

An Approach To
THE NOVELS OF AYI KWEI ARMAH

by

W. OSOTSI

*(you were not serious
in dealing with (Ayikweiamah)
BA HONS 1999)*

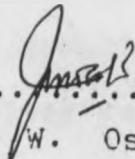
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is presented in part fulfilment of the
degree of Master of Arts in Literature, 1979.

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This is to certify that this thesis
is original research and has never
been presented for examination in
any other University.


.....
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SUPERVISOR:


.....
DR. MICERE GITHAE MUGO

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A B S T R A C T

This thesis is divided into three major Chapters. Chapter one is an analysis of Ayi Kwei Armah's novels at the level of content. In this analysis we conclude that Ayi Kwei Armah is an author who is very committed to creating literature that helps in rectifying whichever mistakes there may be in the African society he writes for.

Because these novels are not political tracts but works of art, this thesis also analyses the creative devices Ayi Kwei Armah uses, how he uses them, and what effect he achieves. Therefore, Chapter Two is about the analysis of the styles this author uses in creating his novels. We find that Armah very consciously uses every artistic unit to create aesthetically appealing novels.

Chapter Three is on The Healers. This novel came too late to be included in the earlier part of the work. Yet to have ignored it would have been disastrous.

The thesis comes up with the conclusion that any work of literary criticism has to analyse both content and style in order to really claim it has done an adequate job.

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Ayi Kwei Armah is one of Africa's leading novelists to-day. He not only has published five novels¹ to-date, but these novels are all of very high quality.

Unfortunatley, criticism has not kept pace with this author's high production. When one

¹Ayi Kwei Armah, The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born , (London: Heinemann Educational Books, 1968.

Ayi Kwei Armah, Fragments. (New York: Collier Books, 1971).

Ayi Kwei Armah, Why Are We So Blest? (New York: Double Day, 1972).

Ayi Kwei Armah, Two Thousand Seasons. (Nairobi: East African Publishing House, 1978).

All quotations in this thesis will be drawn from the above-listed versions.

tries to get available material on him three problems arise. Firstly, most of the works are only reviews of his novels. Secondly, of the few essays that concern him, most of them concentrate on The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born. In these essays, one either finds concentration on one aspect or the other of the novel, or finds the criticism written in such a way as to cover, not just Armah, but also another author or authors. In the first case (as will be illustrated below), we find that the best of these essays extract from these novels one or two elements for either thematic or stylistic analysis. This means that most times we do not get an indepth analysis of the whole novel. In the latter case, where essays cover Armah with another author, we find that an extensive study of any of his novels is completely lacking. Instead, safe platitudes, especially about The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born, are repeated because they will not antagonize other reviewers and critics. To the best of my knowledge, there is not even an essay on any of the other four novels. The only partial references to these works can be seen in Senda wa

Kwayera's dissertation², Paul Ngige Njoroge's thesis on African Literature in general³ and Bernth Lindfor's Seminar presentation to the Department of Literature's Graduate Seminar in October, 1978. All these works are unpublished so far⁴. Therefore since 1968 when he published his first novel, Armah has not received adequate attention from critics of the African novel.

The reason for the superficiality of this criticism lies in two closely tied areas.

Firstly, Armah's usage of language is so careful that he literally knows why he uses every word. This automatically makes him a complicated stylist and consequently alienates some critics who think that he creates ^{Complex} complicated language for the sake of complication. These critics, starting with preconceived ideas of what Armah's message.

²Senda wa Kwayera, "Ayi Kwei Armah's fiction: Major Themes and Style". Unpublished Undergraduate Dissertation, Department of Literature, University of Nairobi, June, 1978.

³Paul Ngige Njoroge, "The Tradition of Search In West African Literature". Unpublished Master's Thesis, Department of Literature, University of Nairobi, 1976.

⁴In a 1979 catalogue, Heinemann Educational Books announced a new work on Armah's novels. It is The Novels of Ayi Kwei Armah by Robert Fraser. It is not yet in the market.

should be, impose inadequate critical standards on this author.

Secondly, Armah's choice of complex subject matter in turn demands a serious approach from the critics/readers. He realizes that the individuals he creates live in a fast-changing world which cannot be adequately analysed in the safe framework of cliches. This realization forces him to try and re-assess the society in which he lives. This re-assessment becomes even more complicated because one is not dealing with an essay or short story, but with a novel form which also has its own laws that govern what constitutes a finished piece. To be in a position to adequately analyse Armah, therefore, imposes certain demands on the critic: he should not only understand what the author treats, but should also be in a position to comment on the novel as an art form through which the author tries to establish communication with his audience.

Let us illustrate the significance of these two assertions by examining some essays that exist on The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born. We find, for instance, that Henry Chakava imposes a straight-jacket made of "love, faith and hope, the three

greatest Christian virtues", without bothering to explain why he finds it necessary to operate within this framework. This, consequently, forces him to look for those "eternal values" which are a-historical and therefore cannot form part of the tools for analysing this novelist who is so conscious of history. As Chakava condemns himself at the end of his essay:

Through out this essay I have born in mind and tried to respect, that Ibsenian analogy in which organic decay was used to symbolize moral decay. In other words I have considered corruption as perennial, everlasting things stretching from the original sin to the end of time. 5

To Chakava, therefore, "an understanding of evil, corruption" without a historical basis becomes the fundamental limit "necessary for a clear appreciation" of The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born. As a result, the conclusions drawn are the usual profound banalities about the hopelessness of the human condition.

⁵ Henry Chakava, "Ayi Kwei Armah and a Commonwealth of Souls", Standpoints on African Literature, ed. Chris Wanjala, (Nairobi: East African Literature Bureau, 1973), p. 208.

Another much better critic, Margaret Alusola, gives the ambiguous assessment:

Armah's pessimism may even be distasteful to some readers, but it does not seem to me a pessimism which need limit the vision of The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born, for Armah seems to be very aware of the positive values of life and the book does not pour scorn on them or those who work for them. 6

Alusola's ambiguity in trying to bring across a concept like positive-pessimist (!) reflects the problems she has in dealing with the style of this author. She, however, comes to the same conclusion as Chakava:

The conclusion from such a glance at the novel would seem to be that human nature will always be like this. Man will always fail woman. Power will always corrupt. 7

⁶ Margaret Alusola, "An Additional Comment on Ayi Kwei Armah's The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born," African Literature To-day, No. 5 Ed. Eldred Jones (London: Heinemann Educational Books, 1971) p. 128.

For Chinua Achebe, The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born is "a sick book. Sick, not with the sickness of Ghana but with the sickness of the human condition".⁸ He has already decided that Armah is writing an existentialist novel which, however, is not successful because it neither fits in Africa nor in Europe: for him, the "realistic ingredients" in the novel "like Kwame Nkrumah" are "a mistake"⁹. Since Armah, Achebe has decided, was out to write "a modern 'universal' story", then he should not have tried to concretize it by referring to specific places and incidents in Ghana. Within this very harsh criticism, we understand Achebe's inability to see that Armah is not only at pains to portray a neo-colonial society, but at the same time wants to show that in such a society there are people who are forced to live alienated lives because they constitute the oppressed

⁸ Chinua Achebe, "Africa and Her Writers",
Morning Yet On Creation Day (London:
Heinemann Educational Books, 1975), p. 25.

⁹ Chinua Achebe, ibid., p. 25

sections of the society. Armah's character, the man was unfamiliar to Achebe to the extent that Achebe did not understand the contradictions imposed on a worker in a neo-colony. It is obvious that Achebe did not pay adequate attention to The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born and consequently ended up having a superficial view of this work. His comparison of Armah to a colonial white District Officer is, unfortunately, most unperceptive.

Arthur Gakwandi, in The Novel and Contemporary Experience in Africa, does not present any radically different position from the one held by Achebe although he is published three years later.¹⁰

Ama Ata Aidoo offers a better understanding of The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born in her introduction to the American edition.¹¹ She does not find the Ghana depicted in this novel untypical except in one sense only: 'the degree of his (the man's) sensitive awareness'. What would have been very good criticism is, however, limited by the fact that this critic was writing

10
Arthur Gakwandi, The Novel And Contemporary Experience In Africa, (London: Heinemann Educational Books, 1978). Materials in this work, were presented to the Publisher in 1975. Achebe's essay "Africa and Her Writers" was written in 1972.

11
Ama Ata Aidoo, "Introduction", The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born, Ayi Kwei Armah, (New York : Collier Books, 1969), pp. vii-xii.

an introduction. By examining this essay, one is led to conclude that Aidoo had a much better grasp of the material the author was dealing with than either Gakwandi, Achebe, Chakava or most of the other reviewers.

Kolawole Ogungbesam's article "Symbol and meaning in The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born". is also an article of merit. Even though the critic does not bother to give an analysis of the content in this novel, his examination of the style is well done and it merits serious attention.

Paul Ngige Njoroge earns the credit of treating Two Thousand Seasons in his thesis, but fails, on the other hand, to see anything in this novel apart from what he terms "neo-negritude"¹², a concept Bernth Lindfors would seem to think appropriate. The complex thematic and stylistic levels escape these two critics. They do not do justice to the text or to themselves.

¹²

Paul Ngige Njoroge, op. cit., p. 445

Besides these, there is that group of outright bad critics, typified by Larson, who substitute fiction for truth and in the process try to foist onto the reader an erroneous view of Armah, the writer. These critics do not deserve any attention beyond our noting that most of them are suffering from alienation in their refusal to come to grips with the real social and public contradictions explored by this important critic of neo-colonialism.

On the whole then, existing criticism on Armah can be said to be fairly representative and gives an indication of the extent to which Armah has not received adequate attention.

Since Armah deals with complex themes, it becomes necessary to analyse his language in order to understand how he conveys his intentions. A well-written novel has a style that suits its content. In fact - and this is our contention - a well-written novel should reflect, at the level of style, not only whatever complexity there may be in its themes, but also at the same time the author's unequivocal perspective vis a vis these themes. It should be possible, to have a clear understanding of

what the author is saying at the level of content. Georg Lukacs's contention - which we agree with - that:

Content determines form. But
there is no content of which
Man himself is not the focal
point. 13

should similarly apply to the form of a good novel. If, by analysing the form of any novel one cannot arrive at a positive affirmation of the human being with all the complexities this affirmation entails, then that novel is not well integrated to form a work of art. The purpose of this thesis shall therefore be to show that Ayi Kwei Armah produces such integrated works of art.

The power in Ayi Kwei Armah's writing lies in the fact that the form he uses adequately carries the problems that he poses. Therefore, in this work, we shall try to find out what techniques Armah uses in writing his novels. But before we come to analyse these techniques, it shall be necessary that, first of all, we understand the concerns of the author. In understanding what the content is, we shall be in a position to deal in

13
Georg Lukacs, The Meaning of Contemporary
Realism (London: Merlin Press Ltd., 1963),
P.19 .

greater detail with the language of this writer.

When analysing the content of these novels, there are certain important areas we cannot afford to ignore. As mentioned earlier, Armah has a deep historical consciousness of the moments in which he places his characters. This makes him centre his novels upon the various stages of the African society's historical growth which makes it possible for him to examine more closely whichever problem he wants to deal with. Let us briefly survey them.

In The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born. Armah sets out to depict, very carefully, a neo-colony. He shows how it owes this status to the previous one of colonization. Within this careful examination of colonialism and neo-colonialism, the author is trying to understand, among other things, the enslavement of the African in a modern society. In order to do this successfully, he takes the position of the modern wage-slave and through the worker's growth in consciousness, the reader is led to understand better the changing nature of slavery.

Fragments is placed in the same context of a neo-colony. The only difference is that the perspective the reader is given has been switched from that of the railway worker to that of

a student returning home from abroad. Through Baako's refusal to play the "normal" role of a corrupt civil servant, the author tries to give articulation to the types of pressures that people placed in this character's position experience. In this novel, we find the author's further examination of the theme of slavery and how the "enslaving things of Europe" turn mother against son, sister against brother. Examined within the context of family relationships, Armah demonstrates how the closest ties break under the impact of family expectations. But simultaneously we are shown the forging of new links between black people who do not have the same family background but are united on the basis of the deep love they bear for their society and how, despite enormous odds, they represent the way of sanity in an insane world.

In Why Are We So Blest? Armah is concerned with the racist links that bind African countries which are struggling to be independent with their "mother" countries. Obviously influenced by what was going on in the former Portuguese colonies, this author goes on to examine the difficulty Modin and Solo have in understanding their roles in their countries. This difficulty arises out of their love

for their people and their people's enemies. In trying to 'understand' both sides they end up antagonizing the two camps and consequently fit nowhere. In this novel, Armah is at pains to depict what the causes of neo-colonialism^{are.} This harsh examination cannot endear him to those who would camouflage the faults in a country fighting for independence. Yet this is necessary, considering how many of the African nations have taken this same path.

As is therefore clear from a general survey of these novels, Armah undertakes the complicated task of trying to present neo-colonial societies. After writing The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born and Fragments, the writer felt dissatisfied with his depiction of the social ills of neo-colonialism. In Why Are We So Wlest? he, therefore, sets out to analyse a society which is heading towards neo-colonialism. But he does it in such a way that while dealing with the problem of neo-colonialism in a country like Ghana, he simultaneously depicts the struggles in societies of former Portuguese colonies. These societies are at the stage where they are about to defeat Portuguese

colonialism, but in the process are opening themselves up to neo-colonial forces. Through this work, Armah achieves the double purpose of analysing the past, without losing grip of the present.

In Two Thousand Seasons, Ayi Kwei Armah tries to offer a possible explanation as to how classes arose within societies in Africa. With this work the author seems to have finally crystallized, in an art form, the idea that the problems for the societies he has been examining are to be found in the class nature of these societies. This, in effect, places him, unlike negritudist writers, in a position to understand what was negative about the foreigners. Because he is dealing with a time-span that covers two thousand or more years this has a crucial effect on his characterization, his evocation of situations and of course his language itself. This novel which is so different from the earlier three, yet so characteristic of their concerns, makes very interesting analysis, especially at the level of style.

After this novel, Armah goes in to examine an African feudalist society and how it adjusted to the European's coming. In this work, The Healers. Armah reverts back to the presentation

of detail, but with the difference that his style is much simpler, more relaxed than in any other previous work. This could be an indication of the fact that he has finally mastered the novel form to the extent that he can communicate clearly.

What emerges from this concern with the historical perspective is Armah's growing conviction that the deviation from "the way" begins when the African societies start to form classes. This formation of classes would not in itself have been negative if it was not for the fact that classes can only begin to exist when a major section of the society becomes alienated from not only the means of production but also from the right to distribute the wealth of their labour. As Armah himself showed right from his first novel, this alienation means that the majority of the people are not in a position to satisfy their basic necessities of food, shelter and clothing, since they do not control the distribution of wealth within the society.

Therefore, as he examines the historical theme, Armah examines the meaning and basis of alienation. In the course of his character portrayal, he reflects his consciousness about the

four levels on which alienation operates among individuals in a class society. Marx's useful definition of alienation shall therefore act as a guide line in unravelling the complexity of this author's themes and characterization.

After an analysis of thematic progression in the novels of Ayi Kwei Armah, the thesis will then focus on style.

The Chapter on Style will form the major part of this work. In analysing the style of this author, we shall begin from the smallest stylistic unit - the word, to the largest - the form of the novel.

In analysing the word, we shall examine the author's usage of nouns, adjectives, verbs and adverbs mainly. Where articles such as 'the' are significantly used, we shall also analyse them.

In examining the noun, we shall look at the proper nouns, common nouns and the way they affect character creation.

In examining the adjectives, we shall try and see how the author uses the unit in order to describe his characters more effectively. Since adjectives are used to qualify nouns, they form an important part of the message and help us to

understand the attitude of this author towards the characters he creates, the things and situations portrayed, and consequently, the nature of his message.

In analysing the articles, we shall try to see where the author wants to particularize a situation and where he thinks that the situation could apply to other similar societies or characters. In this, it will be necessary to analyse Armah's depiction of "the" man, in The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born.

In examining these linguistic devices, we shall not attempt to be exhaustive since this will make the work too large. We shall instead concentrate on the devices in two ways. Firstly, we shall show what is typical and try to answer why this author favours it. Secondly, we shall show what is exceptional and why this author is compelled to use it.

In our work, we shall present a textual analysis focussing on elements, both at the levels of content and form, which we find relevant to our understanding of this writer's creative process.

We shall use all the works of Ayi Kwei Armah. These are: The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born, Fragments, Why Are We So Blest?, Two Thousand

Seasons, and The Healers. The last novel, The Healers, will be treated separately because it came too late to be analyzed alongside the rest of the works. Yet, it is not possible to ignore it since it offers another illustration of this author's mastery of the word.

Since it is our contention that for a good understanding of any work of literature, a balanced study of the way the author uses form and content to project his message is basic, we shall illustrate how balanced Armah's art is in the process of analysing these five novels.

In the conclusion we shall try to see whether by analysing this author, we can come up with critical standards which one can use in understanding other authors, especially stylistically complex ones.

CHAPTER ONE

Before we begin on our analysis of the content in Armah's novels, we need to have an understanding of the term alienation. This phenomenon was analysed in detail by Marx in "The Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844"¹. We shall, therefore, begin with a review of this definition.

The formation of classes, which presumes estrangement of labour from one section of the society by another, creates as a social by-product, alienation in the producers, the workers.

¹ Karl Marx, "The Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844", Collected Works Vol. 3 (Moscow , Progress Publishers, (1975).

Alienation manifests itself most clearly among workers in four distinct ways. The worker is alienated from nature, that is, he does not receive the products he gets from nature as a result of his labour. This means that he will not have a normal way of relating to nature but in fact will see it as a reflection of his alienation. Nature to this worker will acquire the inimical characteristics he is subjected to in his job.

Secondly, the worker feels alienated from himself in the sense that since in working he should affirm and recreate himself further, if the results of his work are not utilized by him but by someone else, he "feels (he is) outside himself".²

² Karl Marx, ibid. p. 274

To work, therefore, becomes a process of estrangement from the self, instead of being a creative act.

Thirdly, man alienates himself from his fellow men if the products of his work are alienated from him. Since man's only way of relating to other people is through his work and its products, then to have the products of that labour alienated from oneself is to lack a means of communicating with other human beings. As a result of this, people relate to one another only through the distorted mirror of alienation.

Finally, man alienates himself from his species-being when his labour is alienated from him. In the process of working, human beings do not adapt themselves to their surroundings. They, instead, shape these surroundings to their use. Therefore when man tries to shape his environment in order to satisfy his basic needs but finds that the decision to work, the choice of what work to engage in, and the results of the work he devotes his labour to are not determined by himself but by another being, this worker finds that he:

only feels himself freely active in his animal functions - eating, drinking, procreating or at most in his dwelling and in dressing up, etc; and in his human functions he no longer feels himself to be anything but an animal. What is animal becomes human and what is human becomes animal. 3

Society cannot become a slave.
↓
It can be

As society develops from the patriarchal, to slave, through the feudal, into the capitalistic stages, alienation assumes such diversified and acute forms that when finally a society is under the rule of capital, the full effects of alienation at the four different levels register heavily among the workers.

← wrong intensification

When we examine Two Thousand Seasons and the earlier novels, we notice that the deviation from the way, the intensification of class formations and the further manifestation of alienation among the people who do the work, are portrayed.

For a better understanding of alienation not only do we examine how it is manifested among

³ Karl Marx, ibid. pp. 274-275.

those who work, but at the same time, we have to look at that section of the society that directly benefits from estranging the products of a worker's labour.

If the worker's activity is a torment to him, to another it must give satisfaction and pleasure. ⁴

But this "satisfaction and pleasure" raises guilt feelings in the light of the misery of the worker. These guilt feelings have to be explained away in order that the beneficiary of a worker's labour continues to enjoy his privileged position. This explanation uses everything, hypocrisy, lies, the act of blaming the victim, etc. in order to satisfy the privileged ones that what they are doing is not a deviation from the way of reciprocity. Therefore the ruling class, the class of those ones who do not work, yet benefit from those who work, becomes a class of liars, cheats, hypocrites. Physically, the ruling class is also affected in that it becomes more and more repulsive in its obvious physical comfort amidst the producers' physical emaciation, misery, ugliness.

⁴ Karl Marx, ibid. p. 278

Because of the ruling class' estrangement from work, (and it is the ability to work that qualitatively defines the human being from other species), this class begins to show signs of decadence. This class, ironically, begins to show the four signs of alienation seen among the workers but now accompanied by "pleasure" and not misery.

By examining this class alone, therefore, one is able to come to an understanding of the distortions within the society.

When we examine the first class society, the society during the Rule of Men, we notice that the women did the work: they were "welcomed" by the men into the real work;⁵ they were the "maintainers...., their own protectresses". And when finally the men tore themselves to pieces in their greed, the women were left to do the work of healing.

In describing the men who were benefitting from the products of work, the author goes into a lot of detail because he wants to depict what had grown unnatural within the society:

⁵ Ayi Kwei Armah, Two Thousand Seasons, p.16.

But already they had brought forth a strange, new kind of man, his belly like a pregnant woman's of a habit to consume more food and drink than he gives out in work and energy. 6

These same men "jealous and cowardly"⁷ also affected the "ordinary multitudes". "Warring gangs, each under its red-eyed champion" began to appear. 8

But the effect was not just a creation of physically repulsive, unnatural forms, but also of deterioration in the morality of the people:

(There was) the banishment of honest words, the raising of flattery and lies into the currency of the time. 9

and also hypocrisy:

The men, at length announcing a necessity to nurse their strength for the work of elephants, with the magic of words made weightier with furrowed brows successively pulled themselves out of all ongoing work, leaving only phantom heroic work, work which never found them. 10

⁶ Ayi Kwei Armah, ibid. p. 17.
⁷ Ayi Kwei Armah, ibid. p. 14.
⁸ Ayi Kwei Armah, ibid. p. 14.
⁹ Ayi Kwei Armah, ibid. p. 14.
¹⁰ Ayi Kwei Armah, ibid., pp. 15-16.

And later on when it was generally accepted that the men should not do the "trivial, easy, light" work of the woman, they pulled themselves even further away from the work:

...Even on those rare occasions when such work as the men had named their work happened, there were no men in sight. 11

Laziness and the need to consume without producing had come into being. Even at the level of aesthetics we notice a difference in the perception of what is beautiful and what is ugly:

(The men) sat through moistureless afternoons..., staring up at the clear white skies, muttering mutual incoherencies about the beauty of such skies -- how often the unconnected eye finds beauty in death -- while the women looked at the same whiteness, saw famine where the men saw beauty, and grew frightened for our people. 12

There are several facts we can note in connection with this society.

The first is that the protagonist is able to tell us more about the class of men since

11

12 Ayi Kwei Armah, ibid., p. 16.

12 Ayi Kwei Armah, ibid., p. 17.

it is in them that we notice more clearly what is changing in the society. They reflect their appropriation of the women's labour not only in their physical but also in their moral selves. And in their turn they affect negatively, the society in which they live with their "masculine carnage".

In this same society, there is not much change in the women's lives except that they have to take on the extra duties that the men have eschewed. The women do not lose their power of perception. In fact the author points to this when we notice that Yaniba who saves the community from a drought ¹³, Anoa¹⁴, and the other five seers¹⁵ who predict "destruction's two thousand seasons" are all women.

Therefore what we notice as the difference between the men and the women is the ability, on the part of the latter to manifest their humanity in work, while the men would reduce themselves to their animal functions without any comprehension or "connectedness". Since an appreciable amount of

¹³

¹⁴ Ayi Kwei Armah, ibid., p. 17

¹⁵ Ayi Kwei Armah, ibid., p. 19.

Ayi Kwei Armah, ibid., p. 19

the women's work is not being estranged from them, and in so far as the men do not set themselves aside and begin to accumulate private property, the two continue to live together in the same households. Thus, the men's greed can only manifest itself in eating and "drinking ahey".¹⁶ It is because of their inability to alienate from the women the surplus produced that we find the men do not cause alienation. But this is not to their credit. The men are incapable of consuming all the surplus that the women produce.

In order for alienation to occur, we have to remember, there has to be an estrangement of the products of a worker's labour from the worker. This means that the worker should not just be a producer but in fact an enslaved producer who does not have any say as to how the products of his/her labour are to be distributed. So long as a worker decides what to produce and how to produce it, then fully realized alienation will not occur.

It is not until the next stage, the stage of the predators' first empire over the people,

¹⁶ Ayi Kwei Armah, *ibid.*, pp. 16-17

that we notice, not only a clear estrangement of a people from the results of their labour, but at the same time, as a result of this estrangement, the obvious manifestations of alienation in its four forms. And this was possible because under feudalism, it was possible to enslave, to completely reify the producer and thereby make possible the estrangement of this slave's products.

The first empire came on the crest of a massacre after which the predators made themselves "masters over their old hosts"¹⁷. Being the masters meant that they were not going to do any work, but at the same time they would consume much more of what they forced the people to produce for them. "For the destroyers" the protagonist points out:

...it was a time of ceaseless self-gratulation, incessant feasting, an unending round of entertainments enjoyed at our expense, a childish euphoria created on our backs. 18

This "slavery", as is pointed out, has certain effects within the society of the dominated:

¹⁷Ayi Kwei Armah, *ibid.*, p. 31
¹⁸Ayi Kwei Armah, *ibid.*, p. 49

Our women the predators from the
desert turned into playthings
for their decayed pleasure. 19

The first negation of the slave's humanity is by the slavemaster turning him/her into a thing that is divorced from humanity. This constant denial of the producer's humanity despite her/his affirmation of it through the activity of work takes on different expressions. For example, there is the crude form of turning the producers into playthings that are there for the gratification of the master's decadent tastes.²⁰ In a bourgeois society this reification takes on subtle forms. But the end result is the same: the producer ends up being reified.

The major criticism of the predators lies in the way they made people "animals for others, things in the hands of (their) enemies"²¹. And those who did the dirty work for them, the askaris whose "violent job (was) to kill off all caught trying to end our oppression", had no better fate awaiting

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²⁰ Ayi Kwei Armah, ibid., p. 31.

²¹ Ayi Kwei Armah, ibid., pp. 33-38.

Ayi Kwei Armah, ibid., p. 47.

them:

...the predators consistently reduced these men first to beasts, then to things-- beasts they could command, things they could manipulate... From morning till sleep they were either at some sport, eating, drinking, accumulating, smoking or defecating.²²

As Marx puts it, the worker suffering from alienation:

... only feels himself freely active in his animal functions - eating, drinking, procreating.. ²³

Yet from whatever angle one may look at the askaris, they were still workers, slaves "forever conditioned against (themselves), against (their) people".²⁴ Alienated from themselves and their people as a result of the work they performed, these people could not see themselves as anything better than animals.

Therefore we notice that under feudalism, the full impact of alienation is not felt by the people since for them, despite the expropriation of some of their products to support the kings, there is still a certain amount of control over what they produce. Ironically, it is the askaris, those

²² Ayi Kwei Armah, ibid., pp. 46-47

²³ Karl Marx, op. cit., p. 275

²⁴ Ayi Kwei Armah, op.cit. p. 42.

slaves who are closest to the master and derive "benefits" from this closeness, who manifest the clearest signs of alienation.

Their work is to kill for the sake of kings and not themselves²⁵ and so they are alienated from the products of their labour, turned into things of "disconnectedness", persons suffering from alienation. They are not really human, they are "zombies"²⁶; they are alienated from other human beings since their work is to destroy their people for the sake of the masters. Neither are they close to the masters since to them they are only slaves, things to be used and no more. In their punishment of the people who would fight for freedom, these zombies express their alienation from other humans by mutilating and killing human beings²⁷, reducing to non-human forms other human beings.

These askaris manifest most clearly the signs of alienation which are going to be seen later on among the workers in a bourgeois neo-colonial

²⁵ Except those times when there was a revolt and then they killed "not just for pleasure but also for their useless lives".

²⁶ Ayi Kwei Armah, *ibid.*, p. 32

²⁷ Ayi Kwei Armah, *ibid.*, pp. 47-49.

state.

Under capitalistic conditions which exist in a neo-colonial class society, like that depicted in The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born, we observe conditions where there is total alienation of the worker from the products of his labour. The worker has no say in what he produces, how much he produces, when he should produce it and why he should produce it. In fact the worker himself by working is reduced to a commodity:

Labour produces not only commodities: it produces itself and the worker as a commodity - and this at the same rate at which it produces commodities in general. 28

Having been reduced to a thing, and because this worker's "labour is not voluntary but coerced"²⁹, man becomes estranged from the products of his labour, and in this we find the source of his alienation.

The problems which face the man and those he observes among other workers (and non-workers too, like Koomson, Teacher, Rama Krishnan etc.) can be seen as manifestations of alienation to which, of necessity, every worker is subject under bourgeois conditions.

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Karl Marx, op. cit., p. 272 (Author's Italics).

²⁹Karl Marx, ibid., p. 274

When one looks at the problem of alienation from nature as a result of one's work in the Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born, the immediate example that comes to mind is the bus conductor. For the conductor, money, an aspect of nature in so far as it is only pieces of paper or metal, has acquired power that is beyond his understanding. In smelling the money,³⁰ the conductor is fascinated with that which has a higher value - the paper cedi. The metal coins do not have that much fascination for him. For the conductor, it is the money and the means of making that money - the bus - which matter. The way he reveres money, buses, expensive cigarettes could almost be said to be invested with mysticism. To him, these things have a power that is more effective than that of the human beings who invented them. To the conductor, a person who does not have a lot of money is "a body that has yet to wake",³² "a walking corpse". But when the same passengers, at the end of the month, are able to provide the

³⁰ Ayi Kwei Armah, The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born, op. cit., p. 3.

³¹ If they had been gold coins his behaviour would probably not have been any different from that of Grandet.

³² Ayi Kwei Armah, ibid., p. 2.

conductor with a chance to steal from them and thereby make a "profit"³⁵, then they are powerful, awake. In other words alive. To the conductor, money has the ability to give and refuse life. It is a god. In the conductor's mind, money has become a fetish.

The same thing can be observed in Koomson the ex-dockworker who now indulges himself in all kinds of acquisition of private and personal property to the extent that he is only fascinated by his ability to accumulate more and more.³⁴.

Even to some extent the sensitive man is subject to the same mystification of nature. For example when Koomson's car emerges out of the shadows, the man, observing it, invests it with more than just the functional characteristics it is supposed to have:

From the rise ahead an object made of power and darkness and gleaming light comes shimmering in a potent moving stream. 35

33

Ayi Kwei Armah, ibid., p. 2.

34 Ayi Kwei Armah, ibid., pp. 172, 173, 175.

35 Ayi Kwei Armah, ibid., p. 42.

The power of the car is magnified beyond its natural aspects and is made to look like a living force, powerful in itself, beyond human understanding. But fortunately for the man, we notice that this is only momentary, since just a few moments later we see him correctly observing it as just a limousine. This restoration of the man's understanding which shows his analytical sensitivity and his refusal to be taken in by "the enslaving things" of the ruling class is a gift that, say, the conductor does not have. When the conductor is caught out in his money-smelling act, he invests another object - the packet of Embassy cigarettes - with power, to intercede for him in his "quarrel" with the watcher:

Calmly, the conductor slipped a hand in his shirt pocket and took out a packet of Embassy cigarettes. He had not thought he would have to open it so soon, but now there was a cause. The soul of a man was waiting to be drawn. An important bargain was hanging in the air. 36

It is interesting that when one reads this paragraph from the underlined lines, one can imagine a country opening an Embassy in some other country. Cigarettes have been invested with the power of a

³⁶ Ayi Kwei Armah, *ibid.*, pp. 5-6 (Italics mine).

diplomatic human being who is to set an important matter right. The poor conductor has not broken out of his alienation from nature. In fact it is ironical that the same Embassy cigarettes were bought with the money that this worker got in the process of his doing his work. His work, therefore, directly leads ^{to} his alienation from nature.

For the man, the alienation is not complete but it keeps occurring on and off throughout the novel. Another example of this type of alienation is seen in the way the man observes the clear water that comes out of the dirty one at the dam, made by the collapsed embankment of a bridge.³⁷ For the man who is observing it, it is as if nature herself is confirming the fact that no matter how one struggles to remain pure, this struggle will end in failure. It is as if, indirectly, nature is telling the man he should stop fighting against corruption since it is "natural" - a message which he gets from the activities of some of his fellow workers on the job, for example the allocations Clerk,³⁸ his wife Oyo³⁹ and even Teacher, with his petty-bourgeois intellectual despair about revolutio-

³⁷ Ayi Kwei Armah, ibid. pp. 26-27.

³⁸ Ayi Kwei Armah, ibid. p. 125.

³⁹ Ayi Kwei Armah, ibid. pp. 49-52.

nary movements and their failure to solve all mankind's problems⁴⁰. But as we pointed out earlier, we observe everything in the novel through the man's perception. It is therefore his senses of hearing, seeing, smelling which give us a guide into the nature of reality around. Marx writes on senses:

...man is affirmed in the objective world not only in the act of thinking but with all senses.. . For not only the five senses but also the so called mental senses, the practical senses (will, love, etc.) in a word, human sense the human nature of the sense, comes to me by virtue of its object, by virtue of humanised nature. The forming of the five senses is a labour of the entire history of the world down to the present. The sense caught in a crude practical need has only a restricted sense. For the starving man, it is not the human form of food that exists, but only its abstract existence as food. It could form, and it would be impossible to say wherein this feeding activity differs from that of animals. The care burdened, poverty-stricken man has no sense for the finest play; the dealer in minerals sees only the commercial value but not the beauty and specific character of the minerals. 41.

⁴¹Ayi Kwei Armah, ibid., p. 107.

⁴²Karl Marx, op. cit., pp. 301-302(Author's Italics)

Exactly the same phenomenon is experienced by the man who, because he sees Koomson in his corrupt activities, has corrupt work-mates, and is criticised at home for not being corrupt, begins to see corruption even in objective nature!⁴²

(On this point of corruption, which has been seen by almost every critic of Armah's as stressed beyond normal, we would suggest it would be better if every circumstance surrounding acts of corruption were carefully observed. In every instance it will be discovered that the corruption is either one or another manifestation of alienation in the character being observed by the man).

The second manifestation of alienation where the worker feels self-alienation can be observed in the impotence that not only the man but also other workers feel when they may be working or when they are away from their jobs. When the conductor is confronted with a person who has money, he is weak, recipient, fawning:

⁴² Note also that when the man sees this, he has "the clarity of vision" brought on by hunger.

"Yes, man. You are a big man".⁴³

He "softens" his own arrogant^{to}-crude nature, the better to please the "boastful giver".⁴⁴ One can imagine that when the conductor has the time to think about himself, he can only see himself in a contemptuous light since he does not have the big money that would make him respect himself.

This feeling of self-alienation sometimes comes out in the sadness and guilt the man feels because he cannot provide his family with their basic necessities.⁴⁵

"Yes. I feel like a criminal. Often these days I find myself thinking of something sudden I could do to redeem myself in their eyes. Then I sit down and ask myself what I have done wrong, and there is really nothing. 46

Since:

Man, much as he may therefore be a

⁴³ Ayi Kwei Armah, op. cit., p. 3.
⁴⁴ Ayi Kwei Armah, ibid. p. 3.
⁴⁵ Ayi Kwei Armah, ibid. pp. 53, 62.
⁴⁶ Ayi Kwei Armah, ibid., p. 63.

particular individual, (and it is precisely his particularity which makes him an individual, and a real individual social being), is just as much the totality-- the ideal totality-- the subjective existence of imagined and experienced society for itself; a totality of human manifestation of life.. 47

the man is just reflecting the major contradictions in this Ghanaian Society. Since the life he leads is dominated by neo-colonialism, the man can neither help reflecting the alienation in society as a dissatisfaction with himself, nor blaming himself for the inability to be a "potent giver", an exploiter, like Koomson and Estella. So long as the society the man exists in is subject to alienation the man will reflect this in himself. That is why the comment at the end is so perceptive:

But then suddenly all his mind was consumed with thoughts of everything he was going back to -- Oyo, the eyes of the children after six o'clock, the office and every day, and above all the never-ending knowledge that this aching emptiness would be all that the remainder of his own life could offer him. 48

⁴⁷Karl Marx, op. cit., p. 299.

⁴⁸Ayi Kwei Armah, op. cit., p. 215.

At the end, the man can see himself as a worker, struggling and waiting for the day when the premises for a more just society will have been laid. But he knows that this will take more time than his own short individual life-span. Therefore, the sadness at the end is not occasioned by despair nor is it a sign of defeat on the man's part, but rather an understanding that his short life will not be able to reach that beautiful future. To try and imagine within the man's own lifespan anything more positive than this is to indulge in idealistic thinking.

Thirdly, we see an example of alienation between one man and another very clearly depicted in the novel. In fact this is the most widely treated form of alienation within the novel. This is not because of Armah's familiarity with it more than with the other forms, but because of the nature of the discipline itself - Literature - through which he is depicting Ghanaian Society. Since literature deals with characters and their consciousness, it means that in a society where alienation is dominant, it will hardly be possible for the characters an author depicts not to show alienation in their relations with one another. This is what goes on to

form the basis of contradictions within characters.

In the conductor, we see this alienation at a very high stage. As pointed out, the conductor cannot relate to people, but rather to the things that relate to them. He finally gives clear articulation of the nature of his alienation from his fellow men when he angrily abuses the man:

Article of no commercial
value: 49

That is the only way he sees other human beings. If they cannot bring in money, if they cannot be bought or sold, then they are of no commercial value, because they have refused to be commodities.⁵⁰ They are useless (in the same way he would reason air was useless) because they do not have exchange - value!

The night clerk in the office also shows the same signs of alienation from his family:

⁴⁹Ayi Kwei Armah, *ibid.*, p. 6.

⁵⁰Karl Marx, *Capital* Vol. 1 (Moscow: Progress Publishers 1954), pp. 43-44.

"Home?" The (night clerk) made a sound much like dry paper tearing... The brightness in his eyes went down and the eyeballs themselves seemed to retreat inside, getting darker..." I can almost like it here when I think of home" 51

Yet of "here", at the office, he had said:

"You don't know how last night was bad for me"
"What happened?"
...."Nothing. Nothing, contrey, nothing. But I sat here alone, and I was wishing somebody would come in, and all night long there was nobody. Me alone." 52

and then man confirms it in his thoughts:

This was very true of the night shift. 53

Loneliness at work. Loneliness at home. Complete isolation. And this is not only the night clerk's problem. The man sympathises because he knows that at work, all he has is his little pay and the starvation he is subjected to while at home are the reproachful eyes of the loved ones. 54

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- 51 Ayi Kwei Armah, op. cit. p. 18.
52 Ayi Kwei Armah, ibid., p. 17.
53 Ayi Kwei Armah, ibid., p. 53.
54 Ayi Kwei Armah, ibid., p. 53.

The only people that the man can relate to are those who show signs of extreme loneliness. No matter how much they try to isolate themselves from this bourgeois society, Rama Krishna and Teacher, are only confirming the fact that they are, like the man, and the night clerk, subject to the alienation within the society. If the human being can only receive consciousness of himself in his social interactions, then it is not surprising that people like Teacher are paralysed by their inactivity.

But even the man in his effort to function normally within society -- love someone, live and have children with her -- still feels this loneliness.

And the marriage ceremonies had actually left him feeling quite happy, with the sense that something important had happened to him. Now, of course, it looked as if the important thing was simply that he had cut himself off from the future. 55.

⁵⁵ Ayi Kwei Armah, ibid. p. 137.

In fact loneliness comes out so powerfully in this novel that it acquires an overpowering hold over the reader's mind. ⁵⁶

The fourth aspect of alienation, that of the alienated man's estrangement from his species-being, is very interestingly treated in this work. The workers reduced to their "animal functions, as Marx would put it, are the ones who sometimes show signs of the need to be human, to show that they belong to the human species. The man appreciates music and takes time to understand it⁵⁷ And when he cannot understand what the words are saying, he relates to its instruments feelingly.⁵⁸ The music he relates to is African and one can see him struggling to accommodate even the painful song that talks of hopes that are very much like his. As a contrast, Koomson, the expropriator of the workers' labour, with his white masters, owns musical instruments, but they are only personal property there for show.

⁵⁶ Chinua Achebe in "Africa and Her Writers" mistakenly takes this to be an indication of Armah's own alienation which has no basis within African reality!

⁵⁷ Ayi Kwei Armah, ibid., pp. 59-60.

⁵⁸ Ayi Kwei Armah, ibid., p. 58.

When Estella is "moved" by the rich organ music that comes out from their expensive music machine,⁵⁹ it is for the sake of showing off to the visitors, very much in the same way as she is showing off her wig⁶⁰. The contrast between Koomson and the man comes out very clearly in their appreciation of poetry. For Koomson, a piece of doggerel of no artistic merit, one which praises decadence in their Parliament, is the most entertaining thing he can keep on reciting⁶¹. And he is not alone in this. When the Attorney General began reciting it, "no one was going back to sleep." This, contrasted with the "high life" that the man hears over the radio⁶² or Kahlil Gibran's poem,⁶³ comes out as a very poor manifestation of culture. It is the working class which is striving to create a meaningful culture but of course they have to create it from the pain of their existence - their work - and hence the sadness of their songs and taste.

⁵⁹Ayi Kwei Armah, ibid., p. 176.

⁶⁰Ayi Kwei Armah, ibid., p.174.

⁶¹Ayi Kwei Armah, ibid., p. 156.

⁶²Ayi Kwei Armah, ibid., pp. 59-60.

⁶³Ayi Kwei Armah, ibid., p. 56.

Thus, in this novel we see the workers reduced to animals through alienation from their labour, yet striving to be human, while the Koomsons who have the material base to create a rich culture cannot do it because they did not work for that material base.

Armah goes on to show this even in his depiction of the physical natures of both the workers and the non-workers who are helping exploit the people. Nowhere in this work do we find a negative physical description of a worker. Even the conductor's physical description is not given, only his actions are described. But if one contrasts this with the description of the timber merchant, one can see the author's biases immediately:

In through the door came a belly
swathed in Kente cloth. 64

Even the rhythm and pace of this sentence, deliberately used to create a heavy dragging kind of movement, seems to indicate how big the belly was. And then it was only the belly and not the rest of the person. Here the author's style matches his disgust for the fat-bellied who exploit. Some more of the

⁶⁴ Ayi Kwei Armah, *ibid.*, p. 31.

paragraph deserves quoting:

The feet beneath the belly dragged themselves and the mass above in little arcs, getting caught in angular ends of heavy cloth. 65

Then a little later:

The visitor's mouth was a wolf shape and when he spoke the reason appeared. Nephews, they called these teeth which came in rows, a second and even a third set pushing impatiently out against the first. 66

Such a revolting appearance bears an equally revolting need. Corruption.

Elsewhere, we see the lawyers who ally themselves with the British to oppress the people described as white people's imitators who came "hugging new paunches scrambling to ask the white man to ask them onto our backs."⁶⁷ Or as one worker put it, they are "fat yessir-men in jokers suits." None of the workers, even the one who struggles with the column of "Garth" and tries to

⁶⁵ Ayi Kwei Armah, *ibid.*, p. 31.

⁶⁶ Ayi Kwei Armah, *ibid.*, p. 32.

⁶⁷ Ayi Kwei Armah, *ibid.*, p. 94.

speak English with an English accent receives such a vicious physical description. What is noticeable is that these descriptions, although highly symbolic, do not fall outside reality. These people are fat. The timber merchant's mouth is a wolfshape. It is as if nature itself defines the man according to his function within the society.

From all this we can therefore see that Armah is not only aware of the society he is writing about, but that his sympathies are definitely for the working class.

The next novel Armah published after the Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born is Fragments. This novel, unlike The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born, addresses itself to the problems of the petty-bourgeoisie within neo-colonial Ghana. This is the class compound of members of the civil service like Fifi Williams who works at the Ghana Bank, H.R.H. Brempong, Asante-Smith "the boss" of Ghanavision Corporation,⁶⁰ the Principal Secretary in the Ministry of Information, Akosua Russell, Ocran the Teacher, Juana the Psychiatrist and Efua, Baako's

⁶⁸ Ayi Kwei Armah, Fragments, p. 75

mother.

This class, "wedged between labour and capital", reflects within its members the struggle between the worker and the capitalist. Some members of this class believe in and try to practise the ruling class' ideology of indiscriminate private property accumulation. These come into conflict with other members of this same class who, being in a very weak material position, cannot engage in self-deceptive activities of trying to be like the big bourgeoisie. The conflict that arises is out of this later member's growing acquisition of a working-class perspective as he is steadily forced by harsh circumstances to leave the ranks of the petty-bourgeoisie. The struggle between these two extremes of the petty-bourgeoisie can sometimes make forced demands on members or potential members of their class to not only sympathise with the workers' point of view, but to also try to create a comfortable position for themselves at the same time. This conflict is possible within individuals in this class because they have the potential to accumulate as a result of their elitist position in society. This position is created by their having

climbed high within the educational system, plus their ability to command the favours of the powerful ones.

Thus when Armah deals with this class, he still is indirectly dealing with the conflicts that involve the workers and the capital owners. However, there is the added subtlety of having to understand contradictions within individual members of this class and at the same time understanding those to be found in the class as a whole. This conflict becomes so acute that at times it can centre itself in one individual, with consequent harsh results, as can be observed in Baako's mental breakdown.

Characteristic of this class is its extreme hurry to accumulate as much wealth as possible - which has become characteristic of the African-bourgeoisie. In this hurry, one notices, the first thing they do is to utilize their own position in order to create as much wealth as possible. This means that these people who make up most of the civil service are not going to function unless they do it as a favour for someone else (who of course has to pay back), or unless they are bribed to do the work they do. Outside these possibilities, there is no way one can make them operate, except in a

very inefficient manner.

Armah portrays the stages of primitive accumulation of wealth by this class very well. For example, a cursory glance through Fragments does not show us any one person who has become a member of this privileged bourgeoisie purely as a result of his own efforts. All of them use government services to accumulate. When we examine H.R.H. Brempong, we notice that he not only is well known within the civil service, but also uses government services - GV 109 government vehicle⁶⁹, - when he comes from his shopping trips in Europe and other white people's places. Asante-Smith and others within the Ghanavision Corporation understand their work as:

...more travel than production.
All had been abroad and had brought back fond footage of themselves visiting foreign studios, seeing strange sights and eating extraordinary foods in famous places.⁷⁰

Akosua, who gets funds to run a writers' workshop for the benefit of upcoming writers, uses it for her own ends. She has found "a way to make some money without working. She is no writer, and she knows it. She doesn't really care".⁷¹

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⁷⁰ Ayi Kwei Armah, ibid. p. 93.
⁷¹ Ayi Kwei Armah, ibid. p. 191.
Ayi Kwei Armah, ibid. p. 170.

This attitude of using one's position to accumulate wealth is best shown when the Television sets come to Ghana. As Baako "stupidly" asks:

"What about the scheme to put sets all over the country, in the villages?"

He is answered blandly by Asante-Smith:

"Yes".. "What about it?"⁷²

Everyone left the conference room and went for their share and as Gariba told Baako, thus posing this petty-bourgeois civil service mentality:

"Look man, its no use standing there worrying".... "Go in and get yours. You'll want one anyway".⁷³

And when one checks on the number of sets that were distributed, one notices that it was very rare for a person to be given just one set. Those, who, like Gariba and Baako were entitled to only one set, were the very junior officers. Otherwise the more senior one was, the more he got.

⁷²Ayi Kwei Armah, *ibid.*, p. 217.

⁷³Ayi Kwei Armah, *ibid.*, p. 218.

As a result, Police Inspector - General Kraka accumulates twelve sets! "Twelve... Hey, wait a mo' ". Exclaims the person who is supposed to share them out. Even he is shocked by the number of sets allocated to this one person: "What the hell you mean twelve?"⁷⁴ And the answer:

"I be Police Inspector-General Kraka
him driver. If him say twelve,
e be twelve".⁷⁵

Therefore to be within the civil service as a high ranking officer, (as opposed to being a worker who can barely survive on the wages he receives), means that you are also placed in a position to accumulate even more. It does not matter whether this accumulation is legalized theft from the people, as in the television sets example, or whether it is the more risky type which Akosua Russell indulges in.

What, in fact, happens is that there are two opportunities offered to everyone who has the chance to accumulate. In order to acquire some wealth, there is need for corporate effort from a whole institution or even the whole class of the petty-bourgeoisie. This we can see in the fact that the

⁷⁴Ayi Kwei Armah, ibid., p. 218.

⁷⁵Ayi Kwei Armah, ibid., p. 218.

television sets would not have been taken had they not come to Ghanavision Corporation for the whole country. In the second instance, an individual is able to accumulate wealth through his own individual manipulation. And the successful ones are those who, as Naana puts it, "have the iron entrails" to go about their material acquisition without feelings for other human beings, be they relatives or not.

When, however, there is no material gain coming from their normal duties, these people become reluctant to be of any assistance. For example, Baako is told to keep on coming "the following day" by the Junior Assistant to the Secretary of the Civil Service Commission, because he does not understand he has to bribe him in order to get a position in the Civil Service:

You can come and see me when you
decide you want me to help you.
And don't come here just to waste
my time. I'm a busy man. I have
my post. 76

76

Ayi Kwei Armah, ibid., p. 117.

Yet when one tries to find out how busy the secretary is, one can only see him "chatting contentedly with one of his colleagues"⁷⁷. It is not until Baako explains the case to Ocran, who uses his influence on the secretary, his former pupil, that he is able to get the job.

We notice the same behaviour in the engineer, dressed in "starched white shorts"⁷⁸, who does not care to arrange traffic in a way that would prevent accidents such as that which killed Skido at the bridge.⁷⁹

Akosua Russell also does not do the work she is supposed to do; neither is Brempong really doing any work, except travelling at the state's expense. When people like Baako decide to do the jobs they are given, every possible impediment is put in their way to stop them from functioning. They are either told that their choice of subject matter for a film is not good enough⁸⁰ or, in case they insist too much, "we have no film or tape for drama"⁸¹. And when the Principal Secretary in the

⁷⁷Ayi Kwei Armah, ibid., p. 117.

⁷⁸Ayi Kwei Armah, ibid., p. 200.

⁷⁹Ayi Kwei Armah, ibid., p. 201.

⁸⁰Ayi Kwei Armah, ibid., pp. 211-216.

⁸¹Ayi Kwei Armah, ibid., p. 216.

Ministry of Information gets Baako a job in Ghanavision, it is as a favour to Ocran, his former classmaster⁸² and not as part of his job.

As he summed up for Baako who was still learning:

"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."

However, within this class of the petty-bourgeoisie there are those like Ocran and Juana who, although they may be in a powerful position (schoolmaster, psychiatrist) still do not use their positions for personal enrichment. They may, like Ocran, in getting Baako a job, exploit their privileged positions, but in so far as they see it as helping correct the injustice in the society. They have enough income to make them pursue their interests without undue need of outsider's help and because of this marginal independence, they are isolated, lonely. They do not interact very much with the rest of the members of their corrupt class. In most cases, their withdrawal from active participation is usually as a

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84 Ayi Kwei Armah, ibid., pp. 123-125.

Ayi Kwei Armah, ibid., p. 124.

result of their imagining that their petty-bourgeois position represents that of the whole society's. As Ocran puts it:

"Those people (the Brempongs, Akosua Russells and others) didn't choose to be like that. If they couldn't be like that, they'd be nothing."⁸⁴

But he either cannot elaborate or forgets to elaborate much further on what he means by "nothing". They would be nothing in the sense that they would not exist as the petty-bourgeoisie, which is always in a hurry to accumulate wealth at the expense of everyone else⁸⁵ within the society: the greedy, corrupt, lazy civil servants who use state machinery for their own personal enrichment. But the fact that they would not exist as this class "wedged between capital and labour", does not stop them from existing as either members of the bourgeois class or the proletariat. For Ocran, the choice of the Brempongs is to be petty-bourgeois or nothing, where nothing still is undefined. This position is negative in so far as it points to a possibility of despair and negativity in the light of any positive efforts within the society coming up. For Ocran, it is a question of expressing the anguish of Africa in his art, while for Juana it is an isolated existence until the only possibility

⁸⁴ Ayi Kwei Armah, *ibid.*, p. 273.
⁸⁵ Obviously they cannot threaten the big bourgeoisie and therefore the only people they turn on is members of their own class or the working class below them.

out of this is through a personal relationship (love).

When she ran away from Puerto Rico she thought she was coming to a country where people were struggling to emancipate themselves:

...watching and listening, moving and learning what life was about in this place, she had understood that what she had thought she would find was not here at all. None of the struggle, none of the fire of defiance; just the living defeat of whole peoples - the familiar fabric of her life. 86

She could not notice that there was an undercurrent of struggles among the working class. If any struggles existed, then they were futile. Being prepared to see only futility, she noticed signs like "Obra ye ko"⁸⁷ or the pessimistic Rambler's song⁸⁸ and these confirmed for her the futility the people felt. Occasionally she would see defiant signs like "strugglers!" but their effect was nullified when the two people wearing the T-shirts carrying some signs were arrested.

However, this section of the petty-bourgeoisie is positive in the sense that it knows at least a way out. Like Juana says:

⁸⁶ Ayi Kwei Armah, ibid., pp. 53-54.
⁸⁷ Ayi Kwei Armah, ibid., p. 43.
⁸⁸ Ayi Kwei Armah, ibid., p. 55.

Salvation is such an empty
thing when you are alone. 89

It is therefore, through "connectedness" that one would find a solution to whatever is negative within the society. This section of society is not as complacent or as callous as that to which Brempong and Asante-Smith belong.

Below it we find such people as the taxi drivers and Baako's mother, Efua, who have the ability to supplement their income with some extra schemes on the side, while at the same time they remain mean to those like Naana whom they consider useless because they do not help them in the process of wealth accumulation. The crude way Efua and Araba use the child to collect some extra income from others within their class⁹⁰ is characteristic of these people who would want to become rich as quickly as possible. They are not satisfied with anything other than an accumulation of material wealth. That is why, for example, when Baako comes back, the first thing Efua asks him is when his car is going to arrive so that she too can

⁸⁹ Ayi Kwei Armah, ibid., p. 276.

⁹⁰ Ayi Kwei Armah, ibid., pp. 265-266.

enjoy life like the richer sections of the petty-bourgeoisie; so that, as she puts it, "her old bones can also rest".⁹¹

Other members of this class are the Doctors and Nurses of all descriptions, who feel threatened once they are not addressed by their correct titles "titles meant a world into which they had struggled and were still struggling to fit their own lives".⁹² Titles meant being nothing or being something. And all this was based on how much material wealth a title could command. Sometimes, as in the case of the honourable Mr. Charles Winson Churchill Kessie, Protocol Branch, Ministry of External Affairs, these titles became traps which others of their class would use to extort money from them.⁹³ But this was a game whose rules Baako recognized. It would only be a matter of time before he too got a chance to turn his fangs on Efua.

When one comes to people like the Taxi-drivers, one finds that they are in an extremely

⁹¹ Ayi Kwei Armah, ibid., p. 108.
⁹² Ayi Kwei Armah, ibid., p. 28.
⁹³ Ayi Kwei Armah, ibid., p. 265.

precarious position. They own their own means of survival (the car) but the amount they make from having this is not much to differentiate them from the working class. However, one finds that because of this ownership, a duel mentality develops. There are those who recognize that "Obra ye Ko", "Life is War" and have developed a more or less proletarian outlook. On the other hand there are others who want to grow rich and when they get a chance, they extract the maximum advantage out of a customer's need:

"Civil Service Commission", he told the driver.

"One cedi flat", the driver answered sullenly.

The woman gaped, but said nothing.⁹⁴

This taxi driver is contrasted with the humane one who takes Baako and Araba to the maternity hospital:

The back seat of the taxi was wet with blood, but when Baako apologized, the driver shook his head. "Brother, its only the blood of a new human being . Luck to you. Luck to me". He took his fare and was visibly surprised when Baako gave him an extra cedi; then he recovered quickly and said thanks, adding, "You see, my luck is in already".⁹⁵

⁹⁴Ayi Kwei Armah, ibid., p. 116.

⁹⁵Ayi Kwei Armah, ibid., p. 115.

This usage of two taxi-drivers, who are members of the lowest section of the petty-bourgeoisie, in order to illustrate what conflicting outlooks people have is also seen in The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born. The first taxi driver with "a shiny new taxi"⁹⁶ is abusive, whereas the second one who drives the man and Oyo to the Upper Residential Area is a human being with humour, understanding and acute observation.⁹⁷

Slightly separate from this class of the petty-bourgeoisie, but with the potential of joining its either upper, middle or lower section, is a person like Baako who, as a result of having gone through the educational system up to degree level, is about to join the Civil Service. Baako and his likes have had problems fitting into this society because of what they observed, during the school years, as its negative characteristics and know of a way out. Yet when they are supposed to join the system, they cannot join it as anything less than as part of the privileged ones. This position of privilege always mollifies most of them

⁹⁶ Ayi Kwei Armah, The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born pp. 10-11.
⁹⁷ Ayi Kwei Armah, ibid. pp. 165-168.

and reconciles them to their status so that after a short while they no longer see the contradictions within the society as they used to notice while they were students. But there is that group of those who feel guilty, not as a result of their class position but from grounds of morality and who cannot resolve this contradiction within themselves. This is especially true of those who take the Arts which force them to go back to the world and to analyse why it is that there are such distortions within the society. Those who would use their art to criticize "the hand that feeds them" find that they are not even in a position to criticize since that hand is so clever that it does not make readily available the material which could be used against it. And therefore Baako and others like him find that they do not have any outlet for the anger they feel. Yet at the same time their class does not let them alone. It keeps on instilling a sense of failure within such people, who never subscribed to the "cargo cult", until they either give in and learn to live with it while futilely making critical remarks, the way Gariba does, or until they break down under the pressures of these antagonistic positions. Once they break down, they

either run away like Teacher in The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born does , or they go mad, as happens in the case of Baako.

Within this class of the petty-bourgeoisie, as portrayed in Fragments, one can notice the four different aspects of alienation.

Examining Brempong, his wife, and his sister, we see that they have invested things with the capacity to mediate for them, the capacity to act as 'ambassadors', in every situation. They cannot be defined except by the things which they surround themselves with. We do not get to know Brempong's name until he has been referred to as "the man in a dark wool suit" many times.⁹⁸ And all this time before we get to know his name, he has already been defined by the things he associates himself with:

He came over with a smile like something learned from the advertisements for beer or whisky or cigarettes made specifically for the new Africans. 99

With careful studied movements he raised slightly the left lapel of his coat. 100

⁹⁸ Ayi Kwei Armah, Fragments, pp. 68-70.
⁹⁹ Ayi Kwei Armah, ibid., p. 70.
¹⁰⁰ Ayi Kwei Armah, ibid., p. 70.

And then after this are the introductions and then Brempong's boasting of what he has collected on his European tour - German cars¹⁰¹, deep freezer for his mother, and a cigarette lighter that "seemed to have been sculpted entirely out of light."¹⁰²

We do not get to know anything more about his wife beyond the fact that she is "a dark head crowned with the mass of a wig"¹⁰³ and that this head's name is Eugenia.

The way the fat sister can express her love for her brother is by laying down a beautiful kente cloth for him to trample on after she has drenched his feet with champagne.¹⁰⁴

And as already pointed out earlier, the conflict between Baako and Efua is due mainly to the fact that he did not act like the usual been-tos in failing to bring home her share of the cargo.

By investing property with so much power, these people have turned them into a fetish, "a nee god" as Naana puts it¹⁰⁵ through whom they can relate to other people. You have the "things", you are powerful. You do not have the "things," you are a nothing. Even personal relations are built, as Christina indicates to Baako, on one's ability to

101 Ayi Kwei Armah, ibid., p. 73.
102 Ayi Kwei Armah, ibid., p. 70.
103 Ayi Kwei Armah, ibid., p. 77.
104 Ayi Kwei Armah, ibid., p. 77.
105 Ayi Kwei Armah, ibid., p. 284.

conjure up "things" - the cars, the material wealth.

This is an indication of these people's alienation from nature which has reached such limits that they totally mystify its powers and turn objects into gods, to whom they would subject not only themselves, but all those with whom they are acquainted.

From this aspect of alienation, it is easy to see how the other forms follow.

Because Brempong believes in the power of things and the things come from Europe, he must identify himself as closely as possible with white Europe not only in buying things and looking down on Ghanaian products, "Where in Ghana would you find a thing like this?"¹⁰⁶ but also in name. He has carefully chosen his names so that they express a sense of power, not only at the white level, but also at the African one. These names are nicely reducible to H.R.H. - His Royal Highness - The Big Man.¹⁰⁷

Another one who reduces his name to a symbol of power is Asante-Smith. Asante-Smith or Ashanti Smith. The Smith of the Ashantis. The white man of the Ashantis. A definite refusal to be

¹⁰⁶Ayi Kwei Armah, ibid., p. 73.

¹⁰⁷Brempong means Big Man in Akan.

identified solely with the powerless Africans.

All these values reflect the characters alienation, not only from themselves, in the sense that they really do not have names, but also from their own history, their own people. Because of their inability to understand the role that christianity and white "Civilization" played in underdeveloping their people, they become "the blind children of slavery themselves",¹⁰⁸ who enjoy enslaving their own people and themselves to whiteness.

And finally we see a lack of basic humanity in the way Araba and Efua have Baako hunted and trapped like a wild beast. If they had made a little effort, they would have understood that Baako's madness came from the acute mental distress he felt in thinking that he had failed them. This hunt, which parallels the earlier one where some men close in and kill a dog is intentional on the author's part. These people - Araba, Efua and the mob they had unleashed on Baako refuse to recognize their dehumanization by blaming the victim for being mad:

¹⁰⁸

Ayi Kwei Armah, ibid. p. 52.

"Stay far from him. His bite
will make you also maaaaad! 109

The way they can only understand him now is in
animalistic terms:

"The same thing happens if he
should scratch you." 110

And in trapping him, just like in the earlier dog-
scene, these people express their disgusting non-
impotence through destroying what makes a sensitive
human being - a child's love for his pet, or Baako's
refusal to join the class of exploiters. It were
better that they were or became impotent.

Within Fragments, therefore, we see the
author's understanding of the middleman nature of
the petty-bourgeois class itself and of the larger
conflicts within the society. But as we noticed in
The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born, the author's
sympathies are not for those who would exploit, but
in fact for those who are exploited or refuse to
exploit.

109

110 Ayi Kwei Armah, ibid., p. 245.

Ayi Kwei Armah, ibid., p. 245.

Why Are We So Blest? is the next novel to be published after Fragments. In it Armah continues to examine the theme of enslavement of the African.

The predicament in which Modin is placed - and this is Solo's problem too - is that as a scholarship student in the metropolitan country that is exploiting his people, he has to come to terms with the fact that whether consciously or not he is part of the "Blest" only in so far as he facilitates the metropolitan country's exploitation of his people. In other words, he is a factor¹¹¹ in the continuing enslavement of his people.

The realization that this predicament exists is in itself a process of education which, logically growing out of the students' position, forces him to try and cut links with those who maintain him in a privileged position vis a vis his people. To realize one's estrangement from one's people and to make a conscious effort to negate this estrangement means that one will come into conflict with those who use people as a factor to entrench the enslavement of the majority in the peripheral countries.

¹¹¹Ayi Kwei Armah, Why Are We So Blest? p. 78.

Basic to Modin's predicament is the enslavement of the African and the benefit people like the Oppenhardts derive from it. As he notes, bitterly, scholarships from the West are a farce:

What a farce, scholarships!
That blood money never went to
any of us for our intelligence.
It was always payment for
obedience....

Factors then, scholarship holders,
B.A.s, M.A.s, Ph.D.s now, the
privileged servants of white
empire, factors then, factors now. 112

Modin realizes he is a factor within a system that thrives on maintaining low living standards among the rest of the African population.¹¹³ And not only does it thrive on this exploitation, but its intellectuals justify it in terms of the superiority of white America over the other peoples of the world.

That distance that removes the motion of the Greek athlete, effortlessly perfect, from the awkward stumblings of unblest humans...., that is the distance between the American Commonwealth and the remnant of the world. 114

¹¹² Ayi Kwei Armah, *ibid.*, pp. 160-161.

¹¹³ Ayi Kwei Armah, *ibid.*, p. 161.

¹¹⁴ Ayi Kwei Armah, *ibid.*, pp. 98-99.

The end, exploitation and underdevelopment of the other peoples of the world, is seen as a justification of the American system, validating the massacres of the native Americans (Indians) and the enslavement of the African peoples in this "Olympus".¹¹⁵ After blaming the victims for being exploited, "Mike the Fascist", in his smug presentation of American blessedness is ready to graciously welcome the "crossover", Modin, from the plains of his African descent into the ideal of American bourgeois Olympus, via the scholarship. As Modin bitterly notes, his role is to be

An African rarity to keep the
blest entertained. 116

And at the same time to confirm the rightness of the existence of Olympus.

This realization comes late to Modin after he has been through the hands of the American bourgeoisie who have used him as propaganda material in order to show off their charity, very much in the light of what their magazines euologize:

¹¹⁵Ayi Kwei Armah, ibid., p. 99.

¹¹⁶Ayi Kwei Armah, ibid., p. 101.

The magazines were about development projects in Africa, the West Indies, New Guinea, and some places in America. In each of them, black people were being helped by white people. 117

He has also been used as a sexual object to awake their "dormancy", "deadness" (Aimee)¹¹⁸ or as a weapon against their husbands (Mrs. Jefferson)¹¹⁹ and the other white women.¹²⁰

But while Modin's analysis of his role within a Western educational system is perceptive, his solution to it, is only partially correct in the sense that he decides at the theoretical level to ally himself with the positive forces fighting for the liberation of Africa. But when he tries to implement this decision, he shows his misunderstanding of the revolutionary movement by deciding to take along Aimee, who really does not care for the revolution. She is only interested because of the fear that once Modin has left, she will go back to being sexually frigid.

For Modin, therefore, the alienation that grows out of the West's exploitation of the African peoples becomes an internalized growth process which

¹¹⁷ Ayi Kwei Armah, ibid., pp. 108-109.
¹¹⁸ Ayi Kwei Armah, ibid., p. 95.
¹¹⁹ Ayi Kwei Armah, ibid., pp. 157-162.
¹²⁰ Ayi Kwei Armah, ibid., p. 167.

he is eventually unable to fully negate. The privileged position he acquires through the educational process not only alienates him from the rest of the other African students (not to talk of peoples in general)¹²¹, but also turns him into a slave trader among his own people:

In the imperial situation the educational process is turned into an elitist ritual for selecting slave traders. 122

But in his solution, he shows the disparity between his theory and practice. Theoretically he realizes:

The revolutionary ideal is an actual working egalitarian society... a whole society organized for self-defence. War against the invader should be the educational process for creating new anti-European 123 anti-imperial, anti-elitist values.124

Yet, in practice he does not recognize Aimee for what she is: a white American. Within his own logic he has failed to prove his sincerity in wanting to join the revolution:

¹²¹ Ayi Kwei Armah, *ibid.*, pp. 223-223.
¹²² Ayi Kwei Armah, *ibid.*, p. 222.
¹²³ In the context of Why Are We So Blest? this includes white Americans: "Americans are transplanted Europeans" (p. 254).
¹²⁴ Ayi Kwei Armah, *ibid.*, p. 222.

Look, (Jorge Mauel points out)
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. 125

Such a slave in love with the daughters of his
people's destroyers, cannot make a revolutionary. As
Solo points out:

He found his aim, moved to reach
the life he had dreamed of. But as
a companion for his journey he took
the American child of the tribe of
death. 126

In this also lies Modin's ironical death. As a
solution to the negative existence he had led in
the United States of America, he decides to make a
conscious effort to unite with his peoples who are
struggling.

Several factors, however, go into stopping
him from making that contact which would have saved
him. Not only has he carried along Aimee, who is
insensitive to a revolutionary movement and only
knows how to mouth what is expected of her:

125

Ayi Kwei Armah, ibid. p. 255.

126 Ayi Kwei Armah, ibid. p. 230.

The most important task for revolutionaries is the raising of the level of political awareness of the massesetc.¹²⁷

but he is also showing his naivety in thinking that every movement that calls itself revolutionary is actually revolutionary. When he applies to the U.P.C. (the People's Union of Congheria) this application is partly conditioned by the fact that he will not be accepted in the National Liberation Army¹²⁸ which would not accept Aimee's participation because she is a white American. But when he applies to join the U.P.C., he inadvertently tries to join a movement that has retained the same structure of racial discrimination. This can be seen in the way it promotes some of its "militants" like Jorge Manuel the dark Esteban Ngulo into doing the actual work under the command of their "half-Portuguese", brothers. As Solo comments in one of his moments of perceptive

¹²⁷ Ayi Kwei Armah, ibid., p. 253.

¹²⁸ Ayi Kwei Armah, ibid., p. 275.

Observation:

It is reported that the (street) on which the Bureau (of the People's Union of Congheria) stands may be renamed after Fanon. The bureau would then have on paper a fitting address for a centre of revolutionary activity.... What goes on inside the Bureau itself, however, will always be a different matter. 129

The revolutionary movement that would fight the "big fires" of colonialism with "the small fires" of a revolutionary movement, basing itself on discrimination by race,¹³⁰ is going to be sensitive to a black man and a white woman who would join the movement on the basic assumption of equality. This would point to the fact that:

...those small fires (of racism within a "revolutionary" movement) do not destroy the larger; they do its work destroying first, they leave it nothing to consume. 131

Therefore the U.P.C. would expose itself as not existing to negate the big fire of colonialism. It would give itself away by showing that it tells the people it is going to destroy inequalities, when in fact

¹²⁹
¹³⁰Ayi Kwei Armah, ibid., p. 48.
¹³¹Ayi Kwei Armah, ibid., p. 114.
Ayi Kwei Armah, ibid., p. 114.

it implants these inequalities more solidly into the movement; into the militants. This is why when Jorge Manuel says disparagingly of the Uniao Nacional Do Congheria that it will fill the Brazilian journalist with "lies", Ngulo answers, wistfully: "Yes, lies" and Solo notes:

There are times when Ngulo catches me completely by surprise, like that, with a statement whose cynism 'cracks the surface of his steady, calculated naivete. 132

Ngulo, doing most of the work because he is the "shadow" part of the "man and his shadow"¹³³ union knows it is not lies that the U.P.C. operates along racist lines.

For Modin therefore to jump from "the boiling water" of American racism, only to find it in the U.P.C., is in itself a negation of the type of life he wants to lead. And since, as Solo notes, he had not prepared any exits, then he becomes condemned to death by the very movement from which he would seek life - a movement which, like himself, does not want to recognise the fact that you do not fight

¹³²Ayi Kwei Armah, ibid., p. 249.

¹³³Ayi Kwei Armah, ibid., p. 52.

large fires with small fires.

All along, Modin's life has been a series of escapes into more and more complex situations arising out of his initial alienation from his people by taking part - albeit involuntarily, perhaps - in the West's educational system. His end, although a physical death, could symbolically be interpreted as a need for Modin to completely negate his total life-style by rejecting the whole of his American experience. No alternative exists for him except to become like Solo, alive but dead. As Solo assesses himself correctly:

Even before my death I have
become a ghost.

This analysis of content in Armah covers only half of the critic's work. The next stage will be an examination of the style used in these works.

CHAPTER TWO

An analysis of Ayi Kwei Armah's style will not only facilitate our understanding of his works as a whole, but will also help in our understanding how, in analysing style, one is logically led to the understanding of the content. The point to begin from is in the structure of the language; from the smallest stylistically meaningful unit, to the total organization of not only each individual work, but all the works and how they relate to each other.

The smallest meaningful unit is the word. The word can, for the sake of convenience, be classified under such definitions as nouns, pronouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, etc.

When we analyse the nouns and the way this author uses them, we find that we still have to distinguish between proper nouns and ordinary nouns. The names of people and definite places are used very consciously in Armah's works. This is so because people's names go into character building, while the names of places help in effectively creating situations.

Examples of how people's names are used to help the reader understand the type of characters being dealt with are to be found in all Armah's works. In The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born, for example, (the section where the man observes the names of people who "have made it" by emulating their white masters), we note the curious way in which black imitators of white people are ready to create new names out of the African and white ones by hyphenating them. The end result is the production of a name which neither fits in with the African background nor with the whites who are being imitated. Besides not fitting into either one group or the other, the names themselves become ridiculous: ATTOH-WHITE, KUNTU-BLANKSON, BINFUL, ACROMOND ("what Ghanaian name could that have been in the beginning, before its civil Servant owner rushed to civilize it....?")¹ When one analyses these names more closely, one finds the unconscious ridiculous reflection they throw on their owners. Attoh-white could be a very direct commentary on the owner who wants to be utterly white. He does not want anything to do with Blackness. And since he is a Black man this means that there is going to be a conflict between his wishes to be utterly white and what he is, Black.

¹ Ayi Kwei Armah, The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born p. 147.

Kuntu-Blankson's effort to erase any memory of his past, a past that would tie him to Africa and therefore poverty and primitivity, is seen in the ingenious way he forms his name. Kuntu in Akan means blanket. Therefore, when we hyphenate this name to Blankson, the new name that is revealed is Blanket-Blankson.

This name can be understood in two ways:

At the first level it would suggest that the character in question is Blanket son of Blankness, a son of total emptiness, which, as already intimated, effectively denies any historical attachment to Kuntu's African peoples.

The second meaning can be read in the word 'blanket' which carries the connotations of a common phrase "a wet blanket". This is an amusing self-accusation on Kuntu-Blankson's part which helps us to understand his character. This is a person who is determined to deny his people and himself totally if that will bring him closer to his white masters.

Sometimes, this petty-bourgeois characters are in such a hurry to acquire civilized names that they do not examine carefully what the names could mean. An example of this is Binful's name. Bin in Akan

means shit. In his adoption of the name, Binful, therefore, this character exposes how full of white shit he is in his attitudes and behaviour. Part of the white shit in this context can be seen to mean the foreign language - English - that these people have struggled to acquire and the 'enslaving things of Europe' that they have accumulated, which do not serve to show anything else other than the fact that the owner can command the power of money.

The subservience of Binful towards whites can also be seen in the fact that, he is willing, if need be, to pass through places of shit the way Koomson does,² as long as this qualifies him into having a civilized white name.

When taken within the context of the novel, this novel also shows how the petty-bourgeoisie is part of that group of exploiters who force the working class and the lumpen proletariat to live in the rubbish of their (the petty-bourgeoisie's and their masters') creation.

By making this seemingly trivial point of

² Ayi Kwei Armah, *ibid.*, pp. 197-199.

African people whitening their names, Armah gives us more characteristics of the petty-bourgeoisie in Ghana at this time. Their alienation from the rest of the masses, and the desire to be identified with their white masters so that both become direct beneficiaries of the products of the workers' labour, creates within them an Estella-like contempt for the masses. This means that they are not going to like being identified by their African names which are a creation of the despised masses. Therefore the pressing need within this class is to run away from any contact with the masses, be it in a handshake ('The man takes the hand... It is withdrawn as quickly as if contact were a well-known calamity.') or in the choice of names as quoted. For these people, civilization is in the West and so if they want to reflect the fact that they are now civilized and not like their primitive tribesmen, they need to civilize their names just as they have civilized their positions. Yet a slight sense of need to identify themselves as being African, a need to prove they are heroes who have come from a long way remains. Hence the hyphenated names. But in the case

³Ayi Kwei Armah, ibid., p. 45.

of a name like MILLS-HAYFORD, there is no need for pretence. Here is a Ghanaian who has found the name that would jettison him cleanly into whiteness. He must be envied.

We can therefore induce certain conclusions about this class in general. Their unquestioning acceptance of the bourgeois system comes as a result of their being in a position to benefit from it more than the workers. And because they benefit from this system, they are going to identify more and more with it, while attacking anyone who would be critical of their position. Yet their understanding that they hold these positions unfairly at the expense of other people is reflected in their talk:

"Do you know, they themselves, the ones who shout, own things, lots of things!"

Koomson gave his wife an under-brow glance, as if to say she was saying things that were not to be said. ⁴

He knows very well that some of those who "shout" do not have anything; they are part of the working class that recognizes that others are eating while they are starving. ⁵

⁴Ayi Kwei Armah, ibid., p. 161.

⁵Ayi Kwei Armah, ibid., p. 129.

A similar name change to denote devotion and gratitude to the whites who have placed him in power is seen in H.R.H. Brempong's case, as we have seen previously. The bigness implied in his name can only be seen when he is compared to other Africans. He still looks up to the whites. Akosua-Rusell and Asante-Smith reflect the same newly acquired power and the powerlessness of their people.

When we look at the choice of people's names in Why Are We So Blest? we find that this is used to reveal an additional dimension to their characters.

Solo's name is appropriate in showing how unconnected he is from other people; from what is going on. The loneliness he experiences as a result of his refusal to take part in the ongoing struggle, condemns him to a solitary existence which in itself implies death. He does not escape this fate in the whole work.

The Oppenhardts are easy to place. Their name is a combination of Oppenheimer, a South African mining tycoon and Engelhardt, an American Capitalist. This combination exposes the Oppenhardts as belonging to groups that have done their best to destroy any

attempts by the African to free himself of European and American enslavement. Modin could not have chosen a worse group to go to for a scholarship.

Craftily, they seem to be self - lessly open hearted in their readiness to give Modin a scholarship. This kindness that comes from the largeness of their hearts comes to be seen in its true light as charity and as a way of creating inferiority complexes within the recipients (I'm glad you find nothing to argue about in that'⁶ which reinforces their belief in themselves as the beneficiaries of the darker unfortunate races. His name becomes a contradiction to his behaviour - while on the one hand he would like to appear magnanimous he is forced into a position of showing that magnanimity, charity and such like gestures can only come as a result of deprivation and misery, poverty and hunger. There would be no need of him to show his openness if

⁶ Ayi Kwei Armah, Why Are We So Blest? p. 128.

people were not deprived, if, in the context of the novel, America and Europe did not create misery by exploiting the Africans, native Americans and other peoples. Oppenhardt's charity comes from a spirit that is mean and petty - and when the people who are receiving this charity do not recognize their worm stature before this white god, then they are reminded of it in the most vicious, insulting manner.

Oppenhardt's name is symbolic of the so called "Foreign Aid" that neo-colonies depend on to be further exploited. A close analysis of the name Oppenhardt yields more information. From the pronunciation, we get "open heart". From the visual presentation, we cannot avoid the "hard" part in the name. Therefore when one combines all the three meanings "open", "hard" and "heart", the idea is presented: a request to a hard heart to be open; in itself an impossible feat.

Similar complexity contained in a name can be seen in Aimee Reitsch's name. Aimee means 'loved' in French and so does not present any problem. But Reitsch is the one that partially yields interesting meaning when one looks at it more closely within the context of the work. Depending on how it is pronounced, one finds that various meanings come up. If one pronounces it as Reich which is the visual impact

that the name has, then one is reminded of Nazi Germany's Third Reich and the fascism it practiced basing itself on the superiority of the Aryan race. This led to the massacre of the Jews in their diaspora. When one examines the symbolic role Aimee plays in the novel, then one sees that this idea of racism being used to murder people comes in. The "loved-reich" or the "love reich" all convey the idea of their death. This is why when Solo sees Aimee for the first time, she reminds him of Silvia who was Portuguese and white. Solo and Modin have in themselves the capacity to love the daughters of their own people's destroyers, the daughters "of the tribe of death". But also in the same meaning of 'love reich' we could deduce another meaning: that the white woman is used by her own people, the white males, as a love instrument of death. This idea comes out especially at the end when the white soldiers use Aimee to kill Modin while she herself is raped. But after her being raped she is transported back to town while Modin is left in the desert. They willingly enslave themselves like Dr. Earl Lynch to the white women. This type of enslavement is the worst of all since the slave himself does not recognize that he has been enslaved. When we

look at Solo we find that it was not because he broke away from Sylvia that they parted. She was influenced by her own people to go away. But Solo, still regrets her going away. The master is gone but the slave is still mentally enslaved. If we see his ambition, it is to write about love, the type of love "springing from the love of an African student.... and a Portuguese girl"⁷. But while he calls it love, the whole novel contradicts it as enslavement. When we also look at Modin we find that his life becomes wasted as a result of his involvement, despite Naita's and the black brothers' warning about Blue eyes' greed.⁸ Every time he tries to do something useful, white women are there to distract him until at the end he dies as a result of being seen by racist soldiers when in the company of Aimee. Modin's life becomes a process of destruction, the type of destruction the black people were subjected to after they had been enslaved in the Americas .

⁷ Ayi Kwei Armah, ibid., p. 1.

⁸ Ayi Kwei Armah, ibid., p. 200.

The only difference between Modin and those earlier Africans is that while the earlier Africans knew they were being enslaved, Modin does not realize it at all.

Dr. Earl Lynch's name within the same context becomes an indication of his suicidal tendencies. The threat in his name becomes a threat against his own very existence. This idea is seen within the symbol of Ananse hiding in the secret library Lynch has in his house. Ananse, the trickster whom even Lynch himself does not know, secretly laughs at him because he uses the "whitest of philosophies" - Marxism, to try and negate his white existence.⁹ According to Modin who is feeling very nationalistic at this moment, Dr. Lynch is on the road to lynching himself and does not know it.

Another interesting character in Why Are We So Blest? is Mrs. Jefferson. No matter how much Modin gets involved with her, she never stops being Mrs. Jefferson. Throughout his whole affair with her he never calls her by any other name. This formal way of addressing her even when he is writing his own

⁹Ayi Kwei Armah, ibid. p. 163.

diary suggests that there clearly was no human contact between them enough for him to be relaxed with her. She was as much of a stranger at the end of the affair as she was at the beginning.

On top of this, Mr. Jefferson's presence throughout the whole affair, suggests another meaning. Mrs. Jefferson, as Modin comes to realize later about all the white women he used to meet at parties etc., was only using him to hurt Mr. Jefferson. And therefore the question of seeing Modin as anything else other than as an instrument of revenge did not occur to her. And because he unconsciously felt this, he was always on a formal footing with her.

The usage of names in Two Thousand Seasons holds significance also. However, since the work's purpose, broadly defined, is to show the enemies and friends of the Black peoples, the choice of names is going to fall very directly into the two classes of enemy or friend. Under each of the two classes, there are two types of names: names which can be related to historical figures and names which cannot. Under the enemy class one finds names like Koranche and Bentum, kings who seem to be fictional inventions,

placed among familiar names like Osei Tutu, the Asantehene of Asante and the founder of the Ashanti Kingdom. In this class also fall familiar names like Kamuzu. The author also presents the titles these enemies acquire for themselves:

Osagyefo!
Kantamanto!
Kabiyesi!
Mwenyenguvu!
Otumfuo! 10

and he continues:

To soothe (Kamuzu)... we chanted more elaborate praises, but his vain appetite only increased with satisfaction:

Osagyefo, courageous, skilled one
who arrives to pulverize the enemy
just when the enemy is exulting in
imminent victory;
Mzee, wisdom's own keeper;
Kabiyesi, leader of men;
Kantamanto, faithful one who never
broke an oath;
Mtengenezaji, what a multitude of things
would remain unrepaired, forever broken
were it not for you!
Katachie, Commander Supreme. 11

And the enmity of the title-holders

¹⁰Ayi Kwei Armah, Two Thousand Seasons, p. 267.
¹¹Ayi Kwei Armah, ibid., p. 269.

derives from the fact that they thrive on inflated titles while acting against the interest of those on whom they have imposed themselves. But what comes through is the fact that the people are not fooled by these titles. They sing praises while they prepare to rebel.

When one checks the names of those characters who are appreciated by the author, those characters who come out as being positive, one finds that they are ordinary, uncomplicated and, where the characters are African, African.

When one contrasts for example, the way Brempong in Fragments, introduces himself and the way Baako does it, their differing characteristics come out immediately.

"Brempong is my name," he said
Henry Robert Hudson Brempong" 12

and Baako responds - (one can almost imagine it a croak of insignificance)

"Baako." 13

¹² Ayi Kwei Armah, Fragments, p. 71.

¹³ Ayi Kwei Armah, ibid., p. 71.

A similar type of introduction that denotes characters is seen in the way Aimee and Modin introduce themselves to Ngulo at the U.P.C. :

"Hi, frere Esteba," she said, "I'm
Aimee."
"Quoi?" Ngulo asks
"Aimee. Aimee Reitsch."
The Black man also held out his hand...
"Dofu. Modin Dofu." 14

An unconscious humour accompanies the way Aimee introduces herself. If one imagines her French that "obviously came from schoolbooks"¹⁵ then it goes like this:

"Hi" (She still must retain some
Americanism even when speaking a
foreign language. Then continues:)
"I'm loved." 16

And one can understand Ngulo's shock on being told such an irrelevant piece of news that has nothing to do with his office work when he exclaims:

"What?"

Even though the author could have written it in italics because it is a French word, still the suggestion that it is an exclamation comes through.

¹⁴ Ayi Kwei Armah, Why Are We So Blest? p. 57.

¹⁵ Ayi Kwei Armah, ibid., p. 56.

¹⁶ Ayi Kwei Armah, ibid., p: 57.

Of the two¹⁷ mutually exclusive ways an author can use adjectives, the method of qualifying almost every noun is the one favoured by Ayi Kwei Armah in his writings. The two styles have one common aim: an author's need to resensitize the reader to the way language is used so that the situations and characters can be perceived in a fresh and interesting manner.

When one examines every sentence on every page of this writer's works, one finds that there are very few instances in which this author does not use an adjective at all. Because of this close attention to the words that describe and present more forcefully the nouns, we find that there are various effects on the writings of this author.

Firstly, the reader is left in no doubt as to what the author's attitude is towards his characters and the situations within which they are placed. It could be noticed right from the

¹⁷The other one is that which is used rather effectively by Michael Anthony in The Year In San Fernando (London: Heinemann Educational Books, 1970). Michael Anthony strips to a minimum from his work, adjectives so that in the very few instances he uses one, no matter how weak and commonplace it may be, it has an impact.

Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born how this author would insist on dragging the reader through all sorts of harrowing experiences that the man went through. This was done very effectively through the author's close attention to detail which could only come about as a result of the care he takes in describing, in minute detail, the peoples and their effect on each other.

Secondly, it can be seen that this author needs a lot of skill and imagination to be able to create these new adjectives all the time. Armah does not invent totally new words to qualify his nouns. What he does, however, is to take fairly common words in English and then use them either in a peculiar manner or within a strange and striking context so that the word is understood to have acquired a new meaning. For example in Why Are We So Blest? Solo's noting of the similarity almost to the point of imitation between Aimee and Modin is shown in the words:

The White girl held out her hand.

.....

The Black man also held out his. 18

¹⁸ Ayi Kwei Armah, Why Are We So Blest? (New York: Double Day 1972) p. 57.

What is interesting to note at the level of language, is the way the colour differences between the two characters strikes the reader as a result of the author's conscious intention to stress these characters colours, despite the fact that the reader already knows not only their names, but colour! At this point the lie that Aimee and Modin have been living, the lie of imagining themselves in a colourless world, is stripped away through Solo's observations and one begins to note Modin's naivete and Aimee's destructive power. The author takes the colours and uses them in a tense racial situation where the reader cannot miss their impact.

We can also observe similar usage of suggestive language in Solo's statement:

The European Woman, the American woman - more shiny things to waste lonely, useless time with.¹⁹

In this we find not only an equation between the American and European woman, but we also see, as a result of the parallelism created by the author, their being equated to shiny things. This derogatory reference to them does not just stop at the level of

¹⁹ Ayi Kwei Armah, ibid., p. 208. (Italics mine).

their role of being instruments that their men use, but we see that the author also does not want us to forget the fact that these are white women. That is why he uses the word 'shiny' and thereby loads it with more than just one meaning. When one examines the contextual meaning of the word "shiny", then the association with trinkets that enslaved the African people becomes even clearer. Therefore by a close analysis of this statement, we come to learn Aimee's negativity which can be traced back to her being the "child of the tribe of death"²⁰, the "daughter of a race of destroyers".²¹

This usage of ordinary adjectives, in a manner that creates attention, can be seen clearly in Two Thousand Seasons where the author takes all the associations of the colour white and depicts them as being negative, while at the same time he takes black and its associations to depict positive situations. For example, he has an "ashen death"²² "pale extinction"²³ "white predators"²⁴, "the white destroyers"²⁵, to depict the negativity of the white presence among the black peoples.

²⁰

²¹ Ayi Kwei Armah, ibid., p. 230.

²² Ayi Kwei Armah, ibid., p. 149.

²³ Ayi Kwei Armah, Two Thousand Seasons, (Nairobi: East African Publishing House, 1973) p. ix.

²⁴ Ayi Kwei Armah, ibid., p. ix

²⁵ Ayi Kwei Armah, ibid., p. 5.

²⁵ Ayi Kwei Armah, ibid., p. 5.

This is a striking way of presenting white with its associations, since a lot of writers - even black writers - continue to depict white as being associated with what is positive within the African experience. However, this author's need to instill a sense of pride within the black people is depicted in the new and refreshing way he uses the colour black and its dark associates. For example, when writing about the night the people escaped from their first enslavers, the protagonist comments approvingly:

The night was a dark night. 26.

In describing Anoa this author writes:

From her forehead to her feet her body was of a deep even blackness that could cause a chance look to wonder how it was that even the surface of a person's skin could speak of depths. 27

Blackness is presented in a positive way for black people and this would indict all those who have imbibed white standards of beauty as being universal.

²⁶Ayi Kwei Armah, ibid., p. 31 (italics mine).
²⁷Ayi Kwei Armah, ibid., p. 23 (italics mine).

This reversal of the colour schemes to present the black experience more meaningfully and positively can be seen when the author contrasts the black and white colour in the same paragraph:

Along the desert road spring-water
is the sap of young wood prematurely
blazing, meant to carry life quietly
darkly from roots to furthest veins
but abruptly betrayed into devouring
light. 28

The light that would have played a positive role no longer has creative meaning for black people.

In creating these symbols, the author is careful to tie up his language with historical truth so that the end result is an interpretation of African history and aesthetics from the perspective of the African people. The experience is an enriching one.

It would be inartistic on this author's part to create all his works just centred around the colour schemes of his situation and characters since this would only appeal to the reader's sense of light. Armah does not just appeal to one sense but

28 Ayi Kwei Armah, ibid., p. xi (italics mine).

to all five senses. We, therefore, see that in his creation of characters, his adjectives acquire two distinctive characteristics.

For those characters and situations he approves, Armah has quiet, non-aggressive, dark adjectives. However, for those he dislikes, he uses loud, aggressive and shiny bright adjectives.

For example, Naana's criticism of Baako's people's impatience is shown in her statement:

But that there was such hot desire impatient at his departure for his return, that I did not see. 29

Can't you see one novel to prove for it?

The people's need for their son to come home should not have been expressed in such an unseemingly manner.

When describing the lorry that nearly crushes Juana in her small car, the adjective used for it is 'hurtling'³⁰. In it we can see the enormous speed barely controlled.

In Brempong's return, we see Baako's disapproval:

²⁹

³⁰ Ayi Kwei Armah, Fragments, p. 15 (italics mine).

Ayi Kwei Armah, ibid., p. 47.

Around them a large crowd of the hero's relatives struggled to get closer to him, shouting, some singing in an ecstatic emotional confusion. 31

The largeness and noisy nature of the welcome in themselves indicate that those in the crowd are sycophants; people who may not sincerely be welcoming their relative home. Brempong's sister's "demonic" energy which drives her into the crowd to add onto the cacophony is noticed by the quiet Baako because he prefers a quiet way of doing things. This quietness can be seen in Baako's reaction to Africa when he is returning:

In the end the actual physical presence of Africa passed under quite softly for him too, like something entirely normal. He had not become suddenly aware of any unusually strong feelings...32

The attachment to the continent and its powerful meaning to Baako are not demonstrated in loud explosive joy. The quiet feelings of acceptance are what is normal. These types of feelings are those demonstrated by characters who are not shallow and are more socially conscious than the

³¹ Ayi Kwei Armah, ibid., p. 88 (italics mine).
³² Ayi Kwei Armah, ibid., pp. 71-2.

loud Brempong or Koomson. The strength of quietness demonstrated here is reminiscent of the man's strength of character when he opposes Oyo's attempts to make him become corrupt.

When he spoke, it was with a deliberate laziness. 33

There are, however, certain times when this author would seem to contradict his scheme of depicting negative characters so that he uses the quiet adjectives to describe them. For example, in describing Brempong's fascination with things, the author writes:

The flame which shot out was several inches long, but its line was narrow and beautifully controlled, and the man in the suit used it just as it was, waiting till the end of his cigarette had been glowing for seconds already before he began to turn the flame down, slowly, like someone absorbed in deep thought. 34

The quiet ending of this sentence, highlighted by the usage of the adjective 'deep' would seem to place the person and incident described into that

³³ Yet Ayi Kwei Armah, The Beautiful Ones Are Not
Born, p. 52.

³⁴ Ayi Kwei Armah, Fragments, p. 70.

group of those favoured by the author. But one only gets this impression if one ignores the word 'like' that suggests Brempong could be looking at the flame without a thought in his mind at all, and also if one forgets that behind all this we see that the situation itself is a loud showing-off by Brempong of the things he has bought in Europe. .

Any time Armah uses the quiet and graceful adjectives to describe negative characters, it is only to highlight their undesirability, their hypocritically assumed goodness which later turns out to be more dangerous than open negativity. As he put it clearly when describing the actions of some of his negative characters:

....the gentleness of the falling sweat came out of the harshness of the circle these men were forming, and the concerted strength that filled their beautiful muscles was born of an immediate and brutal necessity. 35

The gentleness and beauty he may imbue his negative characters with is to highlight their

³⁵ Ayi Kwei Armah, *ibid.*, p. 32.

incapacity to transcend the negative moment so as to create a situation of beauty. Their inability to achieve this, whereas the promise is there, makes them appear all the more ugly and brutal.

Armah uses verbs and adverbs in exactly the same manner as he uses his adjectives. The actions the characters perform give them away. The loud and aggressive actions are the preserve of the negative characters, whereas the quiet and graceful actions are connected with the "beautiful" characters. Instances where there seem to be quiet and unaggressive actions from negative characters are only a camouflage for the ugliness that these characters are hiding.

From such an analysis of this writer's language, it is easy to see how he creates his characters and what his intentions happen to be in every situation.

The criticism that many writers have levelled at the man in The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born, that he is apathetic and lifeless, can therefore be seen to come from a misinformed position about this author's style. Yet the fault is not his that he is misinterpreted. The fault lies with those who would

criticize yet come with already preconceived ideas as to how Armah's work should operate, ideas which could be diametrically opposed to what he wishes to communicate. For example, any critic coming with preconceived conventional ideas about this author's colour schemes will find that he/she falls into the trap of misinterpretation.

So far we have examined instances of parts of speech and demonstrated how this author uses those parts to develop his writing. There is one instance in this writer's style when he makes two parts of speech depend on each other so that the meaning they convey is qualitatively different from what each one would have conveyed. This is when, in creating the man, Armah uses an article and a general noun in order to create a new character.

Because of the use of the definite article 'the', the word 'man' acquires a certain specificity, which, in the context of the novel, leads to a wider discussion around our understanding of the meaning that this character is supposed to convey. When one couples the fact that the man has no other name except this strange one that the author has created for him,

then the centrality of his role in The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born, becomes clearer.

It is important that we notice the word 'man' is not spelt with a capital letter. If the author had spelt it with a capital letter, then his creation of a character with such a strange name would not have really been anything more than just a peculiarity without much of a meaning. All that he would have succeeded in doing would have been to create a noun "The Man" which would not have had more meaning than any other proper noun.

But when Armah leaves it as 'the man', then there are various suggestions made about his functions in the novel.

Firstly, if he is the man in the whole novel, then his mere existence, without his commenting at all, becomes a passing of value-judgement, on the rest of the characters. Koomson, Teacher³⁶ and all the other characters assume less statures as men:

³⁶ The irony in Teacher's name evokes Marx's question of who shall teach the teacher. In The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born, the suggestion is that the man who works to transform his material conditions around him shall be this teacher.

they are less human in so far as they hold a less demandingly perceptive position of the society in which they live.

The other suggestion that comes across is that the man is not just an individual, but a representative of a class. If he had been a unique individual, then it would have been possible to see his alienation from the society within which he lives as some personal disease which need not necessarily be felt by the rest of the people in the working class. The creation of the man destroys this comfortable position, which critics like Achebe would take and instead forces the reader to reassess the class that the author is talking about.

Yet one cannot ignore the specific characteristics that Armah endows this character with. The suggestions the author seems to be making behind this contradiction of the specific in the general is that a simplistic approach to the working class, without recognising that behind the masses are individuals, can be damaging in the arts. The result is that such authors end up creating unrealistic "workers-of-the-world-unite" situations without correctly portraying the conditions that make possible that unity.

The only danger with the usage of "the man" to embody general class characteristics is the implied discrimination against women.

From an analysis of style and language, therefore, we can see that Armah is very conscious of what he wants to say and how he wants to say it. In the process of trying to articulate his ideas, Armah does not sacrifice his art and the end result is that we have in his writing, artistically accomplished works of art.

In all the five novels Armah has published so far, no two novels share the same style. The uniqueness of the styles of these novels does not lie in one or two startling devices : this uniqueness comes out of the way Armah combines various stylistic techniques with his emotional and intellectual attitudes towards the specific subject matter that he is treating at the material time.

For example, if we examine the form of The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born, we notice four characteristics which are combined in such a way as to distinguish that novel from the others.

Firstly, it is noticeable that this novel does not try to tell a story. The frame of the whole story can be paraphrased in two or so sentences. The motif of the story, which is the attempt of an

upright man to survive in a corrupt society, is also familiar. The mistake most readers make is to approach this novel with the same attitude they adopt when reading a thriller. This novel's forte lies in its ability to describe the transformation of the Ghanaian society from colonialism to neo-colonialism and the effect this transformation has on the characters. It is because of this descriptive quality that we notice Armah pays a lot of attention to the language he employs. It is not surprising that this novel has so many obvious qualities, because through the use of such language : tight, symbolic and imagistic, Armah can cover a wide area in a short space. And because of this poetic nature of the language , it is possible for the author to embrace the wider context of Africa's neo-colonies, while actually evoking the specific experience of Ghanaian society.

Secondly, Armah's critical assessment of Ghana from one individual's point of view makes one get an insight into this author's interpretation of what the function of literature is. If Armah had chosen a character from another class other than the working class, then it would have been very hard for him to avoid the concept of a lone hero struggling against fate; a theme the bourgeoisie finds so inspiring. But because he chooses to look

at society from a worker's point of view, even when this worker is a lone individual, Armah still creates him in such a way that he truly is representative of the largest section of the working-class. This "class of the future" has that profoundly critical quality in its perception of the bourgeois society, which makes any writer starting from this base have the soundest starting point. Therefore, from this we can draw the conclusion that Armah sees his novels as a way of teaching his society. In this process of teaching we see that he does not ignore the fact that the emotional understanding of a problem in a human being is important if that problem is to be solved. Literature deals with the problem of presenting not only the intellectual but also the emotional dimension of human experience. One notices that many critics stay away from trying to deal with the form because of its 'unquantifiable nature'. Thus, when Armah forces the reader to perceive reality through the eyes of the man, he at the same time forces the reader to emotionally identify with the man and his aspirations. However, if one analyses critics closely, one notices that those critics who hate the man are the ones who intellectually, perhaps, have

understood the man, but have not emotionally come to terms with the reality of this worker's miseries. There is need for a critic to emotionally identify with the worker if one is to see the validity of this worker's ideas and hopes. It is possible to have critics who intellectually understand a worker's predicament, but who cannot be persuaded to join in his attempts to change his situation because, emotionally, they are estranged from such a character. Therefore, Armah makes it easier for a critic to give himself away if he is only intellectually and not emotionally committed to the people's cause. The feeling of having emotionally identified with a character like the man will also affect one's aesthetics to the extent that whatever constructive activity he engages in to further his cause becomes beautiful, and vice versa.

Thirdly, because of the author's coverage of a wide time span, his treatment of most characters and situations is stylised. This therefore, means that in a situation where he feels that the characters' motives are easily understandable he does not bother to bring them out in detail their physical description. For example, his depiction of

the ^{white} man's servants during colonial times³⁷ concentrates more on their action than on how they look. . . This is unlike his detailed physical description of the man with the wolf³⁸. The rationale for such a method of selection could be that since he is dealing with the ills of the present society, to resort to a detailed description of a character in the colonial past would be to draw too much attention to that period, with the consequent result that the present concerns are minimised. It, therefore, becomes necessary for this author to sometimes selectively describe his characters in detail while at the other times they are covered by a telling word or phrase. However, what is interesting is that the major positive character, the man and the other potentially positive characters like Oyo, Teacher, Maanan, etc are also described in such a way that their physical characteristics are left hazy. The implication of this could be that one

³⁷ Yet Ayi Kwei Armah, The Beautiful Ones Are Not
Born, p. 80.

³⁸ Ayi Kwei Armah, ibid., p. 37.

does not need to have a specific physical shape in order to be considered positive. The only objection Armah would put to this general statement is that when it comes to, say, describing people who have eaten too well, then their physical shape, in its ugly bigness becomes a good indicator of their negativity.

When we look at the description of situations in the novel, we see that they also obey the same rule of emphasizing the situations of the present, situations that he wants to stress. For example we notice that although the author describes the transition of a society from colonialism to neo-colonialism, his concentration on describing the events that take place in the present shows that he is mainly concerned with the current effects of neo-colonialism on the people and that he goes back to the past only to seek an explanation that might illuminate present ills.

Lastly, we notice that contrast, a device that we saw being very effectively used in characterization, etc. is also used in the very structure of the language in the novel. We see that throughout this novel, Armah has beautifully

contrasted long sentences with short sentences, long paragraphs with short paragraphs and even long chapters with short ones.

In alternating short and long sentences, Armah manages to stress whatever point he is making in both sentences because they help to prop each other up. But it should not be assumed that he writes like an automaton. When he has two long sentences following each other, he usually breaks them up with commas so as to give the reader a chance to see how he builds up towards whichever points he wants to stress. This can be illustrated by the following paragraph:

Our masters were the white men
and we were coming to know this,
and the knowledge was filling us
with fear first and then with
anger. And they who would be our
leaders, they also had the white
men for their masters, and they also
feared the masters, but after the
fear what was at the bottom of
their beings was not the hate and
anger we knew in our despair.
What they felt was love. 39

³⁹ Ayi Kwei Armah, The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born p.95.

The first two sentences are long. But the second sentence has three commas which help to make it easier to read since the commas act as resting points.

The other effect this passage has is that in the second sentence, after each comma, the stress falls on the word "they". This helps to sharpen the reader's awareness of the anger and contempt behind the speaker's tone while at the same time building towards the climax that is the short sentence in this paragraph.

This method of contrasting short and long sentences is also to be noticed in the contrasting structure of paragraphs, adopted for more or less the same purpose.

But there is a further interesting feature to note about these contrasting chapters. For example when we examine chapters 4 to 7, we notice that chapter 4 has eleven pages, chapter 5 is slightly longer and has eighteen pages, chapter 6 has thirty four pages, but when we come to chapter 7, we find that it is drastically cut down, consisting of only nine pages.

When we examine each one of the above chapters, we discover that Armah's use of dialogue varies from chapter to chapter, depending on whether the chapter is more concerned with the past or present.

When he wants to create a chapter that is concerned with the present, he puts in more dialogue whereas if he wants to create a chapter that is more concerned with the past, then he uses very little dialogue. For example when we examine chapter 4 that is set in the present, it has 8 pages of dialogue out of 11 pages. But chapter 6 that is set in the past has 8 pages of dialogue out of a total of 34 pages. This does not just apply to these two chapters but applies to the rest. Therefore, although dialogue can be seen as a break in the general monotony of prose, Armah uses this device in a very specific way in order to differentiate between the concerns of the past and those of the present.

The uniqueness of the form of this novel lies in the way Armah has combined those devices with his subject matter.

Fragments as a novel also has certain distinctive features.

Firstly, the novel has a strong story line. The reader is led to take an interest in what happens to the various characters in the novel by the fact that the author builds incidents around them which lead towards a climax as the reader

draws towards the end.

Secondly, the story is told both from first person and third person positions. The device of first person narrative is used in a special manner so that Naana is the only one who directly addresses the reader. This places her in a special intimate position which makes her appeal against the injustices, within this Ghanaian community, have a powerful emotional appeal on the reader. Infact, it is partly because of her general attitude in the beginning that one starts to look at Baako as an acceptable character. When she concludes on such a pessimistic note of someone who is fed up with life, we are left with a tension that negates what nearly becomes a happily-ever-after ending in chapter 12. Because the rest of the story is told in third person narrative, it is easier for the reader to see it as a detailed presentation of Naana's dissatisfaction with her society. This technique makes it easier for the reader to look at Baako, Juana and the other positive characters as examples of the positive elements that exist in the society.

Thirdly, we see different writing forms used in this novel. We see an illustration of a good film script and bad poetry. All these, added

to the fact that the author is generally using a novel form, make this a technically diversified Novel.

However, the author's attention seems to have gone into creating stylistically interesting chapters. For one thing, the thirteen chapters should not be understood within a western cultural context, that works on thirteen as negative. This would be resorting to interpreting African Literature using European superstitions. The possible explanation is that there are six days in the traditional Akan week, while there are seven days in the week that came along with European colonialism.⁴⁰ Added together, one gets the required number thirteen. But at this point, may I hasten to add this is only a possible explanation and not the explanation. The question that remains, however, is, if we accept the idea that Armah added the two types of weeks together, does it therefore mean that he believes in some form of

⁴⁰I am indebted to Ayi Kwei Armah for this information. He uses these figures effectively in The Healers creating the forty-two sections of

culture synthesis between African and European cultures? This would be a highly improbable conclusion when one examines the content of his novels. What could probably be the answer is that he sees the contact between the two people as having created a destructive tension within our people.

These chapters each have a heading which needs to be understood as a guide to what the author's intentions might have been. For example, 'akwaaba', meaning 'welcome', points to the ironical welcome that awaited Baako on his return. In 'Osagyefo' we are given a picture of Akosua Russell praising herself for work that she should be ashamed of. Her pretended role as a redeemer of the people's culture and the way she enriches herself from this role is an ironic comment on all self-styled messiahs. At the same time, one looks at Baako and Juana as possible redeemers in their perceptive understanding of how Akosua is destroying her people's culture.

When one analyses the rest of the other chapters, one sees that the titles are a good indicator of what the author is treating in the novel. "Iwu", meaning "death", becomes appropriate for the Chapter that describes the death of Araba's

child. At the same time, this title acts as a pointer to the symbolic death of any links between Baako and his mother and sister. The faint symbol of hope seen in 'Obra', 'life' seen in the actions of Juana, Baako and Ocran, becomes a good indicator of what is positive in this novel. The rest of the chapters are similarly treated and can only be more fully understood when one understands their titles.

Because of the way Armah creates and combines these four techniques, this novel is very different at the level of form from the rest of the other novels.

Why Are We So Blest? has its distinctive characteristics at the level of style.

Firstly, the stress in this novel is not on the story-line. The stress is on how the author describes the centuries of victimization of black people at white hands. The technique the author uses in this novel is like that of most African traditional story-tellers. Because they are handling material that is well known in the community, their stress comes on the artistry that they put into communicating an already known story. Because Armah is dealing with the effects of white racism on

Africans, something that the Africans themselves already know, the appeal of the novel will now lie at the level of how artistically Armah can communicate this black truth. If any further knowledge is to be gained from this novel about black/white relationships, that knowledge will be seen from how freshly this author weaves already known truths into a newer way of looking at one's historical enemies. And in many cases, the newness of his truths lies in his revival of old and forgotten truths. For example when he calls Aimee "daughter of the tribe of death,"⁴¹ the freshness in his statement lies in its phrasing. White people generally do not think of themselves as belonging to tribes. When one takes what has been a traditional western definition of tribe as being a group of primitive clans led by a recognized chief⁴², then Armah's depiction of Aimee has a very sharp modern relevance.

Secondly, because Armah decides to present his story in form of diary notes of Modin, Solo and Aimee, we see that the whole story is presented in first person narrative. The only other novel that extensively uses this first person technique is Two Thousand Seasons. However unlike in Two Thousand Seasons, in Why Are We So Blest, there are three

⁴¹ Ayi Kwei Armah, Why Are We So Blest?, p. 230.

⁴² J.B. Sykes, ed. The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Current English, Oxford University Press, 1976).

voices contributing to the whole story.

There are two important techniques that emerge out of their diary style. The first one is that the author uses the first person narrative throughout the whole novel, a technique he had only partially used in his earlier two novels. Because everyone, so to say, is given a chance to present themselves in the best possible manner they may think, it means that the reader has to be on the look-out for any false interpretations or attitudes from these characters. This is why one has to read very carefully Solo's section in order to understand how correctly he can perceive some social issues while at the same time, his general pessimism should be considered as counter-productive. Armah's skill is in the fact that despite having three narrators who have their flaws, his concern for the black masses comes through very clearly as the standard which one should use in judging all the three narrators. The other technique that emerges out of this diary style is his cinematic presentation of the material.⁴³ Because he focuses on various characters in their differing attitudes towards certain common problems,

⁴³Ayi Kwei Armah, Why Are We So Blest? pp. 37-41.

the end effect is that the reader not only knows what each individual character can tell, but at the same time he/she can understand what their reactions are and how they differ. This technique is very good for giving the reader a psychological landscape of the character's minds. Armah achieves this by his juxtaposition of Solo, Modin and Aimee in various stances. Also, just like in cinema, there is very good usage of flashback, for example, in Aimee's transcript of Mzee Nyambura's story.⁴⁴

This author's usage of short-incidents, one coming in very fast after the other in order to cover alot of time and space is also a borrowed cinematic technique that is used to cover alot of time and space. The best example is seen when Modin is trying to make contact with Africa by joining a liberation movement. There are alot of short diary entries that are a good indication of how desperately Modin is looking for a contact. And the more he searches, the more elusive his goal seems. At the end of this section, when he finally makes contact, we are not sure that it was quite what he wanted.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ Ayi Kwei Armah, Why Are We So Blest, pp. 37-41.
⁴⁵ Ayi Kwei Armah, ibid., pp. 221-226.

There are other observations that can be made about this section. Modin's singleness of purpose, his naivete in especially trusting Aimee; all these come out very clearly in those very short sharp shots as seen on pages 225-226.

The other techniques of writing, especially the structures of the sentences, paragraphs and chapters, are more or less used in the same way as they are used in The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born.

However, it needs to be mentioned here that Armah's usage of dialogue in Why Are We So Blest? differs from that in The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born. Since he is examining the problems of racism and what this has meant to black people over the centuries, his usage of dialogue becomes a way of evoking, with greater immediacy, the racism inherent in black/white relationships.

Therefore, this novel, just like the other two, has a distinctive style which depends on how the author organizes various stylistic techniques to present his material.

Two Thousand Seasons has a strong story line whose power is partially derived from the fact that in assessing Black history, Armah does

not rely on repeating the time-worn lies of the Black people's enslavers.

Secondly, the stylized characterization is heavily influenced by the fact that the author is dealing with a bigger time span than even in The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born. If Armah had paid a lot of detailed attention to the presentation of each individual character and incident in all the two thousand seasons⁴⁶, he would have ended up with a work that was much larger in size.

His method of characterization is to take a few positive or negative characters and describe them in detail, leaving the rest to the imagination of the audience. His chief concern is not to physically describe them but to describe the ideas they stand for.

⁴⁶This is equivalent to One Thousand years if one assumes that there are two seasons in one year. This assumption is based on the statement in Two Thousand Seasons, page 9".. Our migrations were but an echo to the alternation of drought and rain".

Thirdly, in using the corporate 'we' we find a consciousness that can tell, from the community's point of view, the people's struggles to survive. The usage of such a voice avoids the individualization of a people's history. It correctly looks at the community as a whole, as the true creator of history.

The language used in this novel is so concentrated that it deserves some attention here.

In order to emphasize certain points, the two techniques of inversion of sentence structure and repetition are used. For example by writing:

Painful was the groping after
reciprocity. ⁴⁷

the stress is on the word painful. This sentence acquires its powerful emotive appeal from the fact that its structure is altered for the sake of the 'poetic' effect it is meant to achieve.

⁴⁷ Ayi Kwei Armah; Two Thousand Seasons, p. 41.

We see the other technique of stress used in the following sentence:

We fled them, fled their inhospitable land.

Besides emphasizing the action, the repeated use of the word 'fled' also has the effect of poetically creating an internal rhyme within this sentence. This type of sentence occurs with a regularity which is deliberately planned by the author. It is the most outstanding technique in this novel.

In other instances, the technique of repetition is used to build a climax in the story. For example, in the following paragraphs, we see that the repeated use of the words "we thought" helps to lead us towards the final statement, which is that the people were mistaken in their thoughts.

We thought the generations would change them. We thought as we healed ourselves from the wounds inflicted by them and their masters, and freed our tongues again. to speak to those growing of times closer to the way, to speak in remembrance of those who even in the recent heavy time, refusing to give up their arms and be turned into conquered things, chose to live the roaming life of hunters in the grasslands hunting not only animals but the oppressors

also and their askaris, and found an early death at the end of the liberator's road; we thought because of the change we had wrought they too in coming generations would cease transmitting their foolish, destructive dreams to their children, and allow them to grow again together with us. We were too generous in our thoughts. 48.

We can see, in this same paragraph Armah's skillful juxtaposition of short and long sentences with ~~the~~ same purpose as we have noted in the earlier novels.

Therefore, from observing all these characteristics, we arrive at a conclusion, similar to that one we had come to in the earlier instances, that this novel also has its own unique form.

From these observations on the four novels, there are some conclusions we arrive at concerning not only this author but also the novel form in general.

Firstly, it is obvious from the foregoing illustrations that Ayi Kwei Armah is a skillful novelist, We have shown how, in all his novels,

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Ayi Kwei Armah, ibid., p. 51 (Italics mine).

this author uses a lot of techniques, always purposefully and skillfully combined. At the same time, Armah varies the emphasis he places on the same technique from novel to novel. This means that a similar technique can be used for different purposes in two or more works. Finally, and this is a fact one arrives at after taking these other factors into consideration, Armah shows his skill as an innovative novelist by constantly experimenting with the novel form.

Secondly, from these observations we can conclude that the novel as an art form can be used by a skillful writer very creatively. It is not restrictive and can be made to function the way a skillful artist wants it to.

The final point that is made is that, although the novel was a bourgeois invention, it can be used effectively by a colonized people, the Blacks, as a cultural tool in the struggle for liberation from all forms of oppression by colonizing metropolitan systems.

CHAPTER THREE

In The Healers¹ Ayi Kwei Armah sets up for himself a double task. Firstly, he wants to present an analysis of the Asante Kingdom at the time it was crumbling up as a result of both internal and external ^{wrong word} contradictions. Secondly, this author wants to depict "the healers", a group of people, who, in the way they relate to each other and to the rest of the community, present a socio-economic alternative to the feudal system. The depiction of these two, simultaneously, makes it possible for this author to continue the criticism of the feudal institution that he had begun in Two Thousand Seasons.

It is the author's concern for the majority of the African peoples which makes him refuse to accept any political institution, however seemingly advanced which does not serve the interest of the majority of the black peoples. The advanced nature of any system, the author seems to imply, will be determined, not by

¹Ayi Kwei Armah, The Healers, (Nairobi: East African Publishing House, 1978).

its structural complexity, but by its ability to arrange the people's relationships in such a manner that there is a harmonious co-existence between them in their daily work of transforming the hostile nature around them into an ally.

Right from the start we see the author has no illusions about the meaning of Kings and Kingdoms to the African peoples. As Ababio says in anguish:

....there would be no more kings
if some catastrophe brought all
black people together. Kings
belong to their tribes. 2

For Ababio, who wants to be associated with royal power, somehow the unity of all black people would mean an end to a system of privileges that raises an individual onto the shoulders of the rest of the African peoples.

Because powerful individuals like Ababio believe that disunity should be the rationale of their existence, they find it easier to

²Ayi Kwei Armah, ibid., p. 37.

place themselves in position of power and maintain themselves there using all manner of corruption, hypocrisy, murder.

It is no wonder that the Asante Kingdom begins to manifest failure at the level of human relations because of the inherent dishonesty within its ruling class.

First of all, between the royals and the rest of the population, there is not even the subtlety of lies. There are just crude relationships. For instance, the royals have decreed that any minerals found in Asante must go to the King.³ Contravention of this law is treason, punishable by death. Not only is this a direct form of exploitation, but it is also a very effective tool in the hands of the royals for making sure that any alternative sources of power arising out of sudden acquisition of wealth comparable to that of theirs, are not created in the Kingdom. Indeed the law against the non-royals private acquisition of minerals is so harsh because the royals realise minerals are a faster source of wealth than, say, farming and so it would be a mistake to let the people have any access

³Ayi Kwei Armah, ibid., p. 291.

to it. This law clearly exposes the exploitative nature of the royals, whose delicate bodies (witness Ababio, Queen Mother)⁴ show the least signs of wear and tear because all that they do is just consume without engaging themselves in any productive activity.

Another crude manifestation of the royals' destructive power is seen in the huge standing army which not only takes care of the external aggressors, whether imagined or real, but at the same time serves as an instrument of expressing the will-power of the royals, "a plaything the royals indulge themselves with"⁵. Because the people's sons make up this army and their lives are supposed to be of no consequence, it is easy for royal power to save itself internal troubles by sending the army on wild goose chases to look for imagined external enemies. When this army begins to destroy itself, the crisis is a distant tragedy for the

⁴Ayi Kwei Armah, ibid., p. 292.

⁵Ayi Kwei Armah, ibid., p. 220.

royals.

Among the royals themselves, there is an emphasis on the use of dishonesty as a weapon to either entrench oneself in the privileged position one may be in or to forge ahead at the expense of the others.

The best manifestation of this is Ababio, a descendant of a former slave who has learnt well the ways of the court. When we first meet him, he is a representative of a faction that wants to acquire royal power by sponsoring a likely candidate who will be able to rule in its name. The way Ababio goes about trying to get Densu's support is secretive and compromising. Secretive, partly because the throne is still occupied, but also because there are other rival groups which have their own candidates lined up for this position. Therefore, as Ababio himself tells Densu, to reveal such thoughts of power to any other human being is to compromise his position so that he has no choice but to go along. Densu, unaccustomed to such manipulation, naively thinks that he can be trusted not to reveal these thoughts while at the same time he does not become intimate with Ababio's faction. Ababio soon

disabuses him of this by blaming him for Appia's murder.

Appia's murder in itself is a double-blow for Ababio since it gets rid of a prince who has "catastrophic" ideas about the role of kings - "a king should work for all black people - to bring all the black people together"⁶ - while at the same time it provides a way of getting rid of Densu, who, as a result of his refusal to join Ababio's camp, has become an enemy.

The destruction the royals wreak on other people is not just confined to those who would refuse to be used in their bid to get to the throne. It is reflected in the behaviour towards the rest of the people within the kingdom.

For example, medicine in the hands of those who would serve the royals ceases to be for curative powers; instead it is used for conjuring up tricks and poisoning any rivals. Esuman, an example of this debased user of medicine is "a witchdoctor", a former healer who refused to follow the strenuous and less rewarding path that a healer must follow and instead went to serve the royals with the little

⁶ Ayi Kwei Armah, *ibid.*, p. 37.

medicine he had learnt. He is made to perform rituals that debase what he had learnt from the healers, as can be seen during Densu's 'trial' for murder. He is reduced to being an administrator of poison who kills whichever people the royals would wish to finish off. He has become a slave of the royals. The negation of positive powers in medicine under the manipulation of the royals, can also be seen in the correct assumption by Damfo that when Densu goes to Cape Coast, the only "medicine" the royals there will be interested in is the aphrodisiac that he will be carrying.⁷

Even those other people, in other sectors, who would carry out their jobs with complete dedication in the interest of the royals are not spared. Asamoa, dedicated to the army that serves the royals, arouses the envy of his enemies in the court. They hit at him by murdering his nephew under the ^{dis}guise of carrying out one of the customs of Asante. This causes a serious conflict in the General since he would think it treason to question the very custom that destroyed his nephew, but at the same time, he

⁷Ayi Kwei Armah, ibid., p.230.

cannot understand why such an action should appear unjustified. The royals expose their suspicion by hitting at someone who is most devoted to the army that enforces their will. But it needs Damfo to explain to Asamoa how the latent villainy in the royals took advantage of his trust in order to break him, so that he could not think of rivalling them as an alternative source of power.

After Asamoa is cured, he is recalled by the royals to go and lead the army again. In his absence the army has been made to go on futile missions that make it only destroy itself. This recalling of Asamoa might make it seem as if the royals were concerned about the army's welfare for its own sake. But one can see that behind that selfless concern for the army, the royals realize that they need an army to enforce their will against their internal and external enemies. Besides, the process of destroying the army would make worse the people's antagonism against the royals, since it is the people's sons forming the rank and file who would be destroyed. Therefore in recalling Asamoa, the royals' selfish interests coincide with his selfless

ones of serving the army to the best of his capacity. This identity in interests lasts only for a short time, however. The external threat from the whites and Asamoa's own strategy of wanting to fight within the kingdom helps to expose the royals. They ruin Asamoa's plan to trap the English army on Asante soil because, as the Queen Mother coldly analyses it, if the war is fought on the Asante's ground, then the king of the army shall be the overall king. They do not want to take the risks of trying to see whether Asamoa will fight for them. They therefore help in destroying his plans so that Asante is easily taken by the whites. They would rather the Asante people were colonized by a different power, than relinquish power into a different social organization that would preserve a free black people, who were not organized in kingdoms. In fact, for them to be under the 'protection' of the British rulers would be far more preferable since this would mean the preservation of the kingship system, even in tattered form. Asamoa's trust is for the second time betrayed by the royals.

Contrasted to the way the royals relate to each other and the rest of the people, is the

way the healers have organized themselves.

The healers, who are scattered all over the whole kingdom, are in small groups that form separate villages far away from the royal courts. Within these villages the healers perform all the tasks they set themselves: from the simpler tasks of providing food and shelter for their villages, to the more complicated ones of going out and looking for medicines, or curing patients who are ill either spiritually or physically. All the healers within the village perform these tasks not so that they may receive any rewards, but so that they may better the art of healing. And in the process of improving the art of healing, each one finds individual satisfaction.

The strict moral code that they have, which is revealed in the conversation Densu has with Damfo, can only be observed by a well disciplined group. It is interesting to note, however, the manner in which the interview of Densu by Damfo is conducted. It assumes the form of a discussion. Damfo raises the various points and Densu has a right to disagree with any one that he does not like. In fact, as it seems to emerge from the discussion, some of the questions are included to test the potential healer's ability to

think and discriminate between right and wrong. For example, Densu's modification of the questions on violence, 'god', and the going to the king's court. Densu's ability to find out exactly what the implications are in the statements elevates the conversation to a higher level of understanding the healers' way of life.

The healers' long term aim of unifying all the black people into one harmonious unit makes them try to evolve, through practice, a way in which a whole people could live together. Their solution, which is the creation of a system without privileges - a system where an individual's self-satisfaction can only express itself in the service to the rest of the society - becomes a focus of all the royals' hatred, especially when they want a scapegoat on whom to blame the disintegration of the Asante Kingdom. Consequently, the uneasy co-existence that has been there between the two groups is finally broken when at the end, the defeated royals destroy the healers in Nyaneba's group, blaming them for having 'corrupted' Asamoa Nkwanta. The royals know the potential within the healers to resist even the new order and since they would not like to see

any new social organization coming up that did not include them, they try to kill as many of the healers as possible⁸, so that the whole kingdom is reduced to one mass of slaves under foreign rule. They know that under foreign rule, they will still have more privileges than the rest of the people.

The style of this novel helps to clarify what Armah's concept of a good work of art should be. There is the close attention to the content and especially to the question of how he communicates it so that the language of this novel is even more closely knit than in any of the earlier works.

When we examine the nouns, they manifest the same careful usage as noted in the other works.

For example, the analysis of the names elicits some interesting information. The positive characters like Densu, Ajoa, Anan, Araba Jesiwa, Damfo have softer ending syllables within their names so that they are not as 'heavy' as those

⁸ Ayi Kwei Armah, ibid., pp. 359-360.

of the negative characters. Names have two characteristics.

The first type is the kind of name that sounds heavy and ugly. This heaviness is created by the plosive syllables within the name. Of this type, the obvious examples are Ababio and Buntui.

The second type of an ugly name is that which may have soft consonants, but which is still negative in the sense that it is foreign sounding. Of this group is Esuman, the healer who ran away to become a witchdoctor at the royal's Court in Esuano. The "man" part of the name becomes the negative foreign sounding part which would prove popular with all those who wanted to give their names a civilized anglicized sound. Another name of this type is the King Field Marshal's name, Bentil⁹. There are, however, names like Solomon¹⁰ for an African King, which are directly borrowed from the white people.

There are soft sounding names for kings.

⁹Ayi Kwei Armah, ibid., p. 258.

¹⁰Ayi Kwei Armah, ibid., p. 257.

names like Amfo and Amoonu whose negativity might perhaps be seen at the level of meaning.¹¹

The more general cases of nouns are not used in an exceptional manner, save for those times when they are used to give an extended meaning to a person. For example Asamoa Nkwanta's final title "Srafo Kra". "Soul of the Army"¹² becomes, such a personalized title that it might as well be a proper noun. A similar use, but at a crude level, can be seen in Buntui's captors¹³ who constantly refer to him as 'beast'. In both these cases, we can see that the characteristics of the people referred to by these specially used general nouns, are further explained by their titles. In Asamoa Nkwanta's case, we can see that he had mastered the army so well that he knew what its interests were to the tiniest detail. And that was why, when he was sick and had gone to the healers, the army began to destroy itself in useless campaigns.

¹¹ Unfortunately, it has not been possible to get access to the meanings of these names. Armah's style of writing is such that he would not choose a meaningless name.

¹² Ayi Kwei Armah, *ibid.*, p. 293.

¹³ Ayi Kwei Armah, *ibid.*, p. 273

In Buntui's case, although the use of "beast" is an insult, we see an attempt to establish a usage that partly explains the perceiver's shock at the enormous strength and ugliness, so obviously exposed in Buntui's body.

A distinctive quality that comes out in the analysis of the noun, a quality which it shares, not only with other words but with the whole structure of the novel, is the way the author uses the method of contrast in order to foreground whatever feature he wants to in any section of the novel. The ugliness and harshness in Buntui and Ababio's names are contrasted to the beauty and gentleness in Anan's, Ajoa's, Densu's names. Buntui's 'beastly' nature is contrasted with the assumed human nature of his captors and all the others of like nature. The "Soul of the Army" in itself is an indirect contradiction to those who would be its destroyer.

An examination of the other parts of speech elicits similar conclusions. For example when we analyse the adjectives, we notice two types. This duality is determined by the type of nouns that the author would like to qualify.

When the nouns the author wants to qualify

are in connection with Densu and the other positive characters, the adjectives qualifying them are either soft or serene, beautiful or calm. This can be seen very clearly in the description of the wrestlers¹⁴. Densu has "unfathomable, permanent calmness"¹⁵. He is 'slender'. Anan is swift. He moves 'more like a dancer than a wrestler'¹⁶.

Contrasted with these are those adjectives that refer to Buntui, Ababio and other characters. The description of Buntui¹⁷ is negative. The giant's body "seemed near exploding. Every muscle bulged with some huge uncontrollable force".¹⁸ And Ababio moves "gracelessly"¹⁹. He looks like a deformed sphere, balanced unsteadily on thin legs"²⁰ His body suggests "full, overstuffed contentment". Every description of the negative characters, no

¹⁴ Ayi Kwei Armah, ibid., pp. 9-13.

¹⁵ Ayi Kwei Armah, ibid., p. 13.

¹⁶ Ayi Kwei Armah, ibid., p. 18.

¹⁷ Ayi Kwei Armah, ibid., pp. 11-12.

¹⁸ Ayi Kwei Armah, ibid., p. 11.

¹⁹ Ayi Kwei Armah, ibid., p. 15.

²⁰ Ayi Kwei Armah, ibid., p. 15.

matter how harmless it seems at first²¹, sooner or later reveals itself in all its ugliness.

At the level of verbs, we see that a similarity in treatment to the way the author treats the other parts of speech can be discerned. The choice of verbs that are not harsh, violent, bright is usually in connection with the more positive characters. For example, in the swimming competition, Densu's movement in the water is described in terms of quietness and speed:

(Densu) leapt in long strides
fleeing ahead of his pursuers,
entering the forest and
disappearing from view,
emerging, after unbelievably
short intervals. 22

In the whole of this paragraph that shows Densu's pleasure in the race, we can feel the elasticity of the verbs chosen to indicate the motion that the author approves of. And ~~the~~ effect of the whole paragraph, dominated by this one sentence

²¹ For example the Queen Mother's delicate and beautiful skin "soft as a baby's" is still an indication of the enslavement of others to her interest.

²² Ayi Kwei Armah, ibid. p. 22 (Italics mine).

suggests not only the long race, but also the extended graceful motions of Densu's running.

Contrasted to this are the many harsh verbs which either describe negative actions or are associated with negative people. We are shown, for example, Appiah's lesser beauty in swimming as compared to that of Densu. He is depicted as making violent motions with his "robust churning"²³.

Similarly, the adverbs that describe harsh negative actions are in themselves ugly adverbs. For example, when describing the initial stages of the wrestling match between Anan and Buntui, the author describes at one moment Buntui's movement: (adverb underlined)

The movement was unco-ordinated
and so awkwardly executed that
it failed its aim. 24

When we also analyse 'the trial' we find that the description of the fire Esuman lights up gives us a further example of adverbs used to show what the author's preferences are: (adverb underlined)

²³Ayi Kwei Armah, ibid. p. 23 (Italics mine).
²⁴Ayi Kwei Armah, ibid. p. 18 (Italics mine).

The colours of Esuman's robe
burned brilliantly in the
high light. 25

At this point when bright light is a prison for
Densu, the brilliant colours of Esuman's robe
contribute towards the creation of this prison.

Contrasted with the strong adverbs are the
other ones that qualify a soft action.

(Nsu Ber) flowed so gently
there were places where its
motion was barely visible. 26

Or when describing Anan, Armah tells us:

Anan moved more like a dancer
than a fighter. 27

And the underlined words, serving as adverbs,
give us an indication of the beauty in Anan's
motion which is contrasted with Buntui's ugly one.

From an examination of these words, it
can be seen that the author's method of sharply
contrasting the people, actions and various
descriptions, forms a good style for him to either
foreground or de-emphasize any aspect of the theme

25
26
27

Ayi Kwei Armah, ibid., p. 15. (Italics mine).
Ayi Kwei Armah, ibid., p. 3. (Italics mine).
Ayi Kwei Armah, ibid., p. 18 (Italics mine).

that he is treating. This method of development by contrast is not just confined to the words. The author makes this his style of presentation even when he wants to develop a character or theme. For example, when we examine the whole work at the levels of characterization and thematic treatment, we see that the author creates characters and themes which always counter-balance each other.

Within the characters we see that the author is at pains to depict this contrast so that all the time it is clear who his favourite is.

At the level of beauty, we see a contrast between, say, Buntui and either Anan or Densu. At still the same level of beauty there is a contrast between Ababio's fat, spherical body and the athlete's better built ones.

In the rest of the novel we see that even though Araba Jesiwa is of the royal family, she does not like that type of life and therefore forms a sharp contrast to, say, the Queen Mother or Damfo's wife. This is the same type of contrast Ajoa makes with her mother, who could never stand living in the Eastern forest. Damfo makes a contrast with Esuman who would rather use his

skills, not for healing but for manipulating wealth into his hands. Asamoah Nkwanta makes a contrast, in his honesty, with the royals who are not even honest to their own causes.

At all levels of characterization, this development by contrast is very clearly shown.

At the thematic level, the author does two things. He depicts clearly African feudalism's failure to provide an adequate defence against the coming of bourgeois Europe. Simultaneously, he describes the growth of a healer, Densu, who by joining other positive people like Nyaneba and Damfo provides an alternative to the destruction, wreaked on the Black people, by the alliance of feudalistic decadence and bourgeois aggression.

Armah clearly defines his interest and bias for the healers so that by contrasting them with the royals and their negative supporters, the healers' positive qualities are enhanced. The balance that the author creates between a positive character and a negative one, or between a positive idea and a negative one, does not in itself imply the idea of 'either or' but, infact, helps to clarify why the author is so committed to the creation of unity, based on equality and

honesty among all the black people.

Armah's system of creation of harmony by balancing makes The Healers aesthetically appealing.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this thesis is to come up with an approach that makes Ayi Kwei Armah more readable. Because literature deals with not only what is said but also in how it is said, we decided to analyse Armah at both levels.

When we examined this author at the level of content, there were various conclusions we came to.

First of all, this author shows an acute awareness of the subject matter he is dealing with. If we examine his understanding of the historical eras in which he places his works, we see that he takes time to accurately present the contradictions that exist at the time that the events take place, not only at the societal, but also at the individual level. Where he is dealing with bourgeois societies such as those in The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born. Fragments

or Why Are We So Blest?, or a feudalistic one as in The Healers, we see that this author concretely depicts these societies to the extent that they are recognizable. Part of the reason why he is able to do this well is that he is able to present the characters as products of their age and not timeless figments of his imagination, transplanted, for the sake of convenience, into whatever era he wants to force them. . This, is a mark of good writing. A bad writer will be incapable of dealing with whichever era he sets his work in because he understands neither the subtle nor the glaring characteristic features of that age.

Secondly, we saw that Armah's progressive nationalism in his novels is a quality that enhances the artistic merit of his work. The ability to root his novels among the African people's physical and psychological landscape makes this author one of those few writers who create their art for the African peoples. The fault of the modern African artist has been his self-conscious posturing, through art, for external audiences. In all of Armah's writings, there is no doubt that at every moment he is addressing himself to Black people wherever they may be. His progressive nationalism

not narrowed down to one small ethnic group or state, embraces the whole Continent of Africa. Therefore, in his concern for Africa, he is not, as we have seen, merely repeating the negritudists' misunderstanding of our history. His concern is born out of the type of commitment that would move anyone who was seriously interested in using literature, to create visions that chiefly enhance the people's collective interests and that help them to understand themselves better. A literature that has not reached the stage of unself-consciously addressing its people is a failure. If a writer's literature addresses itself well to this writer's people, then its universality will emerge automatically because the writing is able to deal with a particular human contradiction meaningfully.

At the level of style we noticed that Ayi Kwei Armah was very conscious of every unit he built in his work, to the extent that one could say quite truthfully that there was not one device he used unintentionally.

We saw his careful selection of various parts of speech in order to enhance whatever effort he wanted to put across.

If it was at the level of proper nouns,

for instance, he knew how to distinguish between the negative and positive characters, not only in regard to the meaning of their names, but in terms of the sound inherent in those names. Therefore, Armah is a writer who can constantly develop and distinguish characters on at least three levels. This is a mark of a good artist.

. At the level of adjectives, verbs and adverbs, we saw a similar search for the most effective word of the moment.

When one analyses Armah's works at the level of style, one can grasp what his interests are at the level of content. This is not to say, however, that the style duplicates what the content communicates. When one analyses the style, one sees it acting as a complement to the content, in the sense that it adds more to the understanding of the content. If one were to separate this author's style from the content of whichever work he may be treating, then one would not have such a fine work of art.

However, it is important to stress that if one makes only an analysis of the content, one is not quite dealing with literature. This is also true when one concentrates only on the style. It is necessary to analyse the two of them closely so

as to see whether they are well balanced or whether there are too many inconsistencies between them to make a good work of art.

This sense of balance is the one that will show whether a work is aesthetically well conceived or not. But if this aesthetic balance is to be seen, then the society's morality, if not the author's convincing higher morality, has to be the determining factor. In Armah's writings, for example, we notice that his sense of the historical injustice practised upon the African by the "white destroyers" is the driving force behind his creativity.

The contribution this work has made is to illustrate that there are specific standards the analysis of a literary work should be subjected to in order to prove whether it is a failure or a success. After analysing the content of the work, only part of the task has been fulfilled. What is required is a rigorous subjection of the work to further tests, at the level of style. These tests should examine the author's usage of the word, the sentences, the paragraphs, the chapters, and the total form. This therefore means that the critic should have a certain basic grounding in the

analysis of language. However, the literary critic's problem will be to see how meaningfully the work he is analysing uses language. His purpose will not be to be fascinated by language for the sake of language, but for the sake of the literary work in whose service language is. This, in turn, means that not all linguistic tools of analysis will be found useful in the analysis of literature.

The ultimate purpose of any work of criticism is to look for any sense of beauty in the work being analysed. Any critic who avoids this has not made a full critique of whichever work he/she may have been analysing.

This thesis has not been exhaustive in its work on Ayi Kwei Armah. There are many areas in which an interested critic could work and come up with very interesting results.

For example, a critic with a good knowledge of the Akan culture and language would be able to analyse works like Fragments and The Healers more thoroughly than we have been able to do. It would also be important to examine how the culture of these African peoples influences Armah's writing.

Another area that needs to be studied

is the extent to which Armah has been influenced by the epic form in creating, especially, Two Thousand Seasons. The difference in the style of this work from the rest, could be explained more meaningfully by someone who has studied African epics.

Armah's ideas on what he thinks is a good society could be more thoroughly studied in order to understand the political ideal which informs his works. The critic who works within this area would have to study the Chinese and Cuban societies since there are enough indications within this writer's works that he has made a thorough study of them. Even more pertinent would be the need, on this critic's part, to study traditional African systems and find out which ones Armah might be having in mind when he creates societies like those in the Eastern forest in The Healers.

Although we studied, as thoroughly as the limits of this thesis would allow, all Armah's published works, it is still possible for a critic to base himself/herself on one or two novels and to come up with even more thorough and vigorous results in his/her analysis. In particular a work like The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born,

which has received such misinformed criticism, needs to be more correctly assessed again.

A formalistic study of Armah's works is also another area in which a critic could make good contribution. This critic would have to analyse what devices go into creating the novels of Armah even more thoroughly than we have done, in order to come up with a deeper understanding of why this author favours the novel form.

These five areas are only a few of the areas in which critics could make a meaningful contribution in studying this African novelist.

It is our hope that despite the limitations in this thesis, we have managed to make a fresh contribution to African literary criticism.

Mr. Dsofzi
You gave us a
One-sided-dogmatic
analysis of ~~the~~
Ayi Kwei. Shame on
you! You should have
given us the -ve
parts of the novels!
B.A '99 (HMS)

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