals with the cinematic technique more comprehensively:

Like Soyinka, Armah employs a cinematographic technique, following his spotlight over well-chosen areas, dwelling on them long enough to build up impressions through which the moral state is expressed. He takes the reader on a guided tour illuminating the differences between the way in which the common people live and that of the elite, the filth and squalor of the one and the grandeur, opulence and sanitary splendour of the different world inhabited by the other (Culture, Tradition and Society In the West African Novel 153-4).

Obie china emphasizes the manner in which Armah

approaches varying realities and the keen perception that allows him to take in so much at one glance. Obiechina's analysis is valuable to this study. Just as variety may be captured in one lens, so also can a journey transcend realities of different kinds. A journey conceived through signs will afford many levels of interpretation since a single sign-post may contain many impressions. In this way, we can move through various stages or epochs in history. Along the journeys Armah is the guide and the reader perceives reality along with him.

Ayi Kwei Armah's writing has been the subject of a number of scholarly dissertations. Senda Wa Kwayera's B. A. Dissertation: "Ayi Kwei Armah's Fiction: Major Themes and Style" looks at the major themes in the earlier works and tries to relate them to style. The study is a useful departure from the previous trend of evaluating the novels purely at the level of content.

Wilberforce Osotsi's thesis: "An Approach to the Novels of Ayi Kwei Armah" offers an approach to the reading and understanding of Armah's novels. His study tries to see how the style of a work can enhance its content. Osotsi underlines Armah's conception of society as being Marxist oriented. The study then grapples with aspects of alienation as it is depicted in Armah's works. Osotsi emphasizes the language of Armah's works as exhibiting the alienation in the society under discussion. While this thesis is useful, it tends to be somewhat dogmatic, as if it would set compulsory rules by which we are to read Armah. The Marxist diatribe is exaggerated and Osotsi ignores the racial tone in the works.

Emmanuel Ngara's reflections on Armah's Two

Thousand Seasons contained in both Stylistic Criticism and the African Novel and Art and Ideology in the African Novel are a development upon Osotsi's approach. Ngara uses aspects of language to enhance his understanding of the novel. He singles out Armah's "decolonized" language as being noteworthy. His reversal of the traditional roles of the colours black and white so that white now stands for ugliness and destruction and black becomes the colour of beauty and purity is ingenious and effective in recreating Africa's past. Ngara also takes note of the epic qualities in Two Thousand Seasons and underlines them as being crucial to the content of the work.

In Art and Ideology Ngara attempts to unravel the writer's social vision and ideology by paying attention to the nature of his writing, its form and content. He examines for instance the way Armah has digressed from the traditional epic which sang praises to gods and mortals alike to an epic whose song is one of renunciation of all the kings who have participated in Africa's bondage. Ngara unveils Armah's advocacy of the armed struggle as the only means of wiping out oppression. He concludes that while Armah's social vision is aided by Marxist principles, his is primarily the advocacy of anti-neo-colonialism rather than the adoption of Marxist-Socialism.

Both of Ngara's studies are informative. His approach is rewarding for the way it relates form to content, showing them to be in dialectical interaction with one another. An appraisal of the journeying motif in Armah's fiction presupposes the importance of form to content in much the same way as Ngara has demonstrated.

Paul Ngige Njoroge in a thesis entitled "The Tradition of Search In West African Literature" has rightly included an analysis of Armah's Two Thousand Seasons. He notes Armah's extensive use of symbolism and states that it often leads to alienation since "the larger social / historical world is sometimes lost sight of" (Njoroge ix). Njoroge does not define what he understands alienation to mean or indeed how Armah's use of symbolism loses sight of reality. In his study of Fragments, Njoroge emphasizes the chaos and "lack of accommodation" which lead to loss of man's spirituality in the rush for material comfort. With Two Thousand Seasons, Njoroge rejects Armah's "mythology of symbols" (426) as being too emotive to contribute meaningfully to Africa's search. Indeed, he sees Armah's attitude as being neo-negritudist and alienated from the needs of the people.

The problem with Njoroge's study lies in its methodology. He defines a certain reality and then begins to search for it within Armah's novels. His approach fails to deal with what the works provide since he has already decided what they should provide. As Hayden White demonstrates in his Tropics of Discourse, reality is not a concrete thing. It varies and depends on who is perceiving it and how he perceives it. At the same time, we cannot concretely term reality as an immutable fact for it reveals itself differently at varying levels of analysis. Njoroge's thesis then is presumptuous in seeing Armah's use of symbolism as being disparate from the reality that surrounds him.

Margaret Folarin in a review of The Beautiful Ones makes an attempt to deal with Armah's use of symbolism and satire. She takes particular note of the

image of the sea which contains cleansing salt-water. Through the aspect of cleansing, she tries to see whether Armah is offering an optimistic view of society. In "the man's" struggles against corruption and moral degradation, Folarin sees an impossible task. For her, human nature cannot change given the picture Armah has drawn. Folarin's analysis does not pay heed to the novel's title. It is however useful because from it one can develop the concept of a moral journey, beginning with corruption and leading to the supposed cleansing. An important thing to note here is that a journey does not necessarily have to have an ending. This would resolve Folarin's confusion about the efficacy of salt as a cleansing agent.

Kolawole Ogungbesan's essay on the significance of symbolism in The Beautiful Ones is both engaging and rewarding. He begins from the premise that "any work of art carries more than one meaning (93). Thus he sets out to analyze the levels of meaning that can be gleaned from Armah's novel. Life may be perceived as a journey. In this respect, we must take note of speed, styles of driving and destination as important features of this journey. Ogungbesan singles out men like Koomson as those who have learnt how to drive, they move fast towards "the gleam" and have gained material comfort and wealth. Teacher on the other hand does not drive. He is static and has rejected all aspects of his society. "The man" lies somewhere between these two. Ogungbesan outlines "the man's" deliberately slow movement, in his day to day activities. We may relate this idea of movement to the question of growth as it appears in nature. Koomson's growth is unnatural, a kind of freak that necessarily results in an unproductive dead end. This thesis will make use of the concepts of speed, mode of movement

and destinations which Ogungbesan has identified as crucial aspects of journeys.

Robert Fraser's The Novels of Ayi Kwei Armah is useful to the extent that it tries to bring together the bulk of Armah's fiction. Unfortunately, Fraser tends to deal with each text separately, making only fleeting references to its relation to the others. Thus he notes for instance Armah's extensive use of the symbol of the stream in his fiction. Fraser notes that this symbol recurs to the point where it becomes a motif. Fraser's study however fails to deal with this motif conclusively. The conclusion to his work examines what he terms the "dogmatic thrust" (106) in Armah's last two novels. Fraser does not, however, indicate clearly the line between art and dogma.

Isidore Okpewho examines Two Thousand Seasons as an example of a modern myth. In the essay, he begins by relating the terms myth, reality and fiction. Myth according to Okpewho lies somewhere between fact and fiction. The study then seeks to unravel the importance of myth in projecting a culture of the future, for Two Thousand Seasons is here seen "to review the old mythic tradition and furnish new hopes" ("Myth and Modern Fiction" Armah's Two Thousand Seasons 3). The essay outlines the stylistic features Armah has borrowed from the oral tradition. There is the narrative voice, the idea of song, the use of repetition and also the narrative's general rhetorical flavour.

Okpewho's analysis is educative for the way it incorporates myth as a narrative technique. It helps to illuminate the devices that can be used to sustain a tale set over a period of one thousand years.

Okpewho's definition of myth is qualitative. By placing the emphasis on the fanciful in fiction, he equates history with fact. His view may be contrasted to that of Hayden White (Tropics of Discourse 1985). White maintains that history cannot categorically be termed as fact, since the historian is both selective and innovative in his manipulation of data as he records history. For White then, history is no more than a literary artefact. It is interesting therefore that Okpewho rejects the symbolism in Armah's Two Thousand Seasons on account of its intimate relationship with history. Okpewho declares that it is only the novel's time span - one thousand years - that renders any symbolic significance. In Okpewho's view, a novel that is so tied up with history cannot project adequately into the future. As such, his essay sees no significance between the past and the future. This thesis, however, will interpret Armah's recreation of the past as a way of outlining the future. Armah's myth-making will be seen as being geared towards mapping out a future.

This same view may be seen as the central prevailing idea in Hugh Webb's essay, "The African Historical Novel and the The Way Forward". Webb declares that in Two Thousand Seasons, Armah moves forward by first of all taking a backward glance. The novel is then seen as "a significant instance of the harmony of literary form that can be created by an artistic design uniting structure and meaning, ideology and performance" (Webb,32). Webb's analysis has taken into cognizance the selection that is involved in the writing of both history and literature. He relates Armah's work to the oral myths from which Armah has derived the title. The concept of "the way" is singled out for the way in which it is used to recreate

the moral values that Africa should adopt. Webb is aware that the writer has an intended audience, a unified Africa that has no use for political boundaries and the barriers of language. A study of the journeying motif in Armah's fiction will necessarily refer to the writer's fictionalized audience, paying attention to what may be termed a continental approach in the works.

In Bernth Lindfors journal Researches in African Literatures, Derek Wright makes a study entitled "Fragments The Akan Background". This essay is crucial for the way it relates the writer's use of tradition in explaining present-day phenomenon. The general conclusion here is that while Fragments does not urge a return to customs and values of a life that has vanished, it nonetheless offers an undeniable tenability of our past in the present. The Akan people's timeless perspective of life has been crucial in informing Armah's world-view. As such, he is able to abstract time and seek solutions to present contradictions in the past as much as in the here and now.

In another work, Bernth Lindfors examines "Armah's Histories". He considers Armah's "Janus like view" (86) which enables him to talk about the future while examining the past. Lindfors terms Two Thousand Seasons and The Healers "visionary myths rather than historical chronicles" (86). Lindfors' essay questions the future that Armah projects through his novels. He stresses the negative effects of these "racial epics" and sees Armah as advocating a kind of "anti-racist racism ... negritude reborn" (90) in Two Thousand Seasons.

Unlike Okpewho, Lindfors does not appreciate Armah's

myth-making. In his opinion, Armah falsifies history, creates a lie that is useless to his audience. But Lindfors would appear to have misread Armah's Two Thousand Seasons, recognized a rift in the unity of African societies long before the coming of the 'predators' and the 'destroyers'. Lindfors does not appreciate that even what we ordinarily term as history entails a lot of selection and that historians too resort to their imagination. We cannot therefore term a myth a lie, and history a fact. Both of them are created through a manipulation of the available data.

Lindfors approaches The Healers with much the same perception. He sees Armah as having substituted "concrete substance for abstract symbol" (91). He notes how the imagery of disease is used to hold the novel together and to embody Armah's political philosophy. The hero of this novel, Densu is seen by Lindfors to belong to a breed of saintly people, flawless in character. Through him and the other healers, Armah seems to be advocating the role of the writer as that of inspiring Africa to a better future. But for all this, The Healers remains a "cartoon, still comic strip history" (95). The essay concludes that it will not be rewarding to the adult reader for it is oversimplified history. It can only be enjoyed at the level of "juvenile adventure fiction" (95). Lindfors predicts that the novel's major impact will be upon the younger generation: "and this is as it should be in any mythologizing of Africa. One must aim at winning the hearts and minds of the young, imbuing them with the highest ideals and making them proud and happy to be Africans" (95).

This analysis of Armah's historical novels is both audacious and derogatory. It is prescriptive and

approaches the novels with far too many preconceptions. While Lindfors appears to recognize the importance of the past to the future, he appears to sneer at the novelist's attempt to recreate history. For him, history is the realm of trained historians who produce fact without a recourse to their imaginations. Precisely because he has inadequate parameters, Lindfors seeks refuge in comparing the novels with "pure history". But even here, he does not clearly define where history ends and the comic begins. Lindfors' reading of these works does not inform him about the nature of Armah's audience. Thus he concludes that cartoons can only be useful to children.

Wole Soyinka's study of Armah's writing begins by paying heed to the relationship between the novelist and history. He asserts that one of the social functions of literature is to have "visionary reconstruction of the past for the purpose of social direction" (Myth, Literature and The African World 106). In his view, the social vision of a work is far more important than its literary ideology. Soyinka recognizes the visionary projection of society in Armah's fiction. He sees his writing as being aimed towards a "racial retrieval" (108). This view explains not only Armah's whole depiction of history but it also identifies his audience as the African peoples. Precisely because Lindfors lacks this kind of insight, he fails to appreciate Armah's use of history. Soyinka's study then will be valuable to this thesis for it offers insights into Armah's continental approach. At the same time, through Soyinka's analysis, we are able to see Armah as something of an iconoclast, shattering old deities so as to move on and create new ones.

CHAPTER I:

**ARMAH'S FICTION AND BLACK HISTORY :
AN OVERVIEW**

In the course of this examination of what we have termed "The Journeying Motif in The Fiction of Ayi Kwei", we shall in this Chapter look into what we have found to be the central organizing principle in Ayi Kwei Armah's works. It is central because it is predominant in each of his works, and a principle because it remains uncompromised within the works and is gradually built up to the point of an undisputable fact of African existence. This all-consuming preoccupation that informs Armah's works is African history - not as an end in itself, but rather as a tenable and useful phenomenon in the understanding of today's problems and the mapping out of tomorrow's Africa.

The use of African history in modern creative writing from the continent is in itself nothing unusual. Indeed, there is amongst our African writers a tendency to shape one's literary career alongside the historical moments that have gone into the making of our past. As a result, we find that a writer's first works will be set in pre-colonial and colonial times, demonstrating the impact of colonialism upon African life. In later works, the writer will move on to depict our present predicaments in independent times and perhaps point towards our future.

This chronological pattern or allegiance to the Gregorian calendar may be seen in the novels of Chinua Achebe for instance. Things Fall Apart and Arrow of God speak of the advent of British administration amongst the Igbo people of eastern Nigeria. No Longer At Ease is set in the transitional period between the end of the colonial rule and the onset of independence. The early years of independent Nigeria are again discussed in A Man of the People, while Anthills of The Savannah reflects upon Nigeria's recent and current history of military leadership. We can trace this same chronological pattern in Sembene Ousmane's works from God's Bits of

Wood through The Money Order with White Genesis, Xala and onto the The Last of The Empire. The pattern is indeed a popular trend.

In a seminar paper entitled "Ayi Kwei Armah and the Concept of Defamiliarization" which was subsequently published in Mwangaza, Arthur Luvai discusses this trend in African writing and tries to examine the writings of Ayi Kwei Armah against this background. That Ayi Kwei Armah chooses to begin with independent Ghana in The Beautiful Ones and Fragments and then move back into transitional Africa in Why Are We So Blest? and then again move back into pre-colonial Africa in Two Thousand Seasons and then take a small step forward into early colonialism in The Healers, marks for Luvai a point in Armah's habit of defamiliarizing what we already know. Of this peculiarity Luvai remarks, "It is as if the writer were moving back in time rather than forward as is the case with most other African writers" (4). Luvai's paper is however quick to note that Armah retains a strong allegiance to Africa's past in his journeys backwards and forwards into our history. It states that the reflection of African history in Armah's works is enhanced by a constant resort to "myth, legend and epic" (4). It is the task of this particular chapter to highlight the specific historical events that Armah's works explore. Having done so, we shall attempt to seek a plausible explanation for Armah's reversal of the order of these events to create a unique pattern in his writing.

At a time when Africa's writers had visibly joined hands with her historians to state and reassert the history of her people, Ayi Kwei Armah seemed to remain above the ongoing struggle and set his first novel, The Beautiful Ones in present-day independent Ghana. The period under examination in this work does little to underline the specific and unique culture held by the black man. Beyond the

cursory references by Teacher to a colonial past, we do not feel the African as having his own unique history. Armah is here concerned with outlining the culture of the times. We witness therefore the concerns of the emerging middle-class and even more importantly, the workings of Nkrumah's Ghana at the political level. In The Beautiful Ones, Armah grapples with contemporary history, one that is still in the making. It is clear that the narrator is himself unsure whether the trends he sees are a result of the events in the past or whether the emerging culture itself yields this multiplicity of problems.

Fragments which was written in 1969 and based on the same period in Ghanaian life concentrates more on the socio-cultural dimension of the newly independent state. Here, we see Armah marking a clear demarcation between the culture of pre-colonial Ghana, specifically of the Akan peoples and that of the emerging Ghanaian middle-class. Naana, Baako's grandmother, represents a by-gone age. She alone stands for the traditional way of doing things. Consequently, she notes the modern distortions of the send-off ceremony at Baako's departure, and the careful manipulation of the "outdooring" ceremony into a fund-raising occasion.

It is specifically in these two ceremonies that Armah gives us a glimpse of traditional Africa. We notice the traditional Akan religion as one that offered a powerful link between the living and the dead. As Baako prepares to leave for the United States, he is considered a traveller not just abroad, but into a world where he can intercede for those whom he has left behind. This is the origin of the "cargo-cult" mentality that now cripples the Ghanaian middle-class. The "been to" undergoes a certain kind of death which is itself beneficial to those who have remained behind. In going away, the "been-to" dies in the lives of his people. At the same time, he is the link that will bring back cargo and

wealth from the world he has visited. As such, the "been-to" forms a link between the living and their Creator.

The traditional outdoor ceremony was meant to welcome the newly born into the world of the living. For the infant's first eight days, he is considered to still exist in the spirit world, communing with the ancestors. The outdoor ceremony is crucial because it bridges the distance between the two worlds, confirming the child as a member of the world "of heavy flesh" (136). Akan religion then involved specific beliefs about life and death. These beliefs were reinforced in the way people related to one another. A child for instance was closer to its maternal uncle than to its own father. The reason was that the maternal uncle springing out of the same womb as the child's mother was seen to have a more definite link with the woman's off-spring. Similarly, death in Akan tradition was not viewed as a final ending. Rather it was the occasion for another beginning in the world of the ancestors. The spirit does not die, it simply finds a new home. Traditionally then there was a certain tenable link between the old and the very young, hence Naana's reflection: "The little one is gone; soon he will be the elder of his great-grandmother there" (276).

In Fragments, Armah shows us the diminishing importance of these rituals and of the beliefs that accompany them. In their place has come about a new religion - the senseless worshipping of material trappings. This culture is similar to the one we witnessed in The Beautiful Ones, it is born of the socio-political framework which is under examination here. In these two works, it is made clear that Ghana as a nation has taken the wrong turn. In effect, Nkrumah's regime comes under fire as one that betrayed the hopes and aspirations of the people he led to independence.

Historical accounts of the period have tried to analyze the failure of this regime at the level of one man's personality. In much the same way as Armah lays the responsibility on the leadership of the time, Bob Fitch in Ghana : The End of an Illusion, notes that Nkrumah turned out to be

a romantic African Marxist whose megalomania grew as his charisma dwindled ... he sank the whole economy under the weight of scores of grandiose but impractical schemes for industrial development (9).

Beyond Nkrumah's own personality, Fitch observes that the leadership failed because the break with the "colonial past was not made soon enough, and because when it was made, it was not complete enough". (83). Indeed, we note in both The Beautiful Ones and Fragments, the adoption of and reliance upon western culture and practice. Traditional or indigenous Ghanaian life has been cast aside in favour of the colonial master and other Westerners. In these two works then, we see a people who will not define their own mode of existence for themselves. The fact that Fragments closes on Naana's reflections underlines Armah's message that this society ought to consider indigenous practice as opposed to the Western values that currently define it. Of her past - which is her future held by her ancestors in the world she is approaching - Naana ponders: "You are the end. The beginning. You who have no end" (278). Clearly, Armah is making a call for a return to the traditional way of running society. As a result of this projection into the past, we are not surprised when Armah takes a backward step in Two Thousand Seasons, unearthing the history of the continent. The work is important for the way it fills the gaps in African history. Like Chancellor Williams and Cheikh Anta Diop, Armah actively asserts the truth about the African heritage

which years of colonial rule and fiction had managed to distort and obliterate.

Having defined the post-independence societies of Africa, Armah appears to be eager not only to find solutions to tomorrow's societies, but also, he is anxious to understand the precise reasons for the current set-up that we have. In his next work Why Are We So Blest?, Armah chooses a scenario that may be synonymous with any African country struggling from colonialism to independence. Armah seems to be saying that the society he depicted in his first two works is applicable in any independent African country. As such, the past of these countries may be viewed as one whole. The reasons for the formation of the society we saw in The Beautiful Ones and Fragments are now sought for in Why Are We So Blest? Indeed, the title echoes Armah's concern.

This work does not however fully answer the riddle it has set. We are presented with a society marked by neglect and confusion. All around him, Solo sees nothing but poverty and dejection. This is not the society that independence promised. It is not what the people hoped for. In bringing Solo into a close association with Modin, the would-be revolutionary, Armah tries to map out the mistakes that were made by the African peoples right from the moment of the independence struggle. We see how within the struggle there were those like Modin, eager to participate in the emancipation of their people and yet unable to purge themselves of a naked worship of the colonizers ways. There is little if anything that is rootedly African in the ideas Modin has of the struggle. Modin underlines the truth of Bob Fitch's observation that part of the reason for the failure of African independence, was the failure of the leadership to break away effectively from the colonizer and his ways.

But even far worse than Modin's ill-placed revolutionary zeal is Aimee's nonchalant attitude to the real struggle. For her, it is just another adventure. Clearly, neither Modin nor Aimee possess the values that will be needed to sustain the revolution. We know that one cannot build a society on the ideas and ideology of others.

What arises directly out of this work, is an urgent need to discover the factors that have led to the slave-mentality of the Modins of our continent. Having tentatively determined that independent African society is more inclined towards material accumulation at the expense of communal effort and integrity, because of a failure to correctly conceptualize the goals of the independence struggle, Armah must now turn towards an understanding of the factors that have been responsible for our negation of ourselves and our values and the subsequent adoption of another people's way of life and ethics.

Judging from what comes out of the next work, Two Thousand Seasons Armah finds that his answers to the riddle "Why Are We So Blest?" lie deep in our pre-colonial past. Quite clearly then Armah's retrieval of our African past is brought on by a deep moral concern. His quarrel with the newly independent African countries would appear to be wholly moral. It is their lack of a moral character and communal integrity that have triggered off his writing. Before we move on to examine the substance of Two Thousand Seasons and The Healers where Armah seeks out the heritage of the African peoples its hopes, its losses and its advantages, let us first examine what we have here identified as the cause for his reversal of the Gregorian calendar - that underlying moral concern which we shall here term as "The Moral Trip".

CHAPTER II:

THE MORAL TRIP

The term "morality" has no thumb and finger definition. Rather, it is open to a variety of interpretations, the majority of which appear to agree that what lies at the basis of morality is a normative concern with the code of conduct in society, and, the degree of the individual's conformity to societal ethics. Indeed, Webster's Seventh New Collegiate Dictionary cites morality as "doctrine or system of morals ... conformity to ideals of right human conduct".

The Great Soviet Encyclopedia sees morality as "one of the basic means of normative regulation of human actions in society". Thus, we must understand morality as a kind of "social consciousness and a type of social relationship" (Great Soviet). Once people are living together as a community, there is an urgent need to harmonize their actions. Automatically, there will arise general rules about behaviour, precepts and values. In this sense, human conduct is regulated in a consciousness that transcends all aspects of societal life - family, work, learning, politics, personal, daily routine, intragroup, interclass and even international relations. We can see, therefore, that morality represents "that which is universal and fundamental and that which makes up the culture of human relationships, the accumulated experience of society's century-long development" (Great Soviet).

It is important however that we appraise this term morality from the point of view of the individual. In this vein, the Encyclopedia Britannica underlines that morality involves choice. Just as the standards of what is right and wrong will vary from one society to the next, so also will the individual's conception of right and wrong depend upon his own perception of life. Indeed,

... the individual consciousness plays a tremendous role

in morality, for it permits the individual to control and inwardly motivate his actions, justify them independently, and work out his own line of conduct within the collective or group (Great Soviet).

Generally speaking, what should be and what is will rarely ever coincide in morality. One finds therefore, that the individual is called upon to make useful criticism of an order whose morality is questionable i.e. in the instance when what is varies remarkably from what should be. Action of this sort may, once it gains prominence and popularity, be the founding spirit of revolution and change in society.

For a working definition of this Chapter then, we shall refer to morality firstly, in its communal sense. We shall therefore underline it as a distinguishing aspect of each culture, each nation and each generation. By examining what can be termed as the moral sense of the world's Ayi Kwei Armah portrays in The Beautiful Ones, Fragments and Why Are We so Blest? we shall be better able to define these societies.

At the same time, it will be vital for us to consider and use in this chapter, the term morality in its individualistic sense. In this instance, we shall pay heed to the moral courses traversed by Armah's protagonists and try to understand these against the background of the societies from which these people stem. In effect, we shall be involved in a search for a moral centre through the individual who is operating within the frame work of a particular community.

The Beautiful Ones

The opening pages of the novel plunge the reader into an atmosphere of filth, squalor and decay. The very first action we bear witness to is that of the bus driver spitting "a

atmosphere of
filth, squalor
& decay

generous gob of mucus against the ^{eye} "tire" (Armah, The Beautiful Ones 1).

Henry Chaka^va in an essay entitled "Ayi Kwei Armah and a Commonwealth of Souls" draws our attention to the manner in which Armah uses images of filth, squalor and excrement to symbolize society's moral decay and degeneration. Indeed, the bus driver's action is but an echo of his conductor's corrupt practices of giving passengers the wrong change and pocketing the difference. As the novel's protagonist, simply called "the man" leaves the bus, we follow him through the littered streets of ^{Takoradi} Accra all the time assaulted by images of over flowing rubbish heaps and pursued by the putrid stench of rot and decay. "The man" walks quite slowly. At the Railway and Harbour Administration Block where "the man" works, we along with him are again haunted by dirty walls and rotten banisters, a clear indication of the corrupt activities of those who work within.

At the same time, we are made aware of the financial deprivation of the workers and their struggles to make ends meet. Undoubtedly, this is an underlying cause of peoples' resort to bribery and corruption. The bus conductor in order to survive from one passion week to the next gives his passengers the wrong change and keeps the difference. "The man" is himself presented with an opportunity to make some extra money by accepting a bribe from the corpulent timber merchant Amankwa who wishes to secure some space for his cargo on the goods train. At this juncture, we notice "the man's" unusual stance. He genuinely does not understand the timber merchant's proposal. There is no need for it. Amid all the filth and corruption that goes on around him, "the man" is persistently intrigued by images of light and cleanliness. When the timber merchant asks him what he drinks by way of offering him a bribe,

"the man" replies simply "water". This no doubt is a clear indication of his desire to remain clean and to pursue a life free of all the evil and corruption around him.

And yet, somehow "the man" cannot relate to the gleam of the Atlantic-Caprice. It stands in the midst of the squalor of the streets, tall, "... insulting white in the concentrated gleam of the hotel's spotlights ..." (10). For "the man", the Atlantic-Caprice offers a strange kind of attraction for it somehow seems to attract and at the same time repel.

It is in Joe Koomson's house that we once again encounter this strange cleanliness and light.

It was amazing how much light there was in a place like this. It glinted off every object in the room ... Light came off the marble tops of the little side tables ... All the man could see was a row of glass-covered shelves and with a multitude of polished dishes and glass (145-6).

When Koomson himself eventually descends, he is wrapped in a "shiny" robe, helping to reflect even more light off himself. "Mrs Koomson descended the stairs, wearing a dress that seemed to catch each individual ray of light and aim it straight to the beholding eye". (148).

Indeed, "the man's" wife, Oyo, had earlier referred to Estella Koomsons' life as a clean one. It is ironical then that in this home so full of light and so clean we hear a clear appreciation of the evil and corruption that bedevil Ghana. Upon hearing Estella's sister in London requires foreign exchange to import a Jaguar, Koomson declares to the gathering that "Everything is possible. It depends on the person" (149).

Indeed, the very purpose for which Oyo and "the man" have come to Koomson's home is to fulfil some underhand and illegal deal in the boating business. It is in Koomson's home that the necessary documents are signed.

Koomson and Estella while leading a comfortable and seemingly clean life are in fact trapped in a web of bribery and corruption. They have no moral background. Koomson's success has been 'the result of moral laxity and an ability to spot the main chance' (Fraser, The Novels of Ayi Kwei Armah 17). As "the man" declares to his wife, "some of that kind of cleanliness has more rottenness in it than the slime at the bottom of the garbage dump" (44). And yet,

It is Koomson rather than the man who is seen to epitomize the moral outlook of the nation, for, despite his wealth and prestige, Koomson's ideals correspond to the triumphant average ... despite his sense of exclusiveness, he is essentially a creature of the times; his rapid materialism acts as an intense focus of the cravings of a nation obsessively bent on the pillage of its newly acquired spoils. (Fraser, 17).

I have quoted extensively from Fraser because of the clarity with which he captures the moral framework of the Ghana Armah has depicted.¹¹ Thus, while men like Koomson appear as the success every man wants to emulate, their material affluence is but a thin veil of the moral bankruptcy that lurks within them. The bus conductor and the timber merchant while a lot less affluent, reflect precisely the same mentality as that of Joe Koomson. In effect, the attitude of these people would appear to be a kind of national consciousness, something that has wielded a strong and faithful cult.¹¹ Evil and corruption are a national malaise. The

plagiarism

moral fibre of the nation has been eroded, it does not exist.

When we first meet him, "the man" is asleep in a bus at dawn. Quite obviously, he is oblivious of his surroundings, a non-participant really. In this instance, "the man" is strangely "above" the devious acts of the bus conductor. And yet, his indifference is at the same time party to the moral decadence of his people. Asleep on the bus, he carelessly contributes to the filth and dirt all around him:

For in the soft vibrating light inside the bus, he saw, running down from the left corner of the watcher's mouth, a stream of the man's spittle. Oozing freely, the oil-like liquid first entangled itself in the fingers of the watcher's left-hand, underneath which it spread and touched the rusty metal lining of the seat with a dark sheen, then descended with quiet inevitability down the dirty aged leather of the seat itself, losing itself at last in the depression made by the joint"(5).

From this beginning as an ignorant participant, we follow "the man" through what Neil Lazarus has termed a "Voyage of Discovery" (137) and see how he provides a differing morality from that of the society. As we consider the actions of "the man" and his moral stance, it becomes evident that morality may be perceived from many angles, among them, the spiritual, the material and the political.

At the spiritual level, "the man" is at the beginning unaware of his own stance vis-a-vis that of those around him. He has not clearly defined his position as that of one who differs let alone objects. With time however, we begin to note how he makes conscious choices indicating his moral position. One such instance is his encounter with Amankwa the timber merchant. Another is at Koomson's house when he refuses

to sign the papers to seal the boating deal in which Koomson wants to use Oyo and her mother as a front for his own business.

We notice that "the man's" choices are all the time made more difficult firstly by his own conscience and secondly by his wife Oyo. "The man" finds it difficult to reject the glowing gleam of the Atlantic-Caprice, symbol of wealth and splendour and destination for those who have arrived. The beauty and convenience of the gadgets in Koomsoon's house is real for "the man", he cannot deny how much he would love to get them even if not for himself, then for the children. Oyo, his wife, and indeed his whole family are a constant pressure on "the man's" choices. When he relates the story of the timber merchant to Oyo, she calls him a chichidodo, the bird that eats worms but hates the shit in which they breed. Quite honestly, "the man" cannot deny his family's desires, it is the means to attaining them that he will not succumb to. To do this, would be to compromise his morality and the test of integrity has always been its refusal to be compromised.

It is the "the man's" wife, Oyo, who first introduces the conception of life as a journey and the driving metaphor that relates to this conception.

She let me know that human beings were like so many people driving their cars on all these roads. This was the point at which she told me that those who wanted to get far had to learn to drive fast. And then she asked me what name I would give to people who were afraid to drive fast, or even to drive at all ... Accidents would happen she told me, but the fear of accidents would never keep men from driving, and Joe Koomson had learned to drive. (58-9).

"The man" must constantly grapple with the fact that those who now aspire to material and political greatness were no different from him a few short years ago. Joe Koomson was his classmate. "The man" begins to admit to some kind of failure, a failure which would account for his present position of financial deprivation and political obscurity. In the circumstances, he knows many moments of self-doubt and a general state of apprehension. He begins to question his own morality vis-a-vis that of men like Koomson. Indeed, vis-a-vis that of the rest of humanity that surrounds him.

Kolawole Ogungbesan in an essay entitled "Symbol and Meaning in The Beautiful Ones are Not Yet Born", uses Oyo's driving metaphor to highlight new levels of meaning in the novel. Having taken life as a journey, and in this instance specifically a road journey, Ogungbesan places Joe Koomson at the top end of the spectrum, "the man" in the middle and Teacher at the lower end. Koomson has learnt how to drive, he has consequently arrived at great wealth and social recognition. Ogungbesan draws our attention to such features as speed, mode of movement and destinations.

We always see Koomson and his family in fast moving cars headed for the Atlantic-Caprice, symbol of those who have arrived. Even his young daughter, Princess, is seen on a fast moving bicycle, quite a contrast to "the man's" pedestrian status.

This love for speed and fast moving devices is later echoed in Baako's uncle, Foli, whom we meet in Fragments. Like Koomson, Foli exemplifies a keen worship for material things in his lust for wines and spirits thoroughly uncontrolled and boldly greedy. Foli will not even pour a generous drink for the approbation of the ancestors lest there should be too little remaining for his own greedy throat:

The pig Foli, in spite of the beauty of the words he had spoken, remained inside his soul a lying pig. A shameful lot more than a whole half bottle of the drink had remained unpoured, ... (Fragments 9).

At the far end of the spectrum stand Teacher and Rama Krishna, examples of those who have chosen a life of inactivity, by retreating into marginality. When we first meet Teacher through his friend "the man", we see him at home, naked and lying in his bed, free of any motion. Teacher's nakedness is symbolic of his break with familial ties and social responsibilities. And yet, not even Teacher has managed to solve their moral dilemma. His loneliness is evidence of his uncertainty about the position he has chosen.

How can I think I am doing the right thing when I am alone and there are so many I have run from? Who is right at all? I have chosen something, but it is not something I would have chosen if I had the power to choose truly. I am just sitting here and if you think I am happier than you driving out there, you just don't know what I feel inside (60).

Teacher has repudiated life and his action has proved futile and unrewarding. He is like the pencil sharpener at "the man's" office, having "the futile freedom of a thing connected to nothing else". (17). Teacher's belief is that man is destined to suffer. This position is reflected in the title of the Greek tragedy "the man" finds him reading - He Who Must Die. "It is not a choice between life and death, but what kind of death we can bear in the end. Have you not seen there is no salvation anywhere? (56).

The highlife tune that plays on Teachers radio is illustrative

of his moral position. It is this same stand that "the man" struggles to take:

Those who are blessed with power
 And the soaring swiftness of the eagle
 And have flown before,
 Let them go.
 I will travel slowly,
 And I too will arrive

And have climbed in haste,
 Let them go
 I will journey softly,
 But I too will arrive (51-2).

It is clear that in the world of the novel, speed is presented as being "inversely related to virtue" (Mamudu, "Making Despair Bearable" 13). For Teacher, the only option is a lack of speed.

It is however important to trace the origins of Teacher's attitude. His has been the result of political betrayal at its highest. In the days before Ghana's independence, Teacher was a committed nationalist. Through him, Armah asserts that in Ghana's decolonizing years, there was true potential for radical reform. The coming of Nkrumah signalled for many the birth of a new nation "the promise was so beautiful. Even those who were too young to understand it all knew that at last something good was being born. It was there. We were not deceived about that" (85). Here Armah emphasizes the authenticity with which Nkrumah struck the masses. They had faith in liberation through him. They were certain of drastic social reform, to the advantage of black people. Nkrumah was no mere agitator, he was a man committed to the people. As Teacher recollects, "It is so simple. He was good when I had to speak to us, and liked to L he

be with us (88). Once independence was attained, Nkrumah forgot his own mortality, power went to his head and he himself planted the seeds of betrayal. What Teacher and others like him in the novel cannot relate to, is the difference between what has come to be, and what might have been. The novel underlines the failure of Nkrumah's party to lead Ghana away from foreign domination particularly at the economic level. This situation is given special significance for it may be a source of the nation's moral decline:

Here we have had a kind of movement that would make even good stomachs go sick. What is painful to the thinking mind is not the movement itself, but the dizzying speed of it. It is that which has been horrible. Unnatural, I would have said, had I not stopped myself with asking, unnatural according to what kind of nature? ... How horribly rapid everything has been from the days when men were not ashamed to talk of souls and of suffering and of hope, to these lowly days of smiles that will never again be sly enough to hide the knowledge of betrayal and deceit. There is something of an irresistible horror in such quick decay (62).

The weight of this betrayal is placed squarely on the shoulders of all the followers of the leader's bad faith. It is they who are responsible for the consequence of the nation's moral decadence.

Clearly then, Teacher's is a post-commitment mentality. The series of disappointment have been more than he can handle, he has now found his own way of dealing with life in Ghana. "In Teacher's eyes, there is nothing in social reality upon which to ground a public morality. Time passes,

whisperings swell into movements, into mass activity, and then subside, decay and dissolve" (Lazarus 165-6).

Ghana's unnatural growth is symbolized by the picture of the man-child Aboliga the Frog shows to "the man" in their youth. This human baby had completed the life cycle from infancy through to youth, maturity and old age in the space of seven years. It was a freak. Ghana, progressing at a "dizzying speed" it can barely control was headed for the same kind of freak life and early destruction.

"The man's" acute sensivity and social awareness make it difficult for him to remain in limbo like his friend Teacher. "The man" feels a powerful need to defend what he feels is his innate morality and so he constantly negates the evil and corruption heaped upon him by Oyo, Koomson, Amankwa and even the bus conductor. And yet "the man" remains wholesomely humane. His recognition of the temptations the Atlantic-Caprice offers, indeed his approval of the creative energy the struggle to reach "the gleam" produces, are reflective of his keen humanity. The man does not deny the comfort of Koomson's and Estella's life, it is the means with which to reach it that he disapproves of "Cutting corners, eating the fruits of fraud ... That has always been the way the gleam is approached: in one bold, corrupt leap." (95-6)

... it is fair to say that the man is trapped in his humanity; that far from being a moral fossil calcified into a virtuous ideal, he keeps struggling to reconcile the practice of virtue and being human (Mamudu 7).

Thus for instance, we find "the man" enjoying a clear burst of energy and happiness when he manages to shop for all the things Oyo requires for her luncheon. He does not deny

the creativeness induced by the desire and effort to arrive at "the gleam". It is the means to arriving at "the gleam" which his society endorses that the man rejects. This is where his greatness lies. "The man" clearly opts for a quality of life and we are called upon to applaud his self-discipline, self-control, restraint and patience. He must keep the utmost vigilance so as to steer away from the temptations prompted by "the gleam".

We may therefore begin to appreciate the manner in which "the man" provides his society with an element of moral fibre. His successes are few and he goes about his task without any false optimism. What is important to begin with, is the mere act of resisting the order society enforces on him. All he can hope for at present is to be able to feel certain that his way of life is justified even if he lacks the political clout to enforce it at the national level. That he has been able to deny the attraction of "the gleam" is creative enough in itself.

Perhaps the most tangible attempt at giving the society some kind of moral rearmament comes in the "the man's" compliance to helping Joe Koomson escape to safety after the military take-over. "The man" leads Koomson through the underground tunnel of the pit latrine on his compound. This act is itself symbolic of the new baptism men like Koomson need to go through. The man's contact with an act of bribery at the harbour is cleansed by the salt-water of the sea that he swims in on his way home. At the same time, we are made keenly aware of the political dimension of morality. "The man" is helpless to intervene in the act of bribery he witnesses between the driver of the bus and the policeman on the highway. Evidently, it will be a long time before the lone morality of one individual can filter through the ranks of society, not unless that man is imbued with power at the national level, the kind Nkrumah had access to.

The significant thing about "the man's" choice is that he continues to live actively within his society unlike Teacher and Rama Krishna who search for an illusionary world. In the words of Henry Chakaya, "His determination to continue to live in this society and endure public disgrace, family abuse and mental conflict without being defeated is the greatest sign of hope in the whole book". (200). That "the man" contentedly walks back home after his excursions at the harbour is further proof of his choice to continue living with familial tensions but with a clear conscience. His eventual conversion of Oyo, his wife, into his way of thinking is nothing short of a triumph. It helps "the man" to regain his self-esteem through the support of his wife's respect for him. His has been the first vital and significant step, it is now up to "the beautiful ones" of the future to take up the task of reconstruction. Fragments echoes a similar narrative technique.

Fragments

Much of the power of this novel, Fragments, arises from the very urgent questions it raises concerning the freedom of the individual, as well as his active participation in and place within his society. The title itself makes reference to the relationships between people, as well as to the vital cohesion of Ghana as a nation given its heterogeneous nature and aggravated by its clear class system.

The first indication we get that there is something markedly unsound in this post-independence society, is brought to us through the journeys of Juana the Puerto Rican psychiatrist. Juana has fled her native land in search of a new life away from the broken dreams of her past and of her aborted marriage. Working at the hospital in Accra, Juana often has need to wonder at the efficacy of her job. Tired and filled

with a longing to seek out harmony and peace, she has developed a penchant for driving around the country.

This need of hers for a periodic escape was in some way a cure for her own long unease, thus leaving Accra to come out for air, with the used portion of the day behind her lined with the wrecked minds it was her job to try and repair, and within the city itself behind her, made as if by some clever mind to produce exactly these wrecks that were her job and such an important, invading part of her own life now (Armah, Fragments, 20).

Traveling around the countryside, Juana bears witness to more acts of a deviation from what ought to be the norm and begins to question her attempts to bring back to reality those who have found a form of escape. It is on one of Juana's escapes from the town that she encounters a crowd of men carrying weapons gathered around a single rabid dog. In the midst of this crowd is a young boy who appears to be the owner of the sick dog and implores the crowd to leave him alone with his sick friend.

Armah skillfully builds up the tension through a slow rendition that allows him to describe the mood, appearance and action of each of the men. It is only the little boy who owns the dog who bears an emotion varied from the zest for brutality that the crowd displays. This young boy displays not just a capacity for life, but also a desire to set right what has gone wrong in this life, as is evidenced by his desire to take care of his feverous dog. It appears that the crowd cannot allow such a passion for active life to go unquashed.

It is interesting to note that the man who eventually strikes the first blow bears some kind of physical deformity which

greatly threatens his masculinity. For him, the killing of the dog is a way of reaffirming his manhood and thus reassuring himself. For this reason, he moves from the fringes of the circle to its centre to strike the decisive blow. Juana a psychiatrist is able to relate to his actions:

... Juana saw in his eyes a manic shine with far more burn in it than that possessing any of the others, and she knew at once that this was a man who needed something like the first killing of the dog for reasons that lay within and were far more powerful than the mere outside glory open to the hunter with his kill (26).

The brutality with which this man kills the rabid dog is a way of exorcising a life of masculine impotence. Indeed, as he leaves the crowd, he appears to be truly rejuvenated. "The triumphant killer walked off with his prize in a strange way, as if it were his intention to go through all the motions of a runner while keeping a walkers speed" (27). We notice the way Armah uses the speed of one's movement to connote success or failure. Here, the change in the man's composure and his freed masculinity are indicated by his increased pace. The little that holds him back is finally released when the swollen scrotal sac bursts. "... for the killer himself, a wild feeling of relief seemed to have come in place of the first, short fear." He now walked "with the high, proud, exaggerated steps of a puppet" (28).

This scene is important for the way it sets the mood of the rest of the novel. Indeed, it forms a kind of prelude to the work. It covers the tempo of a society prone to idleness, creative deadness and the tendency to destroy whatever may vaguely threaten the people's mental indolence.

In much the same way as the rabid dog, Baako, the novel's

protagonist, is a victim of society's own internal contradictions. He presents a different approach to life, a singularly disciplined moral position. For this reason, Baako is regarded as a threat, one moreover that his people can not live with. We detect his aloneness right at the beginning of the novel. Here, Baako is the lone traveller, burdened with a people's expectations and obliged not to disappoint them. At this point, he is unaware of the precise implications of such expectations, indeed "he was impatient like a child to see it end" (8). It is clear that at the onset of his journey, Baako has an open mind, he is unburdened by any fears or prejudices.

This Baako that we first meet through Naana, his grandmother, is markedly different from the Baako we encounter upon his return. Now, the traveller's baggage is heavier. Ironically, it is not the physical luggage his people expect him to carry from across the seas that weighs Baako down. Rather, it is the burden on his mind that he labours under. Baako is apprehensive. One of his foremost fears is that he has been unable to fulfil the expectations of Efua, Araba and the community at large. He has not corresponded to the norms of a true "been-to," Baako confesses to a feeling of nervousness, a fear of what he will find back home. Clearly, he is at variance with his society. As Robert Fraser notes, "The point of friction between Baako and his people is far from single or simple. It is determined by a whole bunch of attitudes on both sides which shape the area of conflict" (The Novels of Ayi Kwei Armah 33).

The society from which Baako stems has rigid ideas about a "been to". These ideas are concretized within the cargo-cult mentality; what Chinua Achebe has termed, "a belief by backward people that someday, without any exertion whatsoever on their own part, a fairy ship will dock in their harbour laden with every goody they have always dreamed

of possessing" (The Trouble With Nigeria 9). This attitude thrives on a people greedily and hastily consuming what they have not bothered to produce. In Fragments, Armah portrays the cargo-cult mentality as something akin to a national consciousness. It is nationally accepted and expected that those who travel abroad, go to pave the way to riches and wealth for their brethren who remain at home.

In the return of one Henry Robert Hudson Brempong, whom Baako travels with on the flight to Accra, Armah vividly illustrates the workings of the cargo-cult mentality. Brempong has all the material trappings that form the baggage of the "been-to". He travels fast and relishes the speed. "I like plane travel" (73), he declares to Baako. Brempong is himself fascinated by his ability to move fast literally and materially. At the same time, he is a slave to the trinkets of Europe and considers it a mark of greatness to be acquainted with the continent:

"Do you know how many years, total, I have spent out of Ghana? ... most of the time I was in Britain. I know the old country like the back of my hand" (63).

Brempong brags to Baako about his ingenuity in the acquisition of fine and elegant things like lighters and tape-recorders from Europe. He emphasizes the philosophy that one must not come back home "empty-handed like a fool" (63). Brempong is a creature of the times, a true "been-to".

The people who come to meet Brempong at the airport, reflect the national attitude to "been-tos". They are revered as some kind of demi-gods. They sacrifice their dignity for the sake of the shiny things from the West.

Move back, you villagers. Don't come and kill him with your T.B. He has just returned, and if you

don't know, let me tell you. The air where he has been is pure, not like ours. Give him space. Let him breathe! (82).

The manner in which the villagers revel around Brempong shows their total commitment to a life of consuming what other people's labour and intelligence has produced. As the old woman whom Baako gives a lift to remarks: "This is some disease that has descended upon us" (83).

Baako's return then is significant for the manner in which it defies the norm. It indicates his desire to map out a new morality for himself, a new way of doing things. He is convinced therefore that the knowledge he brings home with him and the manner in which he intends to use it, is ample contribution to his society's development.

The physical return of Baako is curiously paralleled with the birth of his sister Araba's child. In Akan custom, a child's father has no physical relationship with the child. Rather, it is the maternal uncle whom having come from the same womb as the child's mother, has a stronger bond with this child. In effect, Baako is literally responsible for the well-being of Araba's child. Acutely aware of his responsibility, it is Baako who rushes the expectant mother to the hospital and donates blood to save her life and possibly that of the child too.

The out-dooring ceremony which is meant to be a welcome to this child, believed to be a traveller from the world of the ancestors is meant to be held soon after the child's eighth day. In recent days however, tradition has been perverted so that the outdooring ceremony is no more than "an inflated feast to which the most affluent acquaintances are invited" (Fraser 39).

In this particular instance, Baako's mother, Efua, and her daughter, Araba, bring the date forward so that it may coincide with the pay-day. It is clear that their only interest in the occasion is to show off their "been-to" and to collect as much money as is possible from their relatives and friends. Baako is uneasy about these plans. First of all, he has no desire to wear a tuxedo and brag about his American experiences. Secondly, and more significantly, he is hesitant to abuse tradition by ridiculing the outdoor ceremony. He is not alone, Naana who enunciates to Baako the true importance of the outdoor ceremony cannot understand her daughter's thinking:

You know the child is only a traveler between the world of spirits and this one of heavy flesh. His birth can be a good beginning, and he may find this world around it a home where he wants to stay. But for this, he must be protected. Or he will run screaming back, fleeing the horrors, prepared for him up here (136).

Thus speaking, Naana puts the ceremony in its proper perspective. Bearing in mind the total significance of the life and death cycle as a journey, we may consider the outdoor ceremony as an extended metaphor which captures vividly this society's socio-economic framework, and the trappings of the cargo-cult. It is obvious that Efua and her daughter, Araba, do not pay any regard to the child's welfare. They see him purely in material terms, specifically, as a money-making device.

Yet another reversal of tradition may be witnessed in the fact that this ceremony does not accrue from the sharing of sex. It is rather the withholding of sex on Araba's part that is used to sway her husband, Kwesi, to her way of thinking (Wright 180). Given this repeated abuse of tradition, we are

not surprised that the child dies.

The impetuous refusal to observe the correct order of events causes them to lose and to change their proper places in the natural cycle: the newcomer is sent back into the spirit world ahead of its great-grandmother and the reversal of the normal course of human behaviour effectively accelerates the career of a potentially normal child into that of the ghost child whose feared presence is traditionally a threat to the Fante "outdooing" ceremony. (Wright 180).

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This travesty of tradition is but a fraction of the society's lost morality. We witness a community in which the desire and ability to create have been hampered by an attitude of laziness and misplaced assumptions. The tendency for people to consume what others have produced naturally kills their own creativity. In effect, Araba cannot fully respond to her own creation, it remains a freak in this society of consumers. As a result it dies in what would appear to be the society's way of negating its own capacity to create which stands at loggerheads with the religion of thoughtless consumption that they have assumed. Thus Naana reflects:

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 ..." (275-6).

The society's inability to cope with creation and productiveness is indeed climaxed with this infanticide that forms an echo to the killing of the rabid dog. "It is as if the perpetrators are deliberately destroying their own capacity to create" (Fraser 41). It is important for us to note that

Efua and Araba are not alone in their pursuance of the outdoor ceremony for its material aspect only. The guests who grace the occasion seem to be perfectly content with the vile and ludicrous money - collecting arrangements that Efua announces. For instance,

An overjoyed little man stepped solemnly forward, the black of his face tinged with a little of the suit's blue, a white handkerchief showing from his coat pocket like the echo of his smile. He walked to the brass pan, took out his wallet from an inner pocket, extracted five separate cedi notes and allowed them to drift gingerly downward to the bottom of the pan (257)

Baako remains genuinely baffled by the manner in which everybody puts on a show, down to the funeral acknowledgement Efua insists on placing in the newspapers.

When he goes out to look for a job, Baako experiences the same kind of friction with the community that he has had with his family. In searching for a job at Ghanavision, Baako assumed the forces of logic to be in operation. He is soon disillusioned of this hope. Soon, Baako comes to appreciate that Brempong's pompous utterances on the aircraft about the manner in which one ought to pursue job-hunting are indeed the national outlook. One must learn how to boot-lick those at the top and sing their praises louder than anyone else: "these things are necessary" (65).

The inefficiency Baako meets with when he tries to deal with the Junior Assistant to the secretary of the Civil Service Commission is only a prelude to what Ocran, his old art master reveals. Nobody concedes to doing their job unless they are bribed. It does not matter that they are employed to do it. The situation is made all the worse by the swarm of

mediocre officials that are employed in these offices. "Nothing works in this country. What can you expect? The place is run by this so-called elite of pompous asses trained to do nothing" (113).

Added to this, is a general tendency towards inefficiency which as the Principal Secretary says when Baako and Ocran finally meet him: "We don't have modern systems here. This country doesn't work that way. If you come back thinking you can make things work in any smooth, efficient way, you'll just get a complete waste of your time. It's not worth bothering about" (115). It is unfortunate that the attitude of those at the top is in no way different from that of their lazy, mediocre juniors.

Once Baako begins to work at Ghanavision, he finds that he is by himself unable to effect any changes to the air of indifference and attitude of submission that pervades the place. Earlier when he had spoken to Ocran, we saw how concerned Baako was about the kind of writing he was to be involved in. He offers a near-spiritual quality to the role of the writer, what Ocran teasingly refers to as "the ghost of the missionary ... bullying the artist" (111). He is totally absorbed by a desire to communicate to his audience. Baako therefore settles on script writing for film production. As he says:

In many ways I've thought of the chance of doing film scripts for an illiterate audience would be superior to writing, just as an artistic opportunity. It would be a matter of images, not words. Nothing necessarily foreign in images, not like English words.

With a commitment and dedication of this sort, Baako is naturally unable to live the lie at Ghanavision. He finds that

the producers are an idle lot, content to do nothing but travel abroad in the name of training. Instead of their own work, they screen borrowed tapes from the embassies in town. Baako cannot accept this way of life, this "doing nothing but finding the most puffed up pompous ways, strutting around a land of paupers offering extravagance as the universal guide" (185). There is no creativity here. Production has been turned into a sterile business. Baako watches the manner in which his workmates, men like Gariba, have been forced into subservience. They become content to do nothing but follow the Head of State all over the country, taking pretty pictures of him and his elite entourage.

It is interesting to note how every time Baako finds himself faced with his society's rejection of labour and production or their senseless consumption of other peoples sweat, he takes a walk or goes for a ride. He finds it necessary to induce motion in his being. And yet, every time he walks around, he is confronted by yet another instance of the people's habit to consume what they do not produce and destroy any creativeness around them.

This time, Baako takes a walk to Juana's place. As he walks, Baako is filled with conflicting thoughts based on his own vision of life and the reality that surrounds him, luring him to accept the society's ethics. Really, it is a battle between his own morality and that of the community that he lives in. In walking to Juana's place, Baako is guided by "a desire for contact with something he loved" (187), a need to commune with one who sees things in the way he does.

Once together, Baako and Juana engage in a series of journeys, exploring the countryside. All about them, they find "places where maimed people and sickness walked down every half-hidden path" (87). Their quest for a new

ethic, a different way of life, is constantly abused by images of greed and vile corruption. Such is the scene they come upon on their drive to Kumasi, near the ferry. Here, Baako and Juana witness the hustling of lorry drivers onto a single ferry, which, owing to government regulations, only runs from 6 am to 5 pm on each day.

Skido, a lorry driver, has been waiting three days ^{La chance} to board the ferry and transport his cargo of food to Kumasi. He now awaits a space on the last ferry boat of the day. As it happens, there are other drivers who do not see the need to await their turn to board. They push and shove and use unfair tactics to allocate themselves space on the last ferry. In the ensuing rush, Skido finds that he is perhaps the fool for having waited three whole days. He joins the scramble and edges for some space on the boat. The result is death and destruction. The consequence of speed and haste is destruction. Skido's life is scarifi~~e~~^d in the wake of everybody's greed and rush for material gain. He had been a civil and patient member of society and did not reap any benefits. Instead of praise and commendation, Skido was made to appear foolish and uninitiated into the national game. This society cannot contend with a person who tries to offer a new ethic, tries to map out a varying moral course. Skido is doomed to perish.

This scene leaves Baako restless and agitated. He walks away from it fast, unwilling to admit the truth of what it signifies. In much the same way as Skido, Baako had tried at Ghanavision to set a new trend, to point out a differing morality. In effect, he took great care and time to produce scripts keenly related to his nation's history and aspirations. His script "The Root" is rejected by his boss Asante-Smith as being too abstract and unrelated to the people's culture. In a way, Asante-Smith is right. The present crop of Ghanaians is so hell-bent on its own destruction, it can find no way of

relating to a past that entailed struggles to break away the chains of slavery. In "The Brand", Baako has made a graphic representation of the present social structure. The core is made up of the workers and the majority of Ghanaians whose efforts to continue to feed and sustain the elite that hangs on the periphery, goes unacknowledged. Baako wants to enlighten his people about the evils and prejudices of the present system. This time, his efforts are labeled as "peculiar concerns" (208). In any case, there is no film. It is all taken up with the numerous forthcoming national days and Presidential commitments.

Once again, Baako walks away, angry and frustrated. Yet again, he stumbles upon yet another example of national greed and corruption in high places. This time, it is the dishing out of television sets which were originally intended for use in villages all over the country. It is Asante-Smith, the boss, who casually announces the pattern with which the distribution of the sets into rich men's homes is to take:

The highest officials from the Residence and the Presidential Secretariat will get theirs first, then the Ministries Senior Officers here at Ghanavision will get what's left (209).

The greed with which the television sets are distributed amongst the officials - imagine a Police Inspector-General demanding twelve sets - is only outdone by the vile destruction with which two technicians scramble for the last set. They display no respect for the labour that must have gone into producing the sets, they are only interested in hoarding the things for themselves. If they cannot have them, then they will destroy them so that nobody else should enjoy their use.

It is ironical that it is Asante-Smith who should come up and

ask Baako who has caused the mess. This is precisely what Baako had tried to tell them all in the script "The Brand". At the time, Asante-Smith and others like him did not wish to know.

It is this last act at Ghanavision that pushes Baako into resigning. His efforts have been frustrated, and by himself, he has been unable to change or do anything just as Ocran had predicted.

In the period following his resignation, Baako takes time to contemplate what has gone before. It is true that he could no longer find within himself, the stamina to continue working in the decrepit Ghanavision. But at the same time, Baako begins to wonder whether indeed it may not be this morality that he alone seems to feel that will in the end be proved wrong. His capacity to perceive more than others is threatened by the universalness of their way of doing things. Baako is at a cross-roads. It is not easy for him to decide which route he ought to follow. The physical illness that he now suffers is symbolic of the turmoil raging within his mind as he struggles to find a way.

Baako begins to view with greater clarity, the mentality of his people, the precise workings of the cargo-cult. He realizes that the tendency to expect deliverance through one who has travelled abroad is indeed bound up with traditional conceptions on the essence of death. He who dies goes away to act as an intermediary between those he has left behind, and those he now meets. He will ask for what his people require most urgently, be it rain or fecundity. What Baako was faced with upon his departure and return, was therefore a somewhat distorted version of tradition. Unfortunately, this new trend has been elevated to the level of principle.

The "been-to" goes away to pave the route to riches and wealth. He undergoes a kind of death within the minds of those who have been left behind and are somehow bereaved. Their suffering will be atoned not just by the "been-to's" return, but by a whole load of expectations surrounding his return. The "been-to" who has accepted the "ghost-role", acts as "transmission belt for cargo. Not a maker but an intermediary. Making takes too long, the intermediary brings quick gains" (219).

At the same time, those back home are involved in something larger than mere expectation. It is accompanied by a distinct act of faith in the return and the cargo it will herald. In effect, they will willingly surrender the little they have, scatter it to the winds, in anticipation of what the "been-to's" return will bring.

Thus understanding, Baako begins to understand the enormity of the disappointment his return brought upon his people. As a result, Baako begins to doubt his own position. He wonders what right he had to act differently and disappoint his family. The only cargo Baako brought was in his mind. He tried to share it through his scripts at Ghanavision but nobody was interested in his ideas. It was nothing that the people could readily consume. In the circumstances, Baako doubts the worth of his own morality.

Efua, Baako's mother, is concerned not with the fever her son suffers, but with the state of his mind. His constant scribbling and restlessness is seen to be the root of the problem. Baako is totally hemmed in. Once the crowd begins to chase him, his aloneness becomes further accentuated. This is one time we see Baako opting for speed, he runs. His flight is not so much from the physically enclosing crowd, as from what they symbolically stand for and represent. The national culture which promotes greed

and corruption at every turn, which encourages an attitude of consumption rather than production, is what Baako fights to escape from. In the end, he must submit.

Baako has been haunted by the cargo. Until he has resolved this, he cannot be at peace. Like "the man" in The Beautiful Ones who knows he cannot deny that for the children, for the sake of the loved ones, "the gleam" is worth reaching out for, Baako knows that there is something intrinsically sound in a people expecting greatness from one they have sent abroad. The question is, what greatness. Just as "the man" sees no justification, no rightness in the means he must use to arrive at "the gleam", Baako cannot resign himself to an endorsement of greed and corruption, to producing what others greedily consume. Baako actually breaks down over making the decision about whom he should follow, the society or his own mind and morality.

At the asylum, it takes Ocran to make Baako snap out from his resignation to society's demands. Ocran points out to him: "You know, when you know what you want to do, there's no sense in setting other people up in your mind to pass judgement" (265). Ocran knows that deep down, Baako has chosen, and he has chosen correctly. All that he and Juana now wish is that he should stand by his decision. Baako negates what is wrong and inhuman, and wishes to do that which may enhance every man's humanity. If he can stand by his position and with the help of Ocran and Juana, who see things the same way he does, then their society will stand a chance of a rebirth as the hymn from the church across the street echoes. In the words of Ayo Mamudu, "The hope of expectation of a rebirth at the end of Fragments restores the notion of a just, sensible order in Nature..." (24).

It is however important that we realize that his view of justice is not reinforced by Baako alone. There are those

like Naana, Ocran and Juana who all along have offered a degree of humanness and a just dealing with those around them. Thus, it is that Mamudu falters when he declares that this restoration of a just and sensible order "defies the novel's vision of life and the realities of its world" (24).

Baako as an artist cannot hope to succeed working on his own. It is crucial that he enlist the help of those like Naana, Juana and Ocran who share his morality. By himself, his will be a lone voice in the wilderness, unable to reach and influence the rest of humanity. In the next work, Solo's predicament resembles that of Baako.

Why Are We so Blest?

By far, one of the most significant aspects of this novel is its title as it is re-enacted in the work. Why Are We So Blest? does not seek to answer the question its title poses. Rather, it presents a riddle and goes on to illustrate the various dimensions of the puzzle, leaving the reader the task of finding an answer.

This riddle is posed at two very important levels. The first is the communal or national level which represents the position of a country in transition from colonial rule to independence. At this level, the work concerns itself with demonstrating the socio-economic circumstances of these countries and begs the question why this must be so and not any other way. At another level, Why Are We so Blest? speaks of the position of the black man in his entirety. It grapples with the fate of the African, forever doomed to live with racial tension, discrimination, rejection and isolation. The key characters Modin and Solo demonstrate this life of a people trapped in the vicious grip of a centuries old ethic and seemingly fated to remain within its boundaries.

Solo the narrator of this work is himself a failed revolutionary who has escaped to the newly independent Afriasia in the hope of finding some "peace any mediocre peace" and possibly, a chance to start all over again. (Armah, Why Are We So Blest? 64). When we first meet him, Solo has escaped the demands of this life through some kind of illness. All around him are images of destruction, death and need; the results no doubt of the country's struggle for independence. At the same time, Solo is aware of an underlying insincerity, stemming from a people who have just won their freedom. An insincerity towards one another, towards the things for which they fought. Hence,

Our time demands from us just one great observance: that we should pretend. To live well now means to develop as highly as possible the ability to do one thing while saying and preferably also thinking, another thing entirely. The successful livers are those with entrails hard enough to bear the contradiction and to thrive on it (5).

Unable to cope with such a situation, Solo's mind has slowly drifted towards despair. And yet, somewhere in the recesses of his mind, Solo believes there is still a chance that things can be changed. As a result, he keeps close ties at the offices of the Congherian people's revolutionary movement. This faint hope in Solo's mind may be witnessed in his continued visits to the offices downtown. On his way there, he tends to rush downhill, driven by some unknown mortar, "as if some force were pushing me from behind" (5). However, Solo's experiences have brought him a long way, and he can now recognize futility when he sees it. Thus it is that, "The walk back is just the opposite. All the way up, I must struggle against a force that seems many times stronger than the one that pushed me down".(5)

This force that dictates the slowed pace of Solo's walk from town is symbolic of the burden of revolution. In much the same way as our African countries rushed towards independence and self-rule, so also does Solo rush downhill as if some force were urging him on. At the same time, independent African countries are slowly waking up to the intricacies of economic dependence upon their colonial masters, alongside the political freedom they have just won. Revolution is a far more complex phenomenon, not to be confused with the mere change of faces at the helm.

Solo's mind has traversed this ground. From his experiences in the Portuguese colony of his origin, to the realities he now witnesses in the newly independent Afriasia, Solo has learnt the bitter truth about the quest for independence. At first unable to handle the implications of all this, his mind breaks down and he is admitted to a hospital downtown. It is here that he makes the acquaintance of one embittered "mutilé de guerre", dedicated to a study of the world's revolutions in an effort to find out "who gained?" (16). Solo finds himself intrigued by this idea. He too begins to query the benefactors of revolution, the essence of it all. From his new friend he finds out that the militants form the essence of any revolution:

Those who offer themselves up to be killed, to be maimed and driven insane, those who go beyond what is even possible for other human beings in their pursuit of the revolution, they are its essence.(18)

Like his friend, Solo begins to appreciate that the sad but true fact is that it is not these militants who gain from the revolution from all their efforts and sacrifices.

Solo's eventual answer is based on Armah's earlier analogy of life as a journey. It exploits both senses of the French word "l'essence", that which is necessary, and also, petrol. Solo draws a lorry which is here taken as society on the road that is life. This lorry is filled with people from every strata in society, the young, the old, the corrupt, the opportunists, everybody. As this people travel along on the lorry, it is the militant who dedicate themselves to the task of lifting the lorry from the lower to a higher level. In effect, the militants provide the necessary fuel for motion and like every fuel, they must be burnt out in order to achieve a new end.

Solo cannot help agreeing with the man that this is neither fair nor just, it is simply the way things are. At this point, we can see Armah's erstwhile concern with corruption. Here, he is trying to reach to the bottom of its origins, querrying whether it is truly essential to use the masses and then cast them aside in the battle for social success. Armah wants to know whether society cannot be structured in any other way so that alienation of the masses will not be a pre-requisite to social eminence.

This idea of alienation is pursued more thoroughly in the novel through the life of Modin. Indeed, Modin's whole life is a study in initiation. The growth of his mind and consequently his intellectual development is in the work aptly demonstrated through a series of journeys. Modin's first journey takes him to America where he has been offered a place at Harvard University and a scholarship which is based not on the strength of his academic capabilities, but primarily because of the fact that he is an outstandingly intelligent African. It is his colour that carries weight.

Modin does not take very long to wake up to the vagaries of

racial discrimination. It is evident that Mr Oppenhardt, Chairman of the Committee regards Modin as a rare specimen, an unusually brilliant African. By continuing to be regarded in this way and worse still by accepting it, Modin runs the risk of sustaining the Western myth concerning African idiocy. Modin realizes fully the implications of all this. He rejects the scholarship to the chagrin of his hosts.

With time, Modin begins to appreciate the position in which his opportunity for an education has placed him vis-a-vis the people back home. With something akin to awe, Modin realizes that all this has been part of the plan for Africa's destruction by the Western powers. To these white people, Modin is no more than a "factor", necessary to keep relations going between his people and the whites:

Factors then, scholarship holders, BAs, MAs, PhDs now, the privileged servants of 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 a past history. The destruction 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 mind. 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 factors' pay to structure the recipients' lives into modern factorship (130).

As more time passes in America, Modin realizes that the physical loneliness he experiences is only a projection of the greater alienation his education has caused him. In truth, he is being trained to join the ranks of those who sell their

fellow Africans for the favours and shiny trinkets of the West. In essence then, Modin's education does little to keep him in touch with the realities of his motherland.

At the physical level, Modin tries many ways of escaping his loneliness. Naita, the receptionist at the African Education Committee, warns him against any involvement with white people:

You have no business trusting any one of them. Listen, if you can use them, good luck to you, but don't get involved. There's nothing like friendship between us and them. You get involved with them, you're just dumb, that's all. They'll mess you up (100).

In spite of this warning, Modin goes ahead and tries to exorcise his loneliness through a relationship with Mrs Jefferson, wife of the aging Africanist. It is on a journey to Washington in Professor Jeffersons' car that Modin is first transported into the demeaning role of servant of white women's sexual needs. Mrs. Jefferson unashamedly involves Modin in mutual masturbation which Modin does little to resist. Their relationship follows the classical lines in the myth of white vis-a-vis black. Mrs Jefferson is merely using the African to cater for all her perverse notions about how black men function. It fills her "endemic craving for something wild, exciting and out of the ordinary" (Fraser 55). There is no reciprocity in such a relationship. Eager to escape his loneliness, Modin does not stop to think of the dangers that are eminent in such an entanglement. Professor Jefferson finding him with his wife eventually confronts Modin physically, stabbing him severally so as to inflict a number of wounds on the African.

Modin learns his lesson:

The idea itself of lonely white women moving from knot to little knot of talkers at parties wanting to find the African of their unconfessed desires nauseates me these days. The need to work out new ways of containing loneliness has pressed as heavily on my mind, but the wandering days are behind me. I will not slip back into those old ways, not after everything that has happened (135).

Modin has been initiated into the knowledge that no relationship honouring mutual respect, trust, love and bolstering self-worth and cultural identity can be possible between a black man and his white counterpart. He now knows that to any white woman, he is no more than a "rare creature, an African vehicle to help them reach strange destinations of their souls" (135-6).

After his release from the hospital, Modin takes up a part-time job at the Psycho Lab. It is here that he meets Aimee Reitsch, a white American girl whose tolerance for pain is only outmatched by her frigidity. Modin gets involved with her. He pities her. He imagines he can help her attain some of the physical satisfaction she has been missing out on and so he takes on the voluntary job of awakening her "to the full range of sexual experience" (Fraser 55). As it turns out, Modin is caught up in yet another learning process through this relationship. Indeed, the affair turns out to be a kind of death for Modin at more levels than one. With each bout of instruction to Aimee, Modin loses a part of himself, dilutes his cultural identity as he becomes wrapped up in Aimee's lifestyle and ideas.

Although they travel together to Afriasia, Modin and Aimee make the journey for very different reasons, and with very

different hopes. Modin having lost faith in the Harvard education he has been getting wishes to put his knowledge at the hands of his people. He wants to map out a new ethic by placing education and revolution side by side. Aimee is a lot more superficial. For her, the journey to Afriasia is really no more than a whim, it is both fashionable and exciting. Aimee believes she wants to see revolution in the making, wants to be a part of such a struggle. Aimee however lacks any concrete conception of what she can contribute to let alone gain from such a struggle. So together Modin and Aimee head for the colonized Congheria via Afriasia. The journey involves a trek via Europe and all the time, Modin has placed himself in the wilful hands of the white American girl. By the time they reach the capital of Afriasia, Modin has lost more of his identity and sense of culture. He dresses in an identical fashion to Aimee's American ways, truly converted to her way of doing things.

Once in Afriasia, the couple make contact at the offices of the People's Union of Congheria, hoping to enlist into the Maquis. It is because of Aimee's attitude that their applications are rejected. They are however kept waiting at the capital through a series of false promises. It is Aimee who initiates Modin's last journey, the trek across the Sahara. Disillusioned with waiting in the capital, the couple decides to make the journey to Congheria on their own. Aimee rejects Modin's realistic idea of taking a boat from Laccryville back to America. "What would I look like telling people I didn't cross the Sahara after all - just wised up and took a boat" (228).

Along the journey through the desert, Modin begins to realize how much Aimee's initiation and therefore worldview differ from his own. At the farm, she imagines herself in the shoes of the toppled colonialists rather than trying to appreciate the motivations of the locals. Modin of

course cannot relate to this worldview. Her outlook is acutely different from what the two of them need to adopt if they are to join the Maquis in Congheria.

What is significant here, is the close reflection of Africa's past upon its present. Modin is struggling to join the maquis so that he may be actively involved in the liberation of his fellow blacks and yet ironically, he is himself at the moment enslaved by a white power, just as his forefathers had been. As Manuel correctly observes "... an African in love with a European is a pure slave. Not a man accidentally enslaved. A pure slave, with the heart of a slave, with the spirit of a slave" (205)

Presently, Modin would be of little use to the militants in Congheria. His own liberation, through some intellectual development is far more urgent and significant than his physical presence on the battlefield. As Modin makes the trek across the desert, he is unaware that he is in fact following the very routes that were used by his enslaved forefathers until, that is, he can liberate himself of his ties with Aimee. Failing to do this, Aimee now becomes the agent of his destruction.

In a section filled with powerful and shocking symbolism, Armah relates the final destruction of Modin (Booth 61). Several European men use Aimee an American to physically arouse Modin the African who is helplessly tied to the white technology represented by the car. Modin's erection is evidence of his inability to break away from the role of servant to white people's whims. Aimee's own arousal is evidence of her people's fascination with black people sexually and the restraints the white men place upon her is witness to the contempt with which white men view their women's involvement with black men. Modin's mutilation and Aimee's sucking of his blood only go to prove that

"Africa's creative life blood flows to satisfy the destructive and sterile lust of 'Europe' and 'America' combined" (Booth 61). Maimed and beaten by the vicious desert sun, Modin is left in the desert to die.

It is interesting how Aimee now turns against Solo reproaching him for what has been Modin's fate. At the same time, it is significant that Solo himself is haunted by a feeling of guilt and remorse. Modin's experiences have not been a new thing to Solo:

Where he hoped to go I had already been. I had run back with a spirit broken by too sudden contact with rearrangements, my mind howling for peace, any mediocre peace. What help had I to offer him? (64).

Like "the man" and Baako before him, Solo is filled with a keen artistic awareness. He too had tried to map out his own ethic to signal a new way of black relating to white, of black relating to fellow black. Modin has not been alone in his failure. And yet, Solo must have been filled with a certain kind of hope while he watched Modin's pursuits from afar, hoping he would succeed where he Solo had failed. Armah treats Modin like the legendary Prometheus. He was himself material for a cross over from poverty to elite education and yet, he chose instead to make a backward crossing. He suffers the same fate as Prometheus of old, chained in the desert, his entrails left for the vultures.

Through Solo, Armah pursues the idea of the artist's role in society. Solo is a journalist, he has something new to say, a certain experience he can share but he is hesitant and uncertain about how best he can relate it all. Like Baako, he is torn between the Western definition of the visionary who shuts himself off from the rest of society - to "close my eyes

to everything around, find relief in discreet beauty and make its elaboration my vocation?" (181) - or, the essence of African art which dictates a different mode of elaboration. For,

In this wreckage, there is no creative art outside the destruction of the destroyers. In my people's world, revolution would be the only art, revolutionaries the only creators. All else is part of Africa's destruction. (182).

Clearly, Solo is unable to take on this task alone. Modin who alone might have been his aide has been destroyed by the very agents he and Solo should have been escaping. The lone-artist-protagonist may not be the best way for Armah to highlight a society's moral rejuvenation. It is a job that requires many voices if it is to be efficacious. The political dimension of social morality is much too powerful to be ignored. In terms of mass action, it cannot be outweighed by one man's spiritual guidance. This is a fact to which Armah the writer has slowly awoken. In his two following works Two Thousand Seasons and The Healers, he makes structural changes to the journeying motif which reflect both the growth of his own social vision and the need for mass involvement in the rearmament of social morality. Let us now take a look at the stylistic implications of the journeying motif and Armah's growing social vision in Two Thousand Seasons and The Healers.

CHAPTER III:

MOTION AS LIFE, THE EXAMPLE OF
TWO THOUSAND SEASONS AND THE HEALERS

Although the journeying motif continues in Two Thousand Seasons and The Healers, Armah subjects it to certain structural changes this chapter attempts to investigate. The chapter also evaluates the efficacy of these adjustments in highlighting his ideas on social morality and direction.

Coming from the first three novels to Two Thousand Seasons, the perceptive reader is struck by the change in narrative voice. In The Beautiful Ones, Armah for the greater part of the story uses the omniscient narrator. In this way, he is able to traverse the workings of "the man's" mind and even to describe more fully the moral decadence of the likes of Koomson and the timber merchant Amankwa. There is, however, that part of the story that is told by the first person narrator, and which comes to us by way of flashback or a reminiscence by Teacher. The interesting thing about this reminiscence is that it is told in the first person plural so that "I" becomes "we".

In recalling Ghana's decolonizing years, Teacher speaks of a time that held hope of a radical transformation within Ghanaian society:

the promise was so beautiful. Even those who were too young to understand it all knew that at last something good was being born. It was there. We were not deceived about that (85).

Teacher is bold in his declaration that Nkrumah was the embodiment of these hopes, these promises. Unlike the flashy lawyers of the 40s, Nkrumah came to the people with sincerity, humbly. He won their confidence and rose to power on the platform of massive public support. He gauged the mood of the masses, he gave them renewed hope in their own strength, and showed no greed for power for

himself or his party. Teacher recreates for us the mood of the times, it was a time of unity, a time of pride in black peoples power; "We knew then, and we know now that the only real power a black man can have will come from black people". (82)

It is this oneness of purpose in the decolonizing years that justifies the collective pronoun "we" of the narrator. Through a study of this period, we begin to understand how the narrator changes to the omniscient third person "he".

Nkrumah and his party led the people of Ghana into independence, strong in their conviction that colonial rule was over. The betrayal that followed was a bitter experience for Teacher and others like him who had believed wholeheartedly in Nkrumah and his party. The disparity between what had been promised and what was later given is what persecutes Teacher. Nkrumah and his men soon forgot their debt to the people and instead took to providing only for themselves leaving Ghana in the clutches of foreign domination. It is the senseless greed of Nkrumah and his men that revolted Teacher and his friends.

The beauty was in the waking of the powerless. Is it always to be true that it is impossible to have things strong and at the same time beautiful? The famished need not stay famished. But to gorge themselves in this heartbreaking way, consuming, utterly destroying the common promise in their greed, was that ever necessary? (85)

It is in this sense that the movement betrayed the unity of the people. It run at a "dizzying speed" towards imitation of the white man's culture, forgetting its promise to black Ghanaians. The unity shattered, the collective "we" of the narrator has no base. For this reason, the work resorts to

the omniscient third person narrator that we had before the flashback.

In Fragments, this third person narrator dominates the story. Here, it is however sandwiched by the first person narrative of Naana. Naana's thoughts are always centred on the life of her grandson Baako. She is acutely aware of the curious isolation that he and she share. They understand their society differently from others like Efua, Foli and Asante-Smith. Naana is wise enough to realize that Baako's solitary efforts to change Ghana are useless. She has no illusions about communal efforts, hence her isolated "I".

This "I" is encountered by the reader even more persistently in Why are we so Blest? The story here is told in the diary form; Modin's and Aimee's diaries, which have been left in Solo's keep. Far much more than in any of the other works, it is in Why are we so Blest? that we encounter the total fragmentation of human effort. What Modin and Aimee are struggling to foster, Solo has already experienced and yet he cannot move to help Modin whose predicament he understands only too well. Solo stands by his name, he acts alone. Aimee for her part relates to Modin in a singularly selfish manner. She sees him only as an African male, an experiment. She does not, therefore, understand his urges and pursues an adventure of her own instead - trekking across the Sahara. Rather than accord the harmony Modin requires to fulfil his ambitions, Aimee only succeeds in destroying her lover. Modin for his part cannot successfully join the maquis. In his depiction, we see echoes of Frantz Fanon's The Wretched of the Earth. Modin is a man who must first of all welcome the liberation of his mind from faith in involvements with white people. Until this mental slavery is emancipated, Modin can never be meaningfully involved in the physical liberation of a people from colonial rule.

It is for all of the above reasons that Armah in Why Are We so Blest? sticks to the lone voice of the first person narrator. There is no group action let alone collective vision that can foster even the relatively objective third person narrator. Certainly, the collective pronoun "we" would not survive in these conditions.

The narrative voice in Two Thousand Seasons recalls that used for Teacher's reminiscence in The Beautiful Ones. Coming so close after the "I" in Why are We So Blest, the narrative voice in Two Thousand Seasons is both striking and refreshing. As a novel, Two Thousand Seasons is concerned with underlining the history of black people the world over. As such, it begins at a period when all black people on the African Continent were one:

We are not a people of yesterday. Do they ask how many single seasons we have flowed from our beginnings till now? We shall point them to the proper beginning of their counting (Armah, 1).

It is this commonalty of origins that justifies the collective pronoun "we" of the narrator.

In the prologue, Armah makes it clear that there are certain people in society who at every point in a people's history are called upon to record and restore their peoples past and their destiny. The narrator in Two Thousand Seasons belongs to this group of people. He takes the shape of those people Armah refers to as "seers, hearers, utterers" (Two Thousand Seasons xi). These people have received accounts of their peoples past from previous generations and will in their turn pass it on to the generations of artists to come. In this sense, our narrator is a pathfinder, destined to map out

the correct path that we the black people must follow in our return to "the way".

Remembrance is a key feature in the narrator's task. It is through memory that he is able to recount to us this present story, which spans the period of 1,000 years. After the remembrance, we come to that part of the story where the narrator enacts the events. He becomes a witness to what he utters, a character in the story. Thus we are told, "It was in Koranche's time as King that the children of our age grew up" (116) In beginning to recount his own experiences, the narrator says of what he told before: "All this was before the time when we of our age began our initiations - " (133).

This collective narrator is composed of 11 women and 9 men, who during the "dance of love" refuse to break into pairs but come away as a group to seek Isanusi and the truth. Within this group and indeed throughout the work, we notice the way Armah highlights the role of women. Abena is curious and eager to learn, always asking questions always probing for the truth. Women are shown to be hard working, to be innovative as path-finders unafraid of what the future holds for them. It is as if Armah is rejecting the previous complacency of the women - Oyo "the man's" wife who longs for the gleam regardless of what must be forsaken to achieve it, Estella who endorses Koomson's moral bankruptcy in the wake of material riches. Efua and Araba in Fragments who underline the cargo-cult mentality. In Two Thousand Seasons, we are presented with a new breed of women who will not sit back and entertain destruction or even meekly accept their subjugation.

The narrative technique in Two Thousand Seasons allows Armah the writer to throw himself back to his previous stories - The Beautiful Ones, Fragments, and Why Are We so Blest? Just as "the man" and Baako ponder over the opulence

and greed of their leaders, so also does the narrator in this story contemplate the lust for riches and power of people such as Kamuzu and Koranche. In this sense, the work becomes the connecting thread in Armah's stories.

Frederic Jameson has noted that the craft of the story-teller lies in his entrancing of the audience. As the story is recounted, we the readers are in the hands of the narrator, who seeks to persuade us and win us over to his side of the argument. The narrator in Two Thousand Seasons is no different. Through a series of rhetorical questions, he seeks to elicit our sympathy. Consider for instance,

You do not understand how the destroyers turned earth to desert? Look around you. You are ignorant of death but sleep you know. Have you not seen the fat ones, the hollow ones now placed above us? These the destroyers have already voided of their spirits, like the earth of its fertility (10).

Simon Gikandi terms this question-and-answer technique of the narrator rogatio. In his view, it helps the narrator to assert the importance of historical events to our present circumstances while at the same time contriving acquiescence between reader and narrator through the repeated use of "you". Once the narrator has gained our sympathy, he has justified his continued use of the collective voice "we", and succeeded in making his venture a communal one. The journey towards moral rearmament in Two Thousand Seasons is undoubtedly a journey undertaken by many. Gone is the lone artist-protagonist of the earlier works who travels alone to provide a decaying society with renewed moral fibre.

Perhaps more than in any of his other works, Armah in Two Thousand Seasons is able to underline that the journeying motif is not static. Let us begin with a discussion on the setting of this work.

In the previous works, the setting was easily identifiable as Ghana in the case of the first two novels, and America and Afriasia in the case of the third. What we have now is a much larger setting. We are given the entire African continent for our setting, free of the political boundaries we live with. We begin somewhere below the desert in the north, in a region of clear grasslands close to a large mass of flowing water.

The people, Armah tells us, did not remain caught up in one settlement, they moved freely across the continent and always with a purpose. As the narrator declares:

Our fears are not of motion. We are not a people of dead, stagnant waters. Reasons and promptings of our own have urged much movement on us - expected, peaceful, repeated motion (7)

People moved in order to sustain life, in order to avoid death. Thus in seasons of prolonged drought and the ensuing famine, new pastures were sought, new settlements made. Always those who went away remained in contact with the others and in this way the "connectedness" of the people was maintained. It is true some went with the intention of setting up a completely different existence, such was the case of Brafo who together with his mother and his bride Ajoa, moved away to evade the senseless lust of his aging father.

It is important for us to make the connection between motion and life. This is Armah's strongest contention in the

prologue, that life must be preserved and that motion need not end in death and destruction. The message is carried in the powerful interplay between the symbols of springwater and the desert. The African peoples are here represented by the symbol of springwater and the West including Arabs, Europeans and Americans are symbolized by the desert. Hence the warning:

Springwater flowing to the desert, where you flow there is no regeneration,. The desert takes. The desert knows no giving. To the giving water of your flowing, it is not in the nature of the desert to return anything but destruction. Springwater flowing to the desert, your future is extinction (ix).

From this potent symbolism, we are able to infer that any association Africa has with Western culture, will end in the destruction of black people. A relationship between these two peoples can have no future since one only takes while the other gives. Armah's message to his people is clear:

It is for the spring to give. It is for springwater to flow. But if the spring would continue to give and the springwater continue flowing, the desert is no direction (xi) (emphasis mine),

Evidently, the black people have a choice about the shape their lives should take. Simon Gikandi does not think so. He declares that "Two Thousand Seasons is a novel of absolutes" (Reading The African Novel 21). He does not fully comprehend the symbols that Armah uses. He does not see that spring water has a choice, a choice about what path it should choose for its flowing. This is why Armah warns that the desert is no destination. Springwater must change its course, must cut a new path. It is clear, therefore, that the

black people having reviewed their past existence may now turn and cut a new path, innocent of the intrusion of western culture in much the same way that a physical river is capable of mapping out a new bend. This is Armah's ardent hope.

There is yet another instance, however, in which Armah's symbols of springwater and the desert carry the seeds of the hope that exists for African heritage. The formula is somewhat scientific: springwater headed for the desert will no doubt evaporate. At a certain height, the vapour condenses and gathers to form rain-clouds. Without a doubt, this water will come down as rain and it will not necessarily do so directly above the desert. In the event, it will form a new spring somewhere else, and one moreover that need not flow to the desert.

It is clear then that our African heritage, our past can still be recaptured wholesale with the passage of time. Either way, our destiny shall be achieved and we need not ever come into further contact with Western culture. Armah has shown the futility of a single spring's battle against the desert. Alone, the spring will never overcome the desert. Again Armah underlines the importance of unity. Together, the springs of the world can drown the desert: "What a hearing of the confluence of all the waters of life flowing to overwhelm the ashen desert's blight". (321).

In such circumstances, we must consider the journey as a cycle, involving the flowing water which evaporates and gathers again in rainclouds to come down as rain. This scientific regeneration of our past gives us a cyclical view of time and helps us to capture what has gone before in the present. In the event, motion sustains life.

Indeed, Ayi Kwei Armah seems to have a very dynamic perception of time. It re-echoes the theories of Roman Jakobson in "Dialogue on Time in Language and Literature". Jakobson's contention is that synchrony contains within it many a dynamic element. At the same time, in any consideration of diachrony, it is necessary to take note of the many static elements. Jakobson conceives of time as being discontinuous so as to allow for "the backwards march of time" (18). It is in this sense that Armah while exploiting the system of written word feels free to move backwards in the time he is currently operating in, so as to capture and make use of the oral traditions which we in our synchronic approach to time consider to be in the past and forgotten.

In so doing, Armah is rejecting the idea of the death of time. His technique abstracts time so that it is neither living nor dead. By negating death, Armah is asserting that nothing can disappear forever. Indeed, all of Armah's novels carry this indestructible hope. It is particularly underlined in the reflections of Naana in Fragments. Her "Each thing that goes away returns and nothing in the end is lost" (Armah, 1), carries an undying hope for all times. It seems to be Armah's central philosophy, the involvement of the past in the present and the future. In our cycle, the water comes back to the earth and flows once more as a spring.

By the same token, our cultural past can be recaptured and made useful to today. In another sense, the collective "we" of the narrator takes into consideration the forgotten voices of our ancestors. A technique such as Armah's maintains motion and we have already seen that motion entails the sustenance of life.

The incredible time span of 1,000 years that Armah adopts is made possible and indeed held together through the application of one single unifying notion. This idea is the

search for "the way". In the circumstances, Armah presents us with a series of journeys all of which are dedicated to a return to the correct paths to "the way".

In the prologue, we see some amongst the multitudes on the highway who turn back having realized that their destination using the highway will be destruction. In returning, they are seeking a return to the correct path. However, Armah shows us that "the way" lies beyond a mere change of direction away from the white road of death:

And those running back to the source in their new desperation, have they not more fear of death's horror than love of life? Whiteness indeed they have known; of our own blackness they have yet to learn (xviii).

In the same way, we encounter later in the text, searchers of "the way" who having been released from bondage now return to their old, abandoned homes. These people refuse to remain with Isanusi's group which has now dedicated itself to freeing all who are held in white bondage. In choosing to go back to their original homes, Dovi and others like him imagine they are making the return to "the way" that the prophetess Anoa urged. But as Wole Soyinka remarks "the physical road to Anoa is...rendered separate from the ideological road" (Mvth. Literature and The African World 113). We are made to realize that those who arrive physically are not necessarily the ones who have successfully made a return to "the way".

The futility of Dovi's return would appear to be Armah's comment on the philosophy of negritude which had overwhelmed the African continent in the 1930s and 40s. Negritude urged a naked return to our past, a revival of culture for its own sake, rather than for its applicability to

present circumstances. Negritude saw no wrongs in the African past, it was a senseless glorification of the past. Through Dovi's journey back home, we learn that within our past certain things need to be corrected before they can be used in the present and future. Thus Armah criticizes the senseless lust of past leadership as well as the selfishness of the few who look only at their personal liberation. Armah then cannot be a neo-negritudist in the way that Lindfors insists (1980).

Indeed, the correct return to "the way" may not be reached in the life-time of the narrator. Like the military we met in Why Are We so Blest? the narrator and his group may just form "l'essence", that which must burn to bring about motion and change. In this way, the narrator will have brought about the necessary return to "the way" even though he may stand the risk of being physically destroyed in the battle. This brings us to a word about Armah's mode of characterization in Two Thousand Seasons.

Given that the story in this novel covers a life span of 1,000 years, it is not possible for Armah to create what Lawrence Perrine terms "the developing (or dynamic) character" (Story and Structure 87). This means that we cannot have characters who grow from say childhood to adulthood while at the same time undergoing changes that will be significant to the development of the story-line. In Stylistic Criticism And The African Novel, Emmanuel Ngara has examined the various ways in which Armah overcomes these limitations to characterization. The first of these is the use of summary. In Armah's novel, mention is made only of those characters who in one way or another have affected the people's search for "the way", be it by making the task harder or by illuminating new paths. In the event, a quick summary is made of their actions so that we only get one dimension of their character. This mode of characterization corresponds

to what E.M. Forster in Aspects of the Novel" termed as the "flat character" who is "constructed round a single idea" (62).

Consider for instance the character of John, the half-caste tyrant on the white men's ship. Our only remembrance of him is of a brute, a merciless slave-driver who makes life harder for the captives aboard the ship. We know little about his circumstances on the ship nor, indeed, about the reasons for his intense hatred of fellow blackmen. This kind of flat characterization serves the purpose within the work for it allows narration to continue without amplifying the role of such minor characters.

Emmanuel Ngara identifies the use of roll-call as another device by which Armah achieves the goal of narrating the events of 1,000 years while at the same time paying attention to the people who enacted these deeds. Here is an example of roll-call:

For a cascade of infamy this is: the names and doings of those who from struggling to usurp undeserved positions as caretakers, in the course of generations imposed themselves on a people too weary of strife to think of halting them. Let us finish speedily with their mention. The memory of these names is corrosive. Its poison sears our lips. Odunton, Bentum, Oko, Krobo, Jebi, Jonto, Sumui, Oburum, Ituri, Dube, Mununkum, Esibir, Bentu, Peturi, Toipre, Tutu, Bonsu, and lately Koranche (100).

Armah halts the roll-call at Koranche and the narrator who grew up in his time as King takes over to give us a more detailed account of the King Koranche.

Laurence Perrine has declared that "Human nature is not often either black or white, and interpretive fiction deals usually with characters that are neither" (84). In Two Thousand Seasons, Armah makes an interesting departure from Perrine's point. Here we see the wholesale condemnation of races - the Arab predators of the desert, and the white destroyers from the sea. Bernth Lindfors is acutely unhappy with the way Armah reduces entire races to the level of "primal forces" so that they are seen as either inherently good or inherently bad. Lindfors accuses Armah of suffering from "xenophobic oversimplification" ("Armah's Histories" 90).

It is important for Armah's readers to take into cognizance the purpose of his fiction. He is first and foremost involved in a quest for black culture. He is trying to change the harmful effects of imperialism which have divested Africans of their human dignity and cheated them out of their heritage. As Soyinka notes, Armah is involved in the massive task of racial retrieval. In order to do this successfully, certain myths must be created and sustained, hence the substitution of the previous view of history that black people are primitive, backward and evil. Furthermore, what rescues Armah's story from being racist, is his unequivocal total condemnation of black leaders like Mansa Musa I, Koranche and Kamuzu who were actively engaged in the sale of their peoples heritage. These, like the alien intruders, must be condemned wholesale if the liberation of the African mind is to be achieved in totality.

The Healers

One of the most intriguing things about this work lies in the density of the symbols used and their relevance to present day events. Set on the West Coast of Africa, a century ago, the work carries dynamic social symbolism which embraces

the entire African continent and even the Diaspora. As we read along, it becomes clear that the causes and events that led to the fall of the Ashanti Empire all those years ago were applicable to the disintegration of other African kingdoms in the wake of colonial intrusion. By extension, whatever hopes and prescriptions are offered within the text must be seen to be viable for our crippled African states and, indeed, for black people all over the world.

As Bernth Lindfors notes, the novel is held together by the imagery of disease. The ailments of Araba Jesiwa and those of Asomoa Nkwanta are representative of the societal ills, amongst the Ashanti. Just as Jesiwa's legs are broken, so also is society's foundation creaking. In the same way that Asomoa Nkwanta has psychological troubles, so also does the political make-up of the Ashanti need stream-lining. Let us carry this symbol of disease towards a cure.

When Araba Jesiwa is under the tutelage of Damfo the healer, she is constantly urged to revisit her past. Damfo insists that there are certain aspects of her past life that she shields even from herself. It is these kind of inhibitions that she must overcome. Once Araba Jesiwa revisits this past and admits her true feelings about her first marriage, she is on the road to recovery. Damfo's technique of psychoanalysis involves a recourse to and an acceptance of the past. A flow is thus created between the past, present and future.

Armah seems to be saying that in the same sense that the body is willing to accept its past, so also must society make a recourse to the past if it is to be cured. Certain therapeutic aids have been captured in the past and it is only in a return to this lost past that the health of society can be recaptured. Again, as in Two Thousand Seasons, Armah is here stressing

the significance of past measures in the resolution of present ills.

The motion that is created in this recourse to the past may be witnessed in Damfo and Densu's journey to Praso, and the journeys of the chiefs to the sea. The arrival of the chiefs at the coast is marked by pomp and fanfare:

Now other groups, other processions were arriving and crossing the field toward the tents in the centre, each under its bright umbrella, each flowing forward to the beat of great drums and the wail of horns. Here was an umbrella of blue and yellow stripes, with red tassels; there another, bright orange with white borders. There were huge green umbrellas and a dozen multicoloured ones.

As for the music, there was such a coming together of different sounds that all the air was soon vibrating with the power of three hundred drums and a hundred royal horns (Armah, The Healers, 238).

This gay procession and calm flow of the chiefs to the sea is reminiscent of the springwater that flows to the desert in Two Thousand Seasons. Just as the spring water travels to its destruction, so also do the chiefs go to meet the white men at the coast to organize the sale of their land and their people. The chiefs move down with the same ease as the springwater.

By contrast, Damfo and Densu travel up the Pra, a cumbersome and tedious journey interspersed with rapids and demanding keen concentration and the hard work of rowing. This slow journey recalls the healers' task which is

painful, slow and requires deep patience and concentration. It is this that has brought Damfo and Densu to the village of Praso. As Damfo works with the ailing Asamoa Nkwanta, we notice how the healer urges the answers to come from the General himself. It is as if to say, that the troubles we experience in our societies can only be resolved by solutions that are within us. In essence, a comparison of the two journeys reveals that although destruction comes swiftly and easily, healing is a heavier task which requires time and patience. The backward journey into our past which alone holds the solutions to our present fragmentation is as long as and as cumbersome as Damfo and Densu's journey up the Pra. The motion that will sustain must come slow and deliberately. The ending of The Healers indicates a coming together of all black people through the powerful symbol of music.

All the groups gathered by the whites to come and fight for them were there, and they all danced, all except the white,...

Here were Opobo warriors from the east, keeping at a distance from their neighbours from Bonny. Here were Hausas brought by Glover from the Kwarrar lands. Here were mixed crowds with men from Dahomey Anecho, Atakpame, Ada, Gia and Ekuapem ...

All heard the music of the West Indians who had turned the white men's instruments of the music of death to playing such joyous music. All knew ways to dance to it, and a grotesque, variegated crowd they made snaking its way through the town, followed by a long, crazy tail of the merely idle, the curious and the very young (376).

It is clear from the above quotation that Armah in using music is trying to point to the unity that can exist in diversity. With music, people dance, and the act of dancing brings them closer together. At the same time, a different kind of life-giving motion is created.

There is a certain uniformity contained in the rhythm of music. Its insistence tends to draw the attention of the listener to itself, giving him an urge to accept it. Through this ability to draw the attention of all people, music makes people the same, it underlines their commonality. As the sound waves which are in motion envelope the crowd, a flow is created by this immanent sound. The flow is as great as that of the confluence of all waters, gathering to overwhelm the desert. In effect, a feeling of collectiveness which goes beyond the boundaries of the text is achieved, bringing us back to Armah's contention: "That we the black people are one people we know" (Two Thousand Seasons, 4). Motion not only creates and sustains life, it also brings about unity and a sense of purpose. Again, we remember:

Our fears are not of motion. We are not a people of dead, stagnant waters. Reasons and promptings of our own have urged much movement on us - expected, peaceful, repeated motion (7).

In the following chapter, we shall examine how symbols discussed in this chapter become myths in the hands of Armah, the novelist. These myths are subsequently used to sustain the unity of black people, their univocality which this chapter has been explaining.

CHAPTER IV:

THE USE OF MYTH AS NARRATIVE TECHNIQUE
IN TWO THOUSAND SEASONS AND THE HEALERS

In his desire to present his readers with a credible reconstruction of Africa's past, Ayi Kwei Armah resorts to the recurrent use of mythology. In this Chapter, we examine the process by which the symbols discussed in Chapter 3 are used to create a myth. We shall analyse these myths in relation to the univocality that shapes the journeying motif in Two Thousand Seasons and The Healers.

In the previous chapter, we saw how the narrative voice in Two Thousand Seasons has been transformed from the "I" and "he" of the earlier novels, into the collective pronoun "we". This pronoun stands as a symbol in what may be described as Armah's greater myth of black African unity. From the onset of Two Thousand Seasons, Armah stresses the common origins and experiences of all black peoples: "That we the black people are one people we know. Destroyers will travel long distances in their minds and out to deny you this truth" (4). This scenario emphasizes Africa as a continent in which black people have previously lived without the divisions of colour, language and tribe. Black people are presented very simply as a family inhabiting the African continent. In keeping with this idea, Armah graces the characters in Two Thousand Seasons with names that span the entirety of the continent. We have Isanusi, Noliwe and Tutu from the south, Kamuzu, Senho and Bokasa from Central Africa, Kimathi and Juma from the east and Soyinka, Irele and Okai from West Africa. This use of names in characterization is an effective way of asserting the oneness of all black people. Again in The Healers, we are struck by this presentation of a common heritage for all black peoples. At the onset of the story, the narrator wanders throughout the continent before giving the final setting:

What of the place? Have you told the listener where the town Esuano was, beside which of the

numberless rivers of Africa? Or have you left the listening ear without a guide, thinking confusedly of the twin Mfolozi, near whose banks Magolwane, the poet of the soaring silver voice, sang eloquence to the raging shaker of earth? Is the listener to imagine such a river as the Sankarani, or the wandering Joliba, or the fierce Limpopo? Have you told the listener that of the sacred rivers of our land, the closest to Esuano was the Pra? (Armah,3).

The idea here is to underline the uniformity of the experiences of black peoples throughout the continent. We get the impression that in much the same way as the general lie of the land is uniform throughout the continent, so also is the experience we are about to hear common to all of Africa. This idea of a common past and common aspirations for all black peoples is again emphasized by the narrator when he cries:

Ah, Fasseke, words fail the storyteller. Fasseke Belen Tiqui, master of masters in the art of eloquence, lend me strength. Send me eloquence to finish what I have begun... Send me words Mokopo Mofolo, Send me words of eloquence (63).

We know that the Fasseke narrators sprung from West Africa while Mofolo was from Southern Africa and yet here they are both called upon in the same breath as if to say that the stories each may tell bear the same origin, the same experiences and the same aspirations.

The myth of African unity involves the presentation of a common history and common ambitions. Within it, therefore, we find the myth of Anoa's utterance.

The legend of Anoa involves a young Akan girl who stood as some kind of prophetess to a self-satisfied and unrelenting people. Armah uses this legend to recreate a powerful Anoa who was granted strange and disturbing visions of her people walking into enslavement and thereafter, of their futile struggles to free themselves until they recapture their past. In Two Thousand Seasons, Anoa's utterance is not the property of the Akan people alone, rather it embraces the entire African continent which was to suffer the vagaries of slavery and colonialism.

Much of the significance of this legend is held in the power of the poetry with which it is related:

Turn from this generosity of fools. The giving that is split from receiving is no generosity but hatred of the giving self, a preparation for the self's destruction.

Turn.

Return to the way, the way of reciprocity. This headlong generosity too proud to think of returns, it will be your destruction. Turn (25).

Anoa's utterance has been made memorable for the generations of seers, hearers, utterers that come after her utterance, and even for Armah's own audience through the rhyming of giving / receiving, reciprocity / generosity. At the same time, the paralleling of "giving" and "receiving", "reciprocity" and "generosity" underscores the snare for all those weary ones who may not see the difference at a glance.

If we consider this utterance as a poem, we find that the way Armah links the first stanza to the second makes the

utterance not only memorable, but also more dramatic and urgent. The "turn" at the end of stanza one is an immediate command, emphasized by the brevity of the one word. The "return" that opens stanza two is followed by a longer sentence which creates the tone of a request, an urging. The sentence that follows this one is both quiet and subtle in tone. Consequently, the "turn" which follows it has too the humble approach of a plea, a request.

Anoa's prophecy is acutely related to the journeying motif. It presents the travelling voice, an echo reaching from the time of unrecorded history to the 20th Century in which black people still seek thorough emancipation. The ultimate destination of this voice is liberation. It is a voice heard in Anoa's time and again in the life-time of the narrator. At every stage, there are those seers, hearers and utterers, who try to render meaningful this utterance. Thus, in Two Thousand Seasons, we see the efforts of the narrator to pay heed to this voice, to seek liberation for black people on the continent and beyond. Anoa's message is to be understood communally.

Indeed, Anoa's utterance is not born of the desire for personal glory or recognition, it is instead the fruit of communal need and a collective ambition. What Isidore Okpewho in "Myth and Modern Fiction: Armah's Two Thousand Seasons" observes of Anoa is indeed true, she is "shaped more by a communal instinct than by a selfish urge for self-glorification (10). As a result, we cannot term Anoa's as a heroic act, it must instead be measured against the background of what has gone before, and what will come after it.

The legend of Anoa is useful for the manner in which it creates a common history for all black people. We know for a fact that the African continent as a whole was plagued by

slavery and colonialism. It is not difficult therefore for us to believe the occurrence of Anoa's utterance. Certainly, it has been amply supported by the events that followed it historically. Within the work, the myth of Anoa is significant for the way its message shapes the lives of certain characters. We take note of the way some seers, hearers and utterers in Anoa's age grasp the importance of her visions and throughout their life-times, they urge a "return" which is then picked up by another group of seers, hearers, and utterers until it reaches the present generation which forms the narrator in Two Thousand Seasons and who are eventually involved in the liberation of black people through armed struggle and guerilla warfare.

So far, we have seen Armah the storyteller conforming to traditional concepts of mythology through an allegiance to the past, a fictional recreation of historical figures, repetition, and the persistent use of elevated language. It is important at this stage for us to consider the various ways in which Armah's mythologizing deviates from the traditional concepts and so sets a kind of modern myth.

The traditional myth has a tendency to praise and glorify individual heroes in a community's past. In Two Thousand Seasons and The Healers, Armah underlines instead the follies and failures of long-gone leaders and kings, whom legend has always remembered fondly. In so doing, Armah has revised the tradition so that "...instead of a historical song of glory ... What we get is a song of sad condemnation" (Okepewho,7). We observe for instance how critical Armah is of all those who have been in any way a party to the oppression and bondage of black people. It does not matter that these people are sometimes black like the rest of us. Armah lashes out harshly at their betrayal of our people. Listen to his description of Mansa Musa I, one time King of ancient Mali and much favoured in legend and historical

accounts:

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 slaves and servants hauling gold to astonish eyes in the desert? Have we already forgotten how swiftly the astonishment he aimed in his foolishness to generate turned to that flaming greed that brought us pillage clothed in the idiocy of religion? (97).

This description leaves us in no doubt about Mansa Musa's treachery against the people of ancient Mali. He actively partook in the plundering of his peoples natural resources and worse still, he encouraged and participated in the selling of his people to foreigners. It was his vanity and buffoonery that brought on the infiltration of Arabs and their Islam into his Kingdom.

In The Healers, we witness Armah's critique of the Ashanti Empire. Where before it has always been praised for territorial expansion, Armah displays this as senseless warfare and a disregard for human life and dignity. Through Densu and Anan, the reader is made to realize the futility of uncontrolled violence. Asamoah Nkwanta's illness is revealed to be a result of his disenchantment with the royalties disregard for human life.

Armah does not restrict his denouncement of traitors to generations in the past, he speaks equally boldly about actors in the present drama of post-independent Africa. Again, he lashes out at all who continue to aid and abet the cultural and economic bondage of black people. In this way, Armah's mythologizing moves out of the cradle of past

events to embrace the present. As Okpewho notes, Armah is guided by a "vision of a culture yet to be evolved or in the process of evolving" (3). In effect, Armah creates a myth that deals with our present predicaments and which projects our thinking into the future. Listen to the description of one named Kamuzu and who no doubt echoes the Malawian leader we know while at the same time representing a handful of current African leadership:

A few only among us were needed to keep Kamuzu's small mind asleep. For in the passage of these days all he required for his happiness was that his person be subjected to endless praise.

We took turns composing, took turns singing the most extravagant praise songs to Kamuzu's vanity ... what spurious praise names did we not invent to lull Kamuzu's buffoon spirit?

Osagyefo!

Kantamantol

Kabiyesil

Sesel

Mwenyanguvu!

Otumfuol (226 - 7)

From this passage, it is clear that Armah is castigating the habit of a return to feudal glory that the rulers of independent Africa have taken to. There is little to praise in the deeds of such men but Armah is not put out by this, he speaks boldly about the part these leaders have played in maintaining the oppression and bondage of Africa. Herein lies Armah's song of sad condemnation, which he struggles to make useful and relevant to the fight for our total liberation.

This tendency of Armah's to dwell on people's follies and misdeeds must be seen alongside the manner in which he passes with ease over events which in the hands of the traditional oral narrator would have called for a lengthy glorification. Indeed, Armah is quick to turn his audience away from complacency and a false image of themselves. The fulfillment of the mission is what lies as paramount. Thus Armah declares:

But we should not stop the onward flow of the work with overlong remembrance of single battles won, of new people welcomed, of the increase of courage for the journeys of the way. For this is mere beginning, not a time for the satisfaction of sweet remembrances (279).

In this way, the reader is made to realize the urgency of the struggle ahead and the enormity of the work that is still to be done.

Another aspect in which Armah's mythologizing differs from that of the past, is in subject. Where the traditional myth focused on the exploits of the elite class in society, Armah tells a myth that emphasizes the involvement of all sorts of people, poor and rich alike. Thus it is that in The Healers, we are told of Densu's exploits in the same breath as we hear of Appia's life. Densu is born among the ordinary folk, Appia is the child of royalty. Armah's communal approach is innocent of class distinctions. In this way, the myth of African unity sustains the collective pronoun "we". The narrator is shown to have a common history with his reader and so he is justified in calling upon the reader to participate in the work of the future. The reader is drawn into a feeling of active involvement and wants to be identified with the narrator of this story. Because this myth is projected into the future, it becomes purposeful for the

audience and the present readership. Wole Soyinka has emphasized that Armah's writing becomes important for us because it provides us with "visionary reconstruction of the past for the purpose of a social direction" (Myth, Literature and The African World 106).

In The Healers, Armah demonstrates how a lack of unity amongst the African Chiefs and a greed for the empty trinkets from the West lead to the destruction of African society. The message at the closure of the novel calls for a coming together of all black people, not just in Africa, but from as far as the Caribbean and the rest of the African diaspora. In the last Chapter, we saw how music and dance are used to forge a coming together of black people. Armah uses music and dance as symbols of the similarities in the cultures of black people all over the world. This underlying of a common culture is itself a part and parcel of the greater myth of African unity.

It is in Two Thousand Seasons however that Armah has best exemplified the idea of a common African heritage. Here he simply terms it "the way" and urges a return to it for the realization of the African destiny. Armah discusses "the way" as if it were known to his readers and as if all we required was a reminder of it. Many readers of Two Thousand Seasons have found difficulties in comprehending the full meaning of "the way". Thus "the way" has been referred to variously as being too abstract, being ill-defined and even as lacking concrete shape (Lindfors, 1980). Contrary to the opinion of these critics, Armah defines and describes "the way" ad nauseam. The definition is illustrated through a series of descriptions from which the reader builds up a picture of what "the way" entails. For instance:

The way is not the rule of men. The way is never

women ruling men. The way is reciprocity. The way is not barrenness. Nor is the way this heedless fecundity. The way is not blind productivity. The way is creation knowing its purpose, wise in the withholding of itself from snares, from destroyers (27).

The emphasis here is on a culture that encourages the performance of all the people in the community. It is an egalitarian culture shunning the superiority of some people above others. This culture is guided by a sense of purpose and knows neither waste nor senseless indulgence. Again, we are told:

Our way, the way is not a random path. Our way begins from coherent understanding. It is a way that aims at preserving knowledge of who we are, knowledge of the best way we have found to relate each to each, each to all, ourselves to other peoples, all to our surroundings. If our individual lives have a worthwhile aim, that aim should be a purpose inseparable from the way (61).

Evidently, "the way" involves the selfless interaction of the individual with all other persons. It is clear, therefore, that the way entails a communal conscience, a regard for a peoples past and its endeavours to overcome the present fragmentation. Yet again, we find:

Our way is reciprocity. The way is wholeness. Our way knows no oppression. Our way is hospitable to quests. The way repels destroyers. Our way produces before it consumes. The way produces more than it consumes. Our way creates. The way destroys only destructions (62).

As Simon Gikandi has noted, this series of short sentences presents the reader with a "catalogue of the values associated with the way: consciousness, self and group identity, and communality" (Reading The African Novel 27).

Throughout the work, we are given repeated insights into the workings and shape of "the way": "Ours then was the way of creation" (2). Or, "Our way is not a road for unwilling souls. The way is not the road of coercion" (286). These persistent descriptions of "the way" create a kind of resonance in the work. Particularly enticing is the repeated juxtapositioning of "the way" and "our way". From it, we begin to get the impression that Armah is not offering a narrowly chauvinistic viewpoint. It is evident that he underlines our way as the way of many other people. The emphasis is on "the way" as a particular and definite means, one which is at once universal and widespread. Undoubtedly, "the way" ought to make sense to people from all quarters for it is the only reasonable and just means of living. In essence the repeated use of "our way, the way" by the writer forms a crucial part of his stylistic devices. Certainly, it echoes in our minds as we read through the work and it begins to assume the proportions of not just symbol or metaphors but more correctly "the way" takes on the dimensions of a living philosophy. Armah discusses it as though it were an immutable fact of Africa's past. He draws out the sympathy of his readers and lures them into a belief of the culture he recounts.

Through the evocation of our belief, Armah begins to operate in the realm of myth. This myth is vital for the way we see it overcoming the contradictions of a past era and in effect we begin to believe in its power to overcome our present problems. Having been emphasized as the only meaningful way for all peoples, we are convinced of the possibility of a coming together of all peoples signified in

"the confluence of all the waters of life flowing to overwhelm the ashen desert's blight!" (321).

In the previous chapter, we saw how Armah in Two Thousand Seasons exploits the images of springwater and the desert to explain the relationship between Africa and the West. In the racial epic that is Two Thousand Seasons, colour takes on a special significance. Here, we shall see how Armah reverses traditional Western concepts of colour to create what Fraser terms the "stark monochrome" of black and white (The Novels of Ayi Kwei Armah 72). In so doing, Armah creates his own myth of colour which is aimed at explaining the past and present predicament of the African peoples and also at offering ways of resolving these contradictions. In essence, Armah achieves this myth by exploiting the already existing Western myth. He dislocates it, subverts it so as to make his own point, that black is not necessarily evil and that white can be the colour of death.

The persistent use of the images of springwater and the desert in the preface has the immediate effect of categorizing the black people as one entity and the Arabs and Europeans as another. The two never merge with anything akin to harmony. Their meeting is always filled with the hostility born of the desert's inclination to destroy, and the springwater's efforts at conservation and regeneration. Beyond our categorization of black and white as two separate entities lies our being lured by the writer into viewing black as being representative of life and beauty, and of white as the colour of death, destruction and ugliness.

What becomes immediately striking and intriguing, is Armah's reversal of the traditional roles of these colours in Western culture. Where the West has always associated black with evil, despair, ugliness and death, Armah now

uses it to represent that which is beautiful and contributes to growth and regeneration. In this reversed order, the colour white stands for ugliness, destruction and death. Emmanuel Ngara in his Stylistic Criticism and The African Novel has taken essential note of the way Armah manipulates language to create new symbols and give new meanings. He refers to this trait as "Armah's decolonization of the English language" (134).

In the preface, we read, "Along the desert road, springwater is the sap of young wood prematurely blazing, meant to carry life quietly, darkly from roots to farthest veins but abruptly betrayed into devouring light, ..." (xi). (emphasis mine).

Darkness is here shown to be a powerful force which aids life and creation. By contrast, light is now shown to be the agent of death, suffocating growth. In creating this myth of colour, Armah repeatedly uses language which supports his distinction of the roles each colour performs. Thus he speaks of Europeans as the "white destroyers". He terms their culture as "the white road of death". The desert too is described as being white and carrying with it an "ashen death". Any association with it leads to a "pale extinction". By contrast, darkness and the colour black are a sign of creation, of continuing life. In describing the night of the women's vengeance against their Arab enslavers, Armah takes special note of the atmosphere. He describes this night as "a dark night", giving it the sound of power and positive action. It is through this dark night that we witness the black people's first act of resistance to white enslavement.

In Armah's new myth of colour, we see how blackness is a colour of beauty and white the image of ugliness. Consider and contrast for instance the description of Idawa, and that

of the Prince Bentum's white wife. Of Idawa, we are told:

Idawa had a beauty with no ... disappointment in it. Seen from a distance her shape in motion told the looker here was co-ordination free, unforced. From the hair on her head to the last of her toes, there was nothing wasted in her shaping. And her colour: that must have come uninterfered with from the night's own blackness. ... Idawa's surface beauty, perfect as it was, was nothing beside her other profounder beauties: the beauty of her heart, the way she was with people, the way she was with everything she came in contact with; and the beauty of her mind, ... (109-10).

This description of a beauty so rich with meaning and filled with communal purpose stands in deep negation of traditional associations of the colour black. In the same way, the description of Prince Bentum's wife stands in sharp contrast and disagreement with traditional concepts of what the colour white represents. Listen:

Now from the gate to the falling came first an apparition exactly like a ghost: a pale white woman in white clothes moving with a disjointed, severe, jerky walk like a profoundly discontented walker. Her walk was like that a beginning stiltwalker, but an angry beginner. Her face was squeezed in a severe frown that had formed three permanent vertical creases on her lower forehead in the space between her eyes. She had no eyebrows. Eyelashes she had, but they were hard to discern, being white and therefore merging into the pallor of her face. On her head she wore a white hat. As she came in, there was space before her, space to her left and right, space behind her:

her figure seemed the shape itself of loneliness. It seemed impossible that she could ever be together with any other being (186).

In Two Thousand Seasons, we are aware that Armah is responding to the myriad of untruths that have been told about black culture and history by the West for many years. We are not surprised therefore by his creation of myths which have a singularly racial tone. Indeed, these myths form a crucial part of the tasks of racial retrieval which Armah has set for himself. The demarcation of black and white therefore serves a purpose that we the readers can readily respond to. Moreover, we are made to view this racial hostility as only a small part in the larger commitment to the total liberation of the African mind.

The myths we have been looking at play a very important part in the narrative technique Armah adopts for his last two books. First and foremost, these myths provide the narratives with a renewed credibility as a result of their allegiance to the past which here embodies the whole of Africa's history. Secondly and equally important, these myths are significant for the manner in which they distance the voice of the oral narrator. True, the narrator takes on the possessive pronoun "we" but the use of myth distinguishes his narrative from a personal interpretation of events. Instead, we are made to feel as though the narrator were only reporting what we already know. It is in this sense that the use of myth has the effect of purifying the writer's ideals. We know that Two Thousand Seasons and The Healers are Ayi Kwei Armah's creations and yet the use of communal myths makes us overlook the individual nature of the desires the works express and we embrace the writer's ideals as our own. By this action, we move away from the realm of fantasy into that of concrete participation on the part of the readers.

CONCLUSION

This thesis set out to see the manner in which form can concretely illuminate and enhance the content of a work of art. At the same time, the thesis intended to see Armah's fictive writing as one continuous and related narrative production. In effect, we identified and traced the growth and significance of a single unifying thread, the motif of journeying and used it to decipher the hidden meanings in Armah's writing.

By bringing to light the social concerns that necessitate Armah's writing, the journeying motif plays the added part of illuminator. In Beautiful Ones, Fragments, and Why Are We So Blest?, we see the writer sketching a variety of journeys all of which go into informing the reader about the artist's intentions. In these works, we are primarily presented with the travels of a single character who finds himself caught up in the web of a society that will not give him way to pursue the honest and upright livelihood his conscience dictates. A struggle ensues. The characters' attempts to escape this snare involve in the main pursuits of the mind but also, some of the body. In effect, we are then offered journeys which are meant to illustrate the direction this society ought to take and which the protagonists categorically endorse. In this way, we see Armah's protagonist providing society's moral fibre.

In Two Thousand Seasons and The Healers, the mode of characterization illuminates the disintegration of black peoples. We witness the shift from the lone-artist-protagonist of the first three novels to a journey more concerned with numbers. African society is shown as having been divided by senseless greed and the haste to consume what one has not produced. By the time the predators arrive, division is firmly entrenched amongst the black people. The task of reasserting African morality cannot be

undertaken successfully by a single person. In this respect we see the journeying motif as having a definite effect on form.

Because the journeying motif adopts the cinematographic technique, it is at certain stages unable to capture what E.M. Forster calls "rounded characters". Along a journey that covers a fast retreating landscape, one can only take account of predominant or outstanding features. Such has been the experience with Armah's mode of characterization. We are made keenly aware of the avarice of Koomson, the buffoonery of Koranche, and Ababio's scheming mind and Buntui's brute strength and stupidity. Under this mode, it is not easy to identify with Anan's goodness and clear-sightedness, or to understand Teacher's single mindedness. We have only fleeting glances at Damfo's and Ocran's make up, in much the same way as we grasp Idawa's and Isanusi's framework with only one glance. Their development and understanding of life to such elevated levels is part of the puzzle that we must fill in for ourselves. Within the scope of the journeying motif, however, this method of characterization does make sense and does hold true.

By far the most significant aspect of this approach, is the way Armah manages to manipulate it and extend it up to the point where it now offers a window through which we can see all of his works. It is evident that his plan for Africa's moral rearmament involves the unity of all black people on new dimensions based on the shape of the journeying motif. Since the lone-artist-protagonist of the earlier works is no longer viable, a new kind of journey must be undertaken, one that involves more people; one that is collective. As the journeys become more communal than individual, so also does the nature of the travels become less mental and more physical. In Two Thousand Seasons, we see physical pursuits that are wholesomely

geared towards the complete destruction of those factors that have contributed to the African peoples' present state of material worship at the expense of honesty and moral scruples.

Through the motif of journeying, in Two Thousand Seasons particularly, we are able to see that this state has been brought about by the way in which African peoples have rejected indigenous methods and practice, in favour of western thought and principle. Within the works therefore, there emerges a new kind of physical undertaking, the search for and return to African philosophical thought and practice. This task of Africa's moral refurnishment is termed in Two Thousand Seasons, as simply "the way". In Fragments, we see it very clearly portrayed that indigenous material culture is not dead. It is viable for today's and tomorrow's needs. Indeed, only through its adoption can we hope to redeem ourselves from the senseless commitment to material prosperity which has been the root cause of our moral bankruptcy.

In The Healers, we can once again see the preponderance of physical journeys. These are made by Densu, Damfo and some of the other healers. Journeys taken in the direction of the setting sun have negative results. They portend evil for the healers, as in the case of Ababio's mock trial of Densu or the Chiefs' journey to the coast to meet the white man. However, within the work, any journeys undertaken in the eastern direction bring hope and rejuvenation. For instance, Densu and Damfo travel far into the eastern forest to begin the complicated work of healing General Asamoia Nkwanta. It is too in the east that Densu finds his vocation and sets his wandering mind at ease. The message here is clear. It borders on a discussion of the West/East ideological rift which maps itself out as geopolitics. Armah however stops short of urging Africans to adopt the modes of the East in

this respect. Armah is simply urging us Africans to adopt indigenous means and revive what is useful and necessary in our past. At the same time, we must open our eyes to the treachery and vice of western ideology and thought carelessly heaped on black peoples.

By traveling backwards in time, Armah creates his own version of history which is crucial to the re-establishment of dignity amongst black people. Armah's creation offers us African material culture, African modes of education and indigenous means of survival. We must applaud it also for the way it honestly captures those rifts and disagreements that shattered the continent. As Armah broadens out in Two Thousand Seasons and The Healers, we witness the balkanization of all African countries. In actual fact, Armah is politicizing. He is saying that we must first of all seek the political kingdom - which Nkrumah in The Beautiful Ones sought and betrayed. If we Africans stand as one, we shall no longer be blessed with a hatred and distrust of self, we shall at once cease to be fragmented, and in the end, "the beautiful ones" will be born and will live amongst us.

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