

# Beauty and Education: Two Prerequisites for Africa's Rebirth in Ayi Kwei Armah's Major Fiction

by

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## Abstract

This paper argues that in the seven novels of Ghanaian novelist Ayi Kwei Armah, beauty is approached as a trope, and that the absence of beauty denotes the postcolonial condition whose moral code translates horrid social relations, corrupt politics and massive failure. Thus, the beauty of the African locale should function as an incentive to alter the ugliness of the present, and advance the cultural renaissance that Armah envisages for Africa. As such beauty operates as an aesthetic incentive wherein inspiration from the natural locale is transmuted into university curricula, revamping authentic African values for the pressing need of development changes.

## Introduction

Part of the problem with the postcolonial condition, according to the Ghanaian novelist Ayi Kwei Armah, is the systematization of fake aesthetic values. Voluntarily or not, the continent of Africa suffers mostly from substantial amounts of ugliness mistaken as beauty. The major preoccupation in Armah's first and most acclaimed novel, *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* (1968) is the tracing of a dichotomy of 'the beautiful' versus 'the ugly'. Armah breaks the rules of English grammar in the first word of the title: 'beautiful' to emphasize this very apprehension in his overall approach to Africa's needs. Façade or superficial beauty, namely 'the gleam', gets often confused with deep and lasting forms of beauty. That is how Armah finds it compulsory to reeducate Africans in authentic forms of beauty. The choice of Armah's first novel for the illustration of his aesthetic formula is meant to underline his early but succinct preoccupation with beauty as a trope.

The focus in the present essay lies on *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, even though *Fragments* (1970) or *Osiris Rising* (1995) are no less relevant. Strangely enough, even honest educated Africans, those who assume leading roles in combating ugliness, like Teacher in *The Beautiful Ones*, Baako in *Fragments* and Modin in *Why Are We So Blest?* (1972), see their well-meaning efforts disappear into thin air. Due to the conditions surrounding his formation in America, Baako in *Fragments* (1970) fails to bring about an enhancing understanding of beauty; he is not equipped with the adequate utensils to outsmart ugliness to begin with. His verbal defiance uncovers the extent to which subjectivity has been reduced. On the other hand, Asar in *Osiris Rising* (1995) even at the cost of his own life eventually succeeds in coming up with a school curricula that promises to carry a lasting difference. Asar and his colleagues are all aware with the extent of the damage caused by facile beauty or gleam; nevertheless, they set exact objectives towards fixing such damage.

In expanding on the concept of beauty, light will be shed on Armah's reason(s) for his insistence on the harmony, which for him, distinctly marks the African universe. For him still, an understanding of space *ipso facto* accelerates a mutual identification of the African man with his milieu. This milieu incarnates the cosmic design of its deities. Predicament can be approached through the lack of beauty, which can be again discerned in the following statement by Dostoyevsky: "If ugliness has the capacity to destroy life, so beauty has the power to save the world."<sup>1</sup> Beauty, the way Dostoyevsky puts it, comes as an antidote to filthiness, both literal and metaphoric. Beautiful surroundings involve beautiful configurations of self and others; a situation where a healthy individual project his or her legitimate aspirations for a better tomorrow. But for this to happen, beauty should enhance egalitarian principles and ethics.

## **Beauty Duly Considered: A Review of Existing Literature**

In a study entitled *Beautiful Ugly: African Diaspora Aesthetics*, Sarah Nuttal sheds light on the relationship between aesthetics and ethics. For her, in order "to rekindle a politics of hope in Africa, there can be no better starting point than to take beauty seriously."<sup>2</sup> What Nuttal has in mind is the idea of beauty that is not inhibited with a fanciful abstraction that has little to do with the African man's daily concern. Indeed, her understanding of the concept of beauty, which mirrors Armah's, starts with outlining the necessity of beauty. Distinguishing beauty from ugliness has been a compulsory first task for a productive life in the continent. Almost all of the Africans' misfortunes commenced the moment African communities became unable to conceive of beauty as a value, no less than, say, honor, hospitality or respect for the elders; a value that merits defense and nourishment. Self-abuse, which can be easily detected in the individuals' low self-esteem and unfulfilled lives, is a major, albeit, the main reason for the sovereignty of the ugly over the beautiful and the refined.

Breathtaking beauty denotes an aesthetics that springs from a particular conceptualization of holy beings and their attributes. The natural beauty of the African setting, as illustrated by Armah, becomes symbolically suggestive of African man's optimal position in his environment and in his relation to the others around him. Put differently, physical beauty, as it is enfolded in the mountains, rivers and other sceneries, can be approximated as a motif that induces African man for working out his destiny and the betterment of his daily living. Hence, the natural beauty of the surrounding can be best articulated as an extended metaphor or trope denoting people's inner beauty; an incentive towards positive action.

For purposes of inciting readers to understand how he distinguishes the more obvious forms of beauty (physical tidiness as enfolded in African nature) from the more elevated and sophisticated ones (ethical), the ones that are contained in people's refined ethics and values, Armah actually has had to build on metaphor. It is mostly at times of crisis that Armah's metaphors of place play their role of reflective self-correction. This is in line with what Jennifer McMahan thinks: "...when it is as if the very process of perception itself is experienced as a resolution of the tensions, or a solution to the problem of constructing a coherent form from an array of primitives, then we experience beauty."<sup>3</sup>

Natural beauty, in this context, becomes a vehicle connoting not only an abstract kind of freedom but an obligation to resist impetuous drives and instead involve oneself in actions aiming at extending human freedom. In other words, beauty opens otherwise closed doors to reflect over the causes of ugliness surrounding human experience and offer practical means of overcoming those instances. The flight of the community into safety through the bog land in *Two Thousand Seasons* (1973) is significant to the group of the legendary pathfinders. True, the journey was 'a horrid nightmare' and no one denies that what the group members were looking for was some promised and beautiful land, approximating biblical prophecies. Yet, what the pathfinders realize is that this African 'promised' and beautiful land may exist only when instilled doubt and trickery are left behind. The beautiful land cannot be reduced to a material object to look at and fancy. At long last, the community attains this beautiful land, but primarily, only when they get rid of ugliness of treachery. It is only when beauty get located inside translating mutual assistance that the members could feel they were nearing freedom. This metaphor remains cashing in all the time, since whenever the community turns away from the beauty of its values of solidarity and unselfish commitments towards noble ends; it soon falls down in the pit of slavery and colonization.

The same value can be traced in *The Healers* (1979). In withdrawing from wrestling, where Anan nearly meets a sudden death, intellectuals withdraw into themselves from the crowds of thoughtless celebrators leaving the plotters the opportunity to extend ugliness all over the place. Anan and Densu take short dives in the river and savor its beauty. This withdrawal comes as inertia from the destructive competitiveness of the games, processed as lurking ugliness.

One can note how such reflective and transcendental instances of beauty in nearly all the dramas of Armah's seven novels finely execute his corrective cultural project. The writer's general perspective emphasizes beautiful sceneries and natural settings to carry his message. While it invokes the justice of the deity and its divine intentions, the beauty of the scenery in which the African man lives, begs to seek similar beautiful relationships inside the African community and beyond. Thus, Armah breaks away from the transcendently idealistic philosophy that places emphasis on the regeneration of the subject alone away from his or surrounding. Like Adorno<sup>4</sup>, Armah prioritizes the object (beauty of the physical scenery) as both a motive and means for the renewal desired. In other words, Armah expect his readers, and hopefully all Africans, to move from appreciation of natural beauty to the instantiation of beauty in their everyday habits and norms. Both kinds of beauty, then, will be fused and made manifest in the physical and metaphysical inscription.

Similarly, ugliness, as it comes in the section below, deserves thorough investigation. Ugliness is a moment to ferret out a lost beauty. Both subject and objects (perpetuator and victim) are abused and the result is a scatological setting which Armah succeeds in drawing it like a scene straight from hell. Unless there is a reassessment of both object and the object's relation with the subject, positive change will remain illusive. When the gleam of easy success is mistaken for the true expression of natural beauty, ugliness settles in as a result. *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* can be a very good example for this idea, since Armah has made it his ultimate preoccupation (it is heralded in the very title of his first artistic production) to look for and investigate the possibility of regenerating Africa through aesthetics. In championing beauty for African regeneration, Armah makes a call that is both simple and deep.

### **Scatology and the Aesthetics of Vulgarly in *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born***

The choice of Armah's first novel for the illustration of his aesthetic formula is meant to underline his early but succinct preoccupation with beauty as a trope. Focus here is on *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* (1968), even though *Fragments* (1970) or *Osiris Rising* (1995) are no less relevant. Beauty, to start with, functions as a trope that carries the writer's cluster of ideas and thoughts regarding Africa's regeneration. Pushed to extremes, that collection of ideas amounts to the understanding that in the absence of the beautiful ones, only parasites (in terms of perpetual ugliness) continue to haunt Africa.

This present condition of ugliness is actually processed by the writer as an arid desert where the excreta, putrefaction and ugliness reveal a world order that spells political corruption and apathy on the part of the population. In this first novel, readers find about the man's (so comes the name of the principal character) deep distrust in the nationalistic ideal because given his circumstances, it seems that there is no meaningful ideal worth aspiring to.

The novel is full of images of excrements and bad smells, indicating not only a bleak worldview but a certain deadening metaphysics. A particularly perceptive critic of Armah, Joshua D. Esty, has seen the point behind Armah's images of excreta and waste: "In Armah's novel...excrement assumes a variety of figurative guises and narrative functions: shit acts as a material sign of underdevelopment; as a symbol of excessive consumption; as an image of wasted political energies; and as the mark of the comprador's residual, alien status<sup>5</sup>.

Esty follows his remarks by claiming that in *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, Armah reveals an unusual fascination with all that is related to death and disintegration. Corrupt political choices in the early independence period are the causes that explain this kind of fascination by the writer. And this portrayal uncovers Armah's way of discrediting comprador nationalism which, according to him, ruins the country and shatters the rosy hopes that came with the dawn of independence. Indeed, the same fascination reveals ethical and existential concerns of the writer that translates the shaky political arrangement Ghana experienced. For Armah, the absence of beauty must not be disjointed from the absence of a political vision that is capable of bringing forward hope to the general populace.

In this direction, one can note how Armah is not as iconoclastic as some of his critics have observed. The German art theorist, Theodore Adorno, has keenly noted art's need "to make use of the ugly in order to denounce the world which creates and recreates ugliness in its own image."<sup>6</sup> Indeed, in his way of stressing his alarms over the absence of beauty and the consequences related with this absence, Armah translates this understanding artistically, and this understanding extends to the symbolic dimensions of *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*. Tsegaye Wodajo has noted the deployment of corruption as an icon, that is, as part of the novelist's design of stating his ideas. However, Wodajo has neither traced nor analyzed how fitting or not the writer's symbols with his overall project. Wodajo's reading of corruption does not go beyond stating "Armah's exposure" to "Ghana's social and political ills from the lowest to the highest level."<sup>7</sup> It is interesting to see how corruption as an emblem is actually deployed by the novelist as part of his strategy of outlining a certain aesthetic that translates his definition of African worldview and metaphysics. Armah's aesthetics of the renaissance he projects *inter alia* is examined in terms of beauty and the sublime.

With the progress of chapters in *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, the narrative starts to operate less figuratively and more literally. The story first starts with the famous bus scene in which the conductor embezzles money from the tickets he sells. The sleeping protagonist, the man, or the watcher as the conductor calls him, assumes the position of a god as he is the only one who eyes the conductor's misconduct.

The watcher only continued to stare. He did not need to hurl any accusations. In the conductor's mind everything was already too loudly and too completely said.

'I have seen you. You have been seen. We have seen all.' It was not the voice of the watcher. It could not be the voice of any human being the conductor knew. It was a large voice rolling down and everywhere covering empty spaces in the mind and really never stopping anywhere at all. (*The Beautiful Ones*, p. 4)

The words underlined so sound like excerpts from scripture. The narrator reads: "*And so words and phrases so often thrown away as jokes reveal their true meaning. And Jesus wept. Aha, Jesus wept.*" Armah suggests how his protagonist has been a witness to moral perversions and misconducts. In other words, like an all-eying god, the man has seen it all! The same narrator reacts with his response, 'spittle' or the body vermin that matches the moral one just taking place: "...a stream of the man's spittle. Oozing freely, the oil like liquid first entangled itself in the fingers of the watcher's left hand..." (*The Beautiful Ones*, p. 5) In case Jesus wept for some committed wrongdoing, as the interjection in italics claims, "...the conductor [quite astonishingly] did not weep." The bottom line from this scene indicates how the man in the story is delineated as a god in a godless universe. Therefore, his only means of calling for justice is to question that injustice and condemn the stealing of resources of the nation, however insignificant, as filth. This first scene in particular is premonitory through the fact that it announces the shape of the prevalent immorality in independent Ghana. The man (the principal character) typifies any man, representing the helpless population standing in judgment over ruthless public servants. Armah's simulates the Scriptures in order to reinforce the sense of urgency, as the displayed absence of morals highlights the gravity of the African condition after independence.

In moving from the literal to the symbolic levels of the novel, the conductor can be approximated as the cabinet minister Koomson, while the driver seems to be paralleled with President Nkrumah. And again the man plays the same all-seeing God (or Jesus).

He (the man), after *the coup* helps the 'fugitive minister' to hide and escape to safety in Abidjan, Ivory Coast. True, the ex-minister has cheated him and deceived Oyo and his mother-in-law in the shipping project (they were supposed to get the necessary funds from the bank, using his influence as a senior public officer). Nevertheless, the man finds no reason why he should not save that corrupt minister from the jaws of no less myopic new leaders. The man seems to reason that since the fate of Ghana is to exchange hands between old embezzlers and new ones, why should he hand Koomson in a game of revenge? "But for the nation itself there would only be a change of embezzlers and a change of the hunters and the hunted." (*The Beautiful Ones*, p.162) To help Koomson find his way to Abidjan does not mean the man has forgiven the corrupt minister<sup>8</sup>. Faithful to his god imagery, Armah here, as with the rest of final scenes, leaves no doubt that Koomson, very much like his driver or the former Ghanaian premier, Nkrumah, have to be spared until the day when the beautiful ones are born and justice can be eventually executed. On his way back home after putting Koomson on a boat bound for

exile, the man witnesses a scene that reconfirms his distrust in the regime that has just seized power. A bus driver handing his license folder to a policeman has slid cedi notes in it. And again the man reclaims his god-like stature, for "The driver must have seen the silent watcher by the roadside, for, as the bus started up the road and out of the town, he smiled and waved to the man." (*The Beautiful Ones*, p.183). The man, the reader understands, is left to conclude that the filth the first rulers have caused and the stench they brought cannot possibly be cleaned by a new military regime which is as corrupt as the previous one, if not more.

Soon after the conductor is through with the man, the driver clears his throat and aims his blob that contains a hoarse growl at the man. The spittle of the conductor itself connotes filth. In addition of indicating that this driver has no respect for customers, the same behavior illustrates that the driver and conductor are both complicit in the nasty game. Meanwhile, such metaphor permeates how power functions in the newly independent Ghana. Elevated to the driving position, the driver uses the privilege that recalls that of a head of state presiding over the people in order to humiliate them, not to serve them. Both transgressions: embezzling state money and spitting on common people are deliberate actions of will instead of accidental coincidences. Indeed, it is in the symbolic bearings of the drama of driver-conductor that the reader is encouraged to see the parallel with the Koomson-Nkrumah and fully explore it in the rest of the novel. Switching from seemingly trivial and inconsequential little filthiness, that of the driver and his conductor, to wider taints and slovenliness, like that of the president and his cabinet ministers, is Armah's way of marking the lack of beauty in newly independent Ghana. Such a way is found by one critic to be overwhelmingly mythical<sup>9</sup>, which further supports the point introduced here.

Considering the direct or literal reasons behind Armah's stand *vis-à-vis* fictional Koomson as a senior officer; one could find Armah quite eccentric, as many of his harsh critics often see him. But it is only in investigating the rationale of his symbolic and mythic framework in this novel and the way it is channeled to feed into beautiful, egalitarian and serious visions of Africa that we might be ready to acknowledge his efforts and place them in their exact historical situation. Socialism and African nationalism, from Armah's viewpoint, are promises not kept, and Africans reaped only the gleam instead of actual beauty.

Having the whiteness of the stolen bungalows and the shine of the stolen cars flowing past him, he could think of reasons, of the probability that without the belittling power of things like these we would all continue to sit underneath old trees and weave palm wine dreams of beauty and

happiness in our amazed heads. And so the gleam of all this property would have the power to make us work harder, would come between ourselves and our desires for rest, so that through wanting the things our own souls crave we would end up moving a whole people forward. At such times the man was ready to embrace envy itself as a force, a terrible force out of which something good might be born, and he could see around close corners in the labyrinth of his mind, new lives for Oyo; for the children with their averted eyes; for himself also. Then in the morning the thick words staring stupidly out from the newspapers, about hard work and honesty and integrity, words written by men caring nothing at all about what they wrote, all this would come to mean something. But then in the office it is hard work not to see that even this little peace of mind is an illusion. Hard work. As if any amount of hard work could ever at this rate bring the self and the loved ones closer to the gleam. How much hard work before a month's pay would last till the end of the month? (*The Beautiful Ones*, pp. 94-5)

The gleam, as this excerpt elaborates, functions as a deflating trope. It is processed as a deceptive mirage for the amazed wonderers in search for the promised wealth. Armah's idea here is that no matter how hard works one exerts, there is something in the logic of the gleam that leaves one unsatisfied. Stolen wealth poorly justifies itself in newspapers by preaching demagogical slogans like 'hard work' and 'keep your city clean'. Meanwhile, the man lives from paycheck to paycheck. No amount of saving and planning can help the man satisfy the basic needs of his loved ones, Oyo and the children. Yet it is these loved ones that are mostly driven by the allusive slogan known as the "gleam". Indeed, and as he acknowledges to Teacher, the man is horrified at the loved ones' inability to understand this 'trick' of the gleam.

He makes it clear that "I cannot sit and watch Oyo and her mother getting fooled by this Koomson." (*The Beautiful Ones*, p. 57) When he faces both Oyo and his mother-in-law with how Koomson is actually a thief, he finds that they are far from taking him seriously. Oyo starts her justificatory creed of: "...long roads and short roads...", whereas her mother simply stops listening to him and leaves.

Koomson's gleam, when considered in its mythical proportions, seriously threatens the man's value of honesty and moral integrity. The man's immediate family sees him essentially as an incorrigible failure. Still Armah's focus is not on the subject, that is, the man's agony, but on the object which is the gleam and the absence of real and lasting beauty. Koomson, by contrast, is looked at by the man's loved ones as some prophet of a mythical *eldorado* exploiting the chances open before him as a cabinet minister. In consequence of such a reversed worldview, home stops



being the comforting place the man used to seek after work. Emotionally, he is separated from his wife by an ocean of contrary aspirations albeit they live in the same house. Loneliness and domestic insults take the better of his manhood. On the day he takes his children to their grandmother, the old woman greets him with wailings and insults: actually she starts with a warning addressed to his own son: [do]"not grow up to be a useless nobody [like the man, his father], that he would be a big man when he grew up." (*The Beautiful Ones*, p.124) The scene where Oyo's mother warns her grandchildren against adopting their father's ethos comes after her successive disappointments in his restrained attitude. If the man's moral choices have only resulted in destitution and distress, then for Oyo and her mother, it is a better choice to trade ethical standards for the spoils of the 'national game'. If the man's own boy is pushed not to embrace his father's ethical choices, then certainly Armah has captured how scatological postcolonial Africa has become. The gleam, which is again, only a shortcut of a stolen beauty, assumes a process of bastardization, a severe aesthetic crisis. The gleam, thus, serves to justify inauthentic and ugly political choices<sup>10</sup>.

Ironically and as Teacher predicts, only time will instruct how naïve Oyo and her mother were in touching the minister's heart and be willing to take them as partners. Koomson finally deceives them into signing the paperwork, gets the bank loan and buys the fishing boat for himself. What adds insult to injury is that they are sent the crumbs of the fraud, some baskets of fish from the boat that was supposed to be theirs in the first place. Still, it is until the *coup* occurs that the man regains back his wife's trust. That day and while the man is on duty at work, Koomson comes to hide at Oyo's. Only then does Oyo start feeling "...a deep kind of love, a great respect" for the man, her former *chichi dodo* husband. Caught by the sway of his former gleam, Oyo could not think of Koomson's exact repulsiveness until the day when she has been able to contrast his former lavish life with the bad smell and "the corrosive gas, already half liquid" that "had filled the whole room, irritating not only the nostrils, but also the inside, of eyes, ears, mouth, throat." (*The Beautiful Ones*, p.161)

In portraying Koomson's fall as self-suppressive and annihilative, Armah casts the whole final episode of the minister's career in a grotesque dimension. His purpose, however, is matching Oyo's need for self-apprehension. Intentionally, Armah credits Oyo with examining the circumstances arising from her ex-'brother Joe's' abject and humiliating fall. Her early confusion and shock were necessary and helpful means of reconciliation with her husband, and by extension, with his ideals of moral beauty, not just the shining gleam. Similarly, the same shock is indispensable for her to realize that the foul smell which the minister causes inside her own bedroom have been the insides of his gleam, derision and stolen glamour. Still she has learnt that these demeaning characteristics have been essentially there with Koomson all his life. Seen in its true light, the *coup* frees Oyo's sense of beauty from what de Gruchy calls "...the tyranny of superficial and facile images of the beautiful [to the extent that she] can begin to understand the beauty of God and its redemptive power amidst the harsh reality of the world."<sup>11</sup>

Witnessing the irony of fate in Koomson has shattered Oyo's sense of a disrupted orientation towards the gleam, and finally rectifies her own definition of beauty and self. The result is that she renews her trust in the man's ethical choices and embraces his moral cleanliness as her own.

What Oyo learns that day is by no means simple. In fact, her realization of her husband's true worth strikes a very special chord on the entire bearing of Armah's objective in the novel. True, corruption wins the day since the *coup* ushers in just other embezzlers, but for the man, at least, home has been regained as home in the ethical sense at least. Oyo's commentary: "How he smells!", in reference to Koomson, sums up the beautiful transformation in her. She soon adds: "I am glad you never became like him." The narrator notes the change with this comment: "In Oyo's eyes there was now real gratitude. Perhaps for the first time in their married life the man could believe that she was glad to have him the way he was" (*The Beautiful Ones*, p.165). In order to appreciate this change, one has to contrast this dénouement with her former disappointments in the man's moral choices.

As it happens, Oyo's ultimate identification with the man's moral choices can be traced in the novel as a transformation in her ethical framework vis-a-vis Koomson and all he stands for. The image of the Minister used to offer her the promise of the gleam. His fat, perfumed and soft body had long hurt her, as long as she used to contrast that wealth with her humble condition. When the Koomsons visit them for talks about the boat, she feels hurt for not wearing the same diamond ring as the one worn by Estella (Koomson's wife). The goods and the furniture she wondered about in the Koomsons' reception room had a bewitching power over her composure, values and moral choices. That gleam nourishes a set of standards amounting to a fantastic world where she could not accept less than those standards.

In embracing those standards, Oyo had mistakingly assumed that there would be no shadow cast on that gleam. Indeed, it is the boundaries between the real and the unreal that have been erased. To have her talk on 'long roads and short roads' while her mother openly insults the man for his ethical choice meant the end of all things beautiful. Without the lessons from the *coup*, the world would have kept the man in a marginalized position. The *coup* in Armah's dramatic design restores equilibrium in the world and shows the ethicality of the universe.

One indeed ought not to diminish Oyo's transformation and the circumstances leading towards that transformation. A cursory look at this part of the novel reveals that the melodramatic developments of the story stress the positive shift which has taken place and which has not been simple or possible without some compelling and inspiring qualities in the man<sup>12</sup>. The man is indeed carries on ill feelings against those who were unfair to him. What matters for him is how ethical order remains in check. The beauty in that family's renewed harmony at the end of the novel reveals the overall beautiful picture of people reunited. The reader is offered two final scenes actually. On the one hand, there is the man's restored harmony in his household, and on the other hand, Koomson's shattered equilibrium in consequence of his immoral actions.

Oyo's reconciliation with the man is but a tiny glimpse of hope that Armah offers near the end of his otherwise ghostly criticized book. The glimpse comes in the form of hope. For the glimpse is indicative of the chasm still to be bridged between the rulers and the ruled, as well as between self and other or beauty and excrement<sup>13</sup>. The man expresses this case quite beautifully when implying that the coup is simply a façade betraying only a change 'of the hunters and the hunted'. And as the drama unfolds, between the first bus scene and the second one, which significantly marks both the beginning and the end of the novel, Africa lives inside its morass of corruption and stench. This particular structuring of the novel translates Armah's understanding of African politics. When one refers only to Ghana's record of military *coups*, history has not proved him wrong. In the final analysis, Africa's case looks very much like the mad woman that the man met by the sea as he returns from Koomson's rescue: "It was not young, and it looked like something that had been finally destroyed a long time back. And yet he found it beautiful when he looked at it." Though long destroyed and with broken nerves, Africa stays beautiful.

### **Creative Inspiration: Education as an Ideology of Beauty**

Armah's view *vis-à-vis* the role that education is expected to play in order to promote Africa's re-birth is expressed in his last two fictional works in terms of symbols and myths. Rebirth, according to Armah, necessarily involves inspiration from the great heritage of the past. Deliberating on a rebirth while missing contact with the navel is, for Armah, another manifestation of loss and death. That is why in *Osiris Rising* (1995), there is a group of talented (albeit mostly western-trained) intellectuals working as one body to the same single end of rebirth. Armah's intellectuals cannot function adequately without the role of the Ankh, an undercover secret society dedicated to the raising of children along egalitarian values, resisting the slave trade or preserving the authentic African way of life. In a seminar, Armah stated: "We need to develop institutions of awareness to maintain our values; a knowledge of our spiritual and material resource bases and be given to our children from the early age."<sup>14</sup> In *KMT* (2002), Armah makes the backbone of his drama entirely dependent on occult collaboration of two university professors with other two griots—traditionalist historians. Beyond mere criticism of the current educational system or just an emphasis on the centrality for going back to the source, Armah dares blending these two analyses without forgetting to enrich the drama with a convincing dynamics dispelling the present predicament.

Instead of just curtailing his project by attacking what he calls 'imperial education' through dispersed statements, Armah outlines nearly all his reservations regarding this education in his early intellectual characters, namely Teacher, Baako and Modin. In *Fragments* (1970) Armah designs Baako as the experimental object wherein western education can be tested to prove its utility for progressive projects in Africa or simply belies that often proclaimed role. Explanation is necessary to help note irony in *Fragments*. This irony uncovers Baako's cruel and dramatic downfall. In so doing, Armah leaves readers to decide whether Africa should count on western education or not. Finding their own ways up from the nadir where Baako, Teacher and Modin are left, the late intellectual characters, and particularly those of the last two novels,—all stress education as a pillar or foundation of beauty in the continent. The second part of this section is wholly dedicated to dealing with Armah's exploitation of this concern: authentic education being necessary for regenerative beauty. The writer's ideas and the extent to which he envisions authentic education as praxis are traced.

The reader can consider the frustrating disappointments of the protagonists of the first three novels as attributable to the western education they received in the first place. That Teacher, Baako, Solo and Modin cannot face the challenges of beautiful transformation for their respective communities, testifies to the time lag or epistemic chasm separating the learnt 'wisdom' in western shrines of knowledge and the real challenges facing their own societies. In *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, Teacher, the supposed role model, cannot face his mother. He escapes from home but she is still capable of haunting him in dreams. Similarly, Baako, the "been-to", seems never in a position to live up to his mother's expectations. For her, he is just a failure and a disappointment. Meanwhile, Modin gets totally wasted and despite quitting his Ph.D. program in Harvard, the grip of that alien education has been very stressful on him. Armah implies that a lesson can be benefited from Baako's failure. The writer collects evidence for readers to assume that Baako's failure is mostly attached to the effects of the western education he receives.

This, however, does not imply that Teacher's and Modin's experiences are of little help to this study and reference to them will duly be made. But in comparison, Baako's trajectory lends itself to a better perspective. For it is with Baako, the protagonist of *Fragments* (1970), that the reader can review Armah's thoughts *vis-à-vis* the impact of western education on Africans. Modin utters very strong statements about foreign education; teacher can leave us with some concern about living under a corrupt national government; Lindela at first avoids dealing with its disquieting effects, but none of these protagonists embodies better than Baako the ways in which Western education has influenced Africans on the personal and communal levels. One further appropriateness of *Fragments* is the belief that there is no loud rhetoric there as in *Why Are We So Blest?* (1972); *Osiris Rising* (1995) and *KMT* (2002). *Fragments* is unique in the sense that the drama elaborates the writer's overall stand regarding this foreign knowledge and education.

## Baako's Experience: Problems with the Western Educational Paradigm

An examination of *Fragments* necessarily leads to studying Baako's mindset and attitude regarding what the newly independent Ghana expects from him. Armah, at some point in the novel, simply endears him to the reader only to eventually turn him mad. Perhaps, this last strategy helps in articulating the idea that his fellow Ghanaians, like Athenians before, have themselves turned mad after condemning their sage to madness. This young man seems unable to work out a coherent and practical agenda, albeit with few, but nevertheless attainable measures. (like Achebe's Obi in *No Longer at Ease*; endorsing the suggestion that Baako aims at initiating drastic social change). Amongst other concerns, he is obsessed with a movie script on chattel slavery. This pictorial condemnation of slavery can be linked to condemning the intellectual slavery that is implied by a visible African allegiance to the Western cultural paradigms.

Armah might have succeeded in creating a unity about the fragmented world he decries. But what is at stake, however, is that both the unity and the fragmentation decried in the novel bear evidence to the modern day absence of beauty. The drama in this novel is aimed at disproving the widely-cherished confidence that an African graduating from a western-styled university *ipso facto* helps to move forward his community. Moreover, Baako's drama attests to the idea that having a Western education does not guarantee the undoing of ugliness. With only a pile of books and a guitar for luggage, once back home from his studies in America, Baako airs the opinion that social transformation will be a matter of time only. Baako is quite baffled to learn that it does not take a degree to secure a job. For an intellectual, the same strangeness and difficulty are all expected as part of the obligation that his ideals entail. What is amiss with Baako, however, might be his innate incapacity to expect people's traditionality (resistance) as part of his historical fate. Part of Armah's design is that he appears to debase Baako by portraying him as seeking his own peace of mind and welfare in the first place while the intention to lead society comes after.

Reviewing *Fragments*, the Danish critic Kirsten Holst Petersen finds that "[...]the form of the book can [...] be said to not only reflect, but be an integral part of its message or meaning"<sup>15</sup>. The division of time, according to the same source, is at the heart of what the writer wants to highlight. The critic maintains that the circular conception of time as introduced by Baako's grandmother, Naana, works in favour of "a religious mode of perception, rejecting rational, scientific explanation of phenomena" where the "transcendental, mythical system [...] defies logic..."<sup>16</sup>. In the end, the same critic concludes, "Naana represents true spirituality, the seeing blind eye as opposed to the blind seeing eyes that surround her."<sup>17</sup> In this section, one finds that despite how this reading reflects perhaps how the writer himself wants his novel to be read, there are several problems before such a stand could be taken. The contention that members of the same community have undergone a cultural surgery whereby they have lost their values and become alienated from so called "true" spirituality leads us to consider the role of the same spirituality 'holders' to fight in a corrective cause.

Kofi Owusu insists on reading *Fragments* as an African story that strongly compares with William Shakespeare's *Hamlet*<sup>18</sup>. Although Baako is read as a complex character, his ideas regarding cultural regeneration are however subject to criticism. It seems that gaining Western knowledge does not ensure practical insight of African realities. Such impracticality of the 'wisdom won' in foreign lands, Armah plans it to mean, as essential and foundational. Education is initially planned and processed among student communities as a deadly competition with potential and privileged others. The expression 'survival of the fittest' is fairly accurate to account for scholarship and the way education in general is approached in the western academy. Its momentum is found by the writer to be murderous because in the end its structure is hierarchal. Therefore, the pyramid as metaphor cannot be reenacted for a constructive comprehension of Armah's intention from staging Baako's conduct as suicidal. Although he imagines a context where he can be a sort of modern healer, the thrust of the pyramidal drive impairs his noble ends. Again, it is this very self-centeredness that ironically misleads him and causes his insanity at the end. Petersen's position is quite pertinent. Armah works on both the circular and the linear (that is on the mythical and factual) lines with the purpose of showcasing how Baako has been stripped from historical consciousness as a result of having to make it to a foreign school that little attends to the specificities of the African or Akan locale. Hence Baako cannot take a positive approach to the situation resulting from the interaction between local tradition and European modernity. Consequently, his quest for beautiful tomorrow remains severely injured and hampered.

William Walker assuming the same critical perspective suggests another way of reading Baako's fate:

The protagonist [Baako] seeks to reenter a fragmented world which holds his roots, his lost culture and his only source of redemption. This quest, however, is doomed in advance since the distance between the two worlds has become too great and the return path is no longer clear, buried under too many years of alien influence.<sup>20</sup>

One can easily notice that nepotism, political corruption, family hypocrisy and repudiation of the old ancestral ethos, are perceived by Baako as fate rather than the result of some unfortunate but reversible historical circumstances. Indeed, matters would be different if he had approached these ills through deliberate actions of will where both European Modernity and local arcane practices bear evidence. In his illustration of the African Writers Series edition of *Fragments*, cover designer Bill Heyes illustrates two black hands tightly fastened together with a white string. Although there is no obstacle before the five fingers to keep them from stretching out freely, they remain strangely half-cloned and turned inwardly with palms facing each other.

The five fingers form a bone sandwich which, though fear-inspiring remains, in actual fact unable to untie itself. In fact, the two hands may stand for action that is needed by the intellectuals. This reaction may be due to two main reasons. The first one is that the white string suggests capitalistic consumerism and market values made possible by European Modernity. The second reason is that those closed knuckles bear witness to arcane *cultural* practices. Indeed, it is this failure of imagination that is mostly deplorable on the part of Baako, which is again attributed to the costly but useless education he has acquired.

Under such circumstances for Baako, the historical self-consciousness with which he would have been credited by entering and later changing the world is simply absent, and this is due to his lack of contact with his country's realities. To take his main point of dissatisfaction (exposure to capitalistic or consumerist culture), we should bear in mind that Baako calls it derogatively "Cargo Mentality" (*Fragments*, p.160). Reading his hastily written personal notes, one cannot fail to see that Baako compares his society members with some Melanesian natives who perform 'primitive' rites by waiting for the cargos to come from heaven. In some Melanesian islands and during World War I and II, some indigenous religious sects looked at American and other Allied troops coming with their military cargos (aircraft carriers, planes, tanks, vans, etc.) as the realization of the prophecy of the cargo cult. In order to share the bounties of the prophecy, there has to be first a hedonistic mass hysteria like "violent shaking of the hands and ecstatic trances" in a way of sacrifice.<sup>21</sup> Yearnings for Western goods are understood as gratuitous and dull, depersonalizing rites that recall benign Melanesians. His self-righteousness does not allow him to reconsider the idea that there has to be, perhaps, some deficiency with his 'authentic' tradition. On the contrary and as we find in Baako's notes, the young man even consults Naana (his fountain of beauty and authenticity) for explanations, "[A]sk Naana later. Try to find out what she sees and knows of this." (*Fragments*, p. 157). For what does Naana know about Melanesians?

Thus Baako never doubts the parallelism of his society with Melanesians, an attitude in him that downplays a large section of his people to mindless imitators, devoid of self-esteem and self-respect. He, in addition, moves on to refuse the construction of his presumed role within that inaccurate portrait which no one but himself draws in the first place. Baako imagines or takes himself for one among those important mediators standing between their ever expecting people and the gods who are supposed to bring the bounties. In his travel to study abroad, Baako takes modern day students (since students are also a 'been-tos') as the ones who assume the role of "a messiah and the ancestors [who] bring huge supplies of manufactured goods. Their arrival will usher in a wonderful new era when the believers will have their identity, dignity and honor restored."<sup>22</sup> Baako ridicules that position due to no other reason but that stubborn refusal to be belittled into the role of the crucified 'messiah', that is, as somebody who sacrifices his own individual self so that others of his kind after him may lead a better life.

In fact Baako's reference to Oedipus's pride and the hubris in Greek mythology (*Fragments*, p. 157) shows how aware he is of his defeatist premises. Like Oedipus's journey to the Oracle of Delphi, in Euripides' *The Bacchae* and in which tragedy was the result of vanity, Baako's travel as a 'been-to' comes as an ultimate product of vanity in front of the gods. Ironically, Baako's decision to be an artist evokes Oedipus's defiance to challenge God, so as to be a god himself<sup>23</sup>. Baako notes:

The idea that the ghost could be a maker, apart from being too slow-breaking to interest those intent on living as well as the system makes possible, could also have something of excessive pride in it. Maker, artist, but also maker, god. It is presumably a great enough thing for a man to rise to be an intermediary between other men and the gods. To think of being a maker oneself could be a sheer unforgivable sin. (*Fragments*, p.157)

Baako takes artists as an exceptional category of people competing, albeit unsuccessfully, with the gods since both seem to be engaged in a similar work, creation. Therefore it is the gods who while motivated by sheer jealousy of their competitors, defeat 'been-tos' and artists alike.

Nevertheless, the very parallel that he assumes linking Oedipus with himself should not overshadow the fact that Baako refuses the mediator's role for the waiting inhabitants of Ghana. One can note then that Baako's self-image of the god-like visionary supersedes that of the messiah or mediator. And implicitly the idea arises of the messiah's image is displaced on the ground that bounties cannot be provided since there is no place where they can be found; they need to be made, that is created first. That is the reason why artists are urged to create, that is, to compete with gods or offer what gods have not been able to offer. Artists like to think that in the godless chaotic universe which they find, they either assume the role of the gods or the world becomes an uninhabitable place for humans. It is paramount to note why Armah orchestrates Baako's failure in the first place. Baako's worldview is fundamentally based on the postulate rooted in the Greek paradigm. If Armah parodies Baako's presuppositions, it is because Baako, perhaps unconsciously or naively, perceives Africa as one of the old Greek city-states where the world is an arena in which gods and demigods brutally compete against each other. This makes him unfit for the battle with the consumerist inclinations of his society because in the end such a society slips into a variation between what is European and African.

Even when condemning Baako's choices as unconstructive and self-defeating as far as Armah's identity quest is concerned, one may still observe that these choices are the result of certain premises in his thinking that are more in line with Platonic beliefs. Truth, in the Platonic school, is always situated outside human beings, beyond the reach of the individual because it is assessed as objective, thus, it is both abiding and superior.



In order to be abiding, just and holy, truth has to be regarded as a holistic entity, fixed in a timeless and shiftless 'objectivity', that is, a sort of a metaphysical fact which surpasses the human<sup>24</sup>. Within this paradigm one scholar observes that for Plato as well as for his mentor Socrates, truth can only be conceived "as an independent realm external to human beings. In ancient Greece, truth was regarded as an unchanging hyper-reality whose principles may be discoverable through, but not created by, human activity"<sup>25</sup>. His portrait of Baako allows us to think that Armah shows symptoms of this age-old Platonic view with the presupposition that a mind can lead a life totally independent of that of the body, *à la Socrates*<sup>26</sup>.

By veering to mental suicide, that is, madness, Baako gives the illusion of eliminating bodily pain and enjoying the world of the mind only. But are not Baako's choices simply more about death where they should be dealing with more positive aspects in human existence? Aren't such choices purely pouring into the formation of "the disengaged self, the atomistic subject and atomistic individualism in society"<sup>27</sup>? Fairness obliges readers to note that Baako inaugurates what we may call 'a Traditionality of Postulations', which is responsible for his psychedelic identification with an idealistic heaven. Now identification with what can be termed Naana's "Traditionality of Past-ness" is doomed, knowing that it defies logic. The proof is that Baako turns mad at the end. In this regard *Fragments* can be taken as a precursor or prototype for Armah's plans for the creative intellectual in *Two Thousand Seasons*, *The Healers*, *Osiris Rising* and *KMT*.

## **Authentic Education as an Alternative Choice: Embracing Asar's Kind of Intellection**

As stated above, Armah's objection to western education is basically centred on the Graeco-Roman foundations of this education. However his attachments to Naana's fountain of Akan spirituality, Baako still conceives of the world as an arena where gods and demi-gods fight. There is a rift deep inside his imagination which uncritically pushes him to reduce his case to the sharp edges of some brave but, in the end, still a hopeless gladiator. Given Armah's philosophy of the beautiful, it will not be difficult to locate his alternative proposal on education as an incentive for regeneration. Partly in answer to Baako's case in *Fragments* but also in the hope of coming around his philosophy of self and being, Armah through "the words of Swri the drinker, elected scribe of the companions in the house of life" in *KMT*, provides the African man with awareness. The first level is connectedness; the second one, commitment. Baako might enjoy both of these but he lacks the means by which he would bridge connectedness with commitment. The solution to this problem would be what Swri calls 'energy':

Energy in dispersed form may go unrecognized as power, as long as it remains divided, broken, the pieces attached to a million disparate objectives, objects of simple desire, vague goals, empty wishes, haphazard dreams. Thus fragmented, our energy is so dissipated that in each instance of its myriad uses it is inevitably a weak force, its motion without consequences. Commitment gathers the many wandering fragments of the energy that is our soul, concentrates the gathered energy, then focuses the beam on goals we set ourselves. (*KMT*, pp. 244-5)

In connectedness there is the reason behind Baako's catastrophic failure. Baako lacks both commitment and energy. Indeed, it is because of this very problem, the lack of a functioning mechanism for drawing connections with the rest of people, that Armah subsequently bases his philosophy of 'redemptive' or constructive education. Fixing a broken connection with others and with the deeper traditions going millennia back in time by identifying with the long buried wisdom may bring forth an adequate strategy for bettering the Africans' conditions in the world today.<sup>28</sup> That is the reason why Baako, as a protagonist, remains an easy target for many critics. Wodajo finds him even 'naïve'<sup>29</sup>, and that is perhaps why this latter is in favour of Asar. Asar is the one who conveys Armah's visions about authentic education. This critic finds that Asar's methods of 'study groups' and 'system of reconnaissance' are excellent means whereby smooth and peaceful transformation of society can practically take place<sup>30</sup>.

But before expanding on Asar's qualities, one should note that in the first part of *KMT*, Armah again restates the reasons why he cannot trust Western educational system on Africa's regeneration. Lindela observes that such a system and the way it is implemented with African students prevents them from being "system makers". By "system makers", Armah has in mind graduates who are more than just engineers, doctors, lawyers and simple administrators. By "system makers", one can understand an elite that is a blend of conscious, talented and committed think-tanks working always for the long run to ponder over the postcolonial conundrum. Insisting on the quality of 'system making' as conditional for a redemptive education, Armah tacitly but artfully moves in the second part of the same novel to lay the foundations for this alternative education in the hope, so we are to understand, to found "system makers." The trust that has honed between traditionalist, Djely Hor, and the university professor, Sipa Jengo, can only expand to meet the conditions necessary for training "system makers" through a sound educational system. Good-hearted Traditionalists join hands with dedicated, innovative and secular university scholars in the hope of reversing Africa's fortunes. In *Osiris Rising*, Asar proposes to "design a new system, do detailed research to outline necessary content, compare it to the old, argue its superiority in open debate, then organize its practical implementation."

Maanan Djan, known to the group of teachers at Manda Training College as the Mystic Comrade, suggests "We'd have to organize in a way we haven't done before. Around precise objectives. With specific volunteers taking charge of each project. The rest of us would form a permanent support and resource group." (*Osiris Rising*, pp.189-90). Interesting still is the fact that the debate can quickly switch from the abstract to action and *vice versa*, thanks to Asar's charismatic role.

Among the critics that consider *Osiris Rising* in their corpus, neither Ode Ogede, nor Tsegaye Wodajo discuss the contents of this curriculum. They both acknowledge that Armah means his proposed curriculum to be at the heart of his message out of the novel, yet they have done but little to explain why and how<sup>31</sup>. The group of teachers comes up with detailed observations and suggestions, ready for execution in three departments: African Studies, History and Literature.

The proposals are all predicated on the need to outdo the colonial cerebral paradigm in educating Africans. Gbemisola Adeoti does not miss the advantage from group work: "The group sees education as the bedrock of social change and a window into a new world. It advocates a system that displaces the centrality of Europe and America, making Africa its starting point."<sup>32</sup> Since the Europeans' aim to shape learning in the continent was primarily in the hope of "keeping Africans usably underdeveloped and dependent" (*Osiris Rising*, p. 213), it is very logical to seek different criteria once Europeans have left. Curricula, according to Manda school designers, are not to be viewed as separate from subject—object dynamics in Africa; hence they recommend the necessity to free African students from 'old colonial servile reflexes' and habits of mind. The three departmental proposals are drafted by 'a joint committee drawn from interested faculty and students', and are all submitted to the Humanities Faculty for deliberations. Each department comes up with its own reflection highlighting the three same concerns. The African Studies department outlines its proposal in three elements. The first element is entitled: *Historical Background*, where there are reviews on the state the discipline as first charted in the European curricula. The second is called: *Principles For A New Approach* outlines the reasons why main changes need to be implemented in the new curriculum. The third element, however, is labeled *Design Specifics* where it attempts translating the desired changes directly to a practical memorandum. History and Literature departments work in slightly the same fashion. Each provides what they call: *The Background, Basic Assumptions Of The Old Curriculum* and later *Principles For A New Approach*. By the end, each department presents a list of concerns they call: *Recommendations*, which proclaimed to be a statement where immediate steps are insisted on for implementation.

In African Studies, the general assessment goes along a more stringent line that considers Western triumphalism as an attitude resulting from a penchant for "locating exploitable antagonisms". Grabbing the African space could not be done effectively without "missionary intelligence gathering" too. In order for Manda Teachers to outdo this state of affairs, they emphasize the need to overcome the Darwinian linear 'anti-historical approach'.

Instead of accumulation as an approach, they "advocate a dynamic consciousness of history as a process.", where all factors, and the interplay between these factors, are brought into light and put under scrutiny. The activity of determining who is an African and who is not has to filter through the investigation of Africa's inhabitants prior to the Arab and European invasions. Since mythical *Kemet* is placed as the starting point from where Africans first originated, a full program attending to the study of heliographic scribes becomes paramount for the full appreciation of this starting point. And to this end, the use of archeological and linguistic evidence can be a means to determine who is African and who is not.

In reviewing the state of the History Department, the first priority goes to enabling students to read heliographs as part of their reading assignments routine. The mystery of the scribes is lifted from the monopoly of orientalists, and here *Kemetic* life starts to radiate its egalitarian ethics and beauty. Similarly, observing the great changes that have occurred in Japan, China and Korea has the value of locating the cultural elements that can dissolve social differences and result in societal cohesion.

Armah's intention from underlining the experiences of these far eastern societies is for the purpose of making Africans shift from tribal identities, characteristic of feudal populations, to modern, self-dependent and self-developed communities. Besides, such a study breaks the European paradigm, publicized as the only option which Africa has to embrace or else die. To consider other experiences, particularly of these Asian societies that reached acceptable horizons of science and high technology while keeping rooted in their origins and the sense of who they are, can induce Africans to do the same.

When it comes to the Literature Department, literature becomes a tool for uplifting consciousness. From this perspective, African Literature crucially sets instructional habits of democracy and designs strategies of knowing by providing excellent interpretive devices. This is targeted against the preposterous view which assumes Africa as a continent without literature or worse, beyond literature. Modern African literature, in this view, has been regarded as a twentieth century innovation, almost a bastard creation without roots in the African Oral Tradition, and not worth more than a few lines of commentary compared with works in the western canon. Driven by their illusory superiority complex, Europeans have presented their own literature as the only literature that deserves serious attention<sup>33</sup>. Obsessed with presenting their worldview as the only valid, very little has been said by European scholars about 'exotic' literatures and experiences, say of the Chinese or the Korean, etc. That is why in Manda Training College, teachers seek a literature curriculum that is open to writings that are beyond Europeans' experiences and tastes. In the same vein too, they advocate a reevaluation of both Africa's Oral Tradition and *Kemetic* scribes. Meanwhile, if the old curriculum overstresses the aesthetic elements in a literary work just to downplay the overriding political and social concerns, the new one pins all its hopes on an outlook *vis-à-vis* literary reading that mirrors all its concerns and social background.

Anyone reading Armah's *Osiris Rising* for the first time finds an unusual and perhaps an unprecedented fascination with Ancient Egypt, informing the reader how the writer orients his vision of beauty towards Pharaonic civilization. In the three proposals, ancient Egyptian civilizations and their written records receive the center stage. Explicating his hopes for an alternative curriculum in Manda Teachers' Training College to the newly arrived Ast, Asar summarizes what has to be done in three basic recommendations:

But for me the most important come down to three. One, making Africa the center of our studies. Two, shifting from Eurocentric orientations to universalistic approaches as far as the rest of the world is concerned. The last would mean placing a deliberate, planned and sustained emphasis on the study of Egyptian and Nubian history as matrices of African history instead of concentrating on the European matrices, Greece and Rome. We would also bring in Asian and pre—Columbian history, something the old guard is ignorant of and hostile to at the same time. (*Osiris Rising*, p.104)

## Conclusion

Be that as it may, Armah's vision seems to be in line with the Africanist insights drawn by Molefi Asante<sup>34</sup>. Hence, authentic education is one step made for the formulation of a paradigm that would be helpful for Armah in demythologizing Western supremacy and proceed with his forward-looking and progressive vision of the African renaissance. Armah's concept of beauty (which he deems necessary not for solely aesthetic purposes but for what Asante calls "self respect" and self esteem) itself gets translated into an educational system. My essay has articulated the writer's mechanism(s) devised to guarantee an enhancing form of beauty through education. In Armah's mind, the struggle to create a mythology of success and beauty has to be deeply inculcated in the imagination of any African community. One is supposed 'not to leave home for school' is Armah's trope in *Why Are We So Blest?* to indicate the adverse effects of western education on Africans in search of non-profit values.

In outlining his philosophy of education, one agrees with Kwame Ayivor that "Armah's fictional programme [...]is a two-edged literary weapon designed to destroy both European and Arab myths and their interpretations of African and Diasporic history and the indigenous, neo-colonialist, Eurocentric academics who are reluctant to restructure Africa's educational systems."<sup>35</sup> In each fold, Armah offers excellent arguments for support. As Baako's failure seems to exemplify that of society as a whole, the intention of the writer has been to convince his readers that the Greek paradigm lies at the heart of Africa's crisis. Unless Africans start to consider and conceive the world as a just and egalitarian entity, the quality of life they lead would barely improve.

Drawing off the veil on *Kemetic* mythology has been Armah's answer to the present overriding challenges and needs of Africa. In *Osiris Rising*, the writer simply translates that mythology into a leading way of life and an enlightened educational system. Under this *Kemetic* worldview, life is essentially a choice. It involves identification and commitment, both a deeply articulated supposition and a never failing habit of democracy. Again, the *Kemetic* paradigm entails the gradual suppression of ugly images, arcane practices and irresponsible customs. In campaigning for such ends, beauty becomes just another mythical variation of education.

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## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Fyodor Dostoyevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*. (London: Heinemann, 1968), p. 103.

<sup>2</sup> Sarah Nuttal, *Beautiful Ugly: African and Diaspora Aesthetics*. Duke University Press, (2005), p. 3.

<sup>3</sup> Jennifer A. Mc. Mahon, "Towards a Unified Theory of Beauty". *Literature and Aesthetics*. October, Vol. 9, 1999, p. 13.

<sup>4</sup> Callaghan thinks that: "Whereas Kant conceives of beauty as a subjective experience, Adorno suggests that beauty mediates between subject and object. Beauty is contained in the cognitive or truth-content of works of art. As Adorno writes in *Aesthetic Theory*: 'All beauty reveals itself to persistent analysis' (69)." Jennefer Callaghan, "Theodore Adorno", <<http://www.english.emory.edu/Bahri/Adorno.html> Spring 2000.

<sup>5</sup> Joshua D. Esty, "Excremental Postcolonialism", *Contemporary Literature*, Vol. 40, N° 1 (Spring, 1999), p. 34.

<sup>6</sup> Theodore Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*. (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984), p.72

<sup>7</sup> Tsegaye Wodajo, *Hope in the Midst of Despair: A Novelist's Cure for Africa*. Africa World Press, Inc. (2004), p.88.

<sup>8</sup> According to Wodajo, in helping Joe Koomson escape the country, the man "seems to have become a participant in the evil acts of corruption he has so despised in others." I think that Wodajo here simply overlooks the protagonist's choice to help Koomson escape. Tsegaye Wodajo, *Ibid.*, p. 68.

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<sup>9</sup> The critic is Ben Obumselu and he writes that: "*The Beautiful Ones* is best read as myth. Its treatment of the corruption of power, of the contradictions inherent in the idea of benevolent autocrat of the oppression of social and political experience, as patterns which repeat themselves suggests that the operative imaginative form is that of myth." Ben Obumselu, "Marx, Politics and the African Novel" *Twentieth Century Studies*, 10 Dec., 1973, p. 112.

<sup>10</sup> In reference to the power to the captivating radiance of the gleam in Armah's *The Beautiful*, one has to take in consideration de Gruchy's observations that "...art in its endeavor to help us see differently, is often iconoclastic, reacting against images and symbols associated with de-humanising ideologies and powers." John W. de Gruchy, "Holy Beauty: A Reformed perspective on Aesthetics within a World of Unjust Ugliness." <http://livedtheology.org/pdfs/deGruchy.pdf>, p.7 One such reflective image in the novel is the gleam which derives its force from borrowed time from the future. Since no matter how hard you work no one can possibly amass such wealth, brilliance and glamour and stay at the same time morally and ethically clean.

<sup>11</sup> John W. de Gruchy, "Ibid.", p.9.

<sup>12</sup> In a very interesting paper, Richard Priebe finds: "... the novel [*The Beautiful Ones*] is a powerful and eloquent thematic elaboration and exploration of the man's role as priest and the attendant paradox of being part of, yet separate from, the structure of society." Richard Priebe, "Demonic Imagery and the Apocalyptic Vision in the Novels of Ayi Kwei Armah", *Yale French Studies*, N° 53 (1976), p. 111.

<sup>13</sup> Joshua D. Etsy, in the above mentioned article, "Excremental Postcolonialism", offers an interesting observation. If corruption ends up with Koomson no better than the excrement his body gets rid of (think of the time he was hiding in Oyo's bedroom and the foul smell he lets go of), then that excrement is the product of the self. Etsy claims that "Shit, operating as the preeminent figure of self-alienation (the matter that is both self and not-self), becomes a symbolic medium for questioning the place of the autonomous individual in new postcolonial societies." pp. 36-37. In other words, to what extent one is involved within the cycle of beauty-excrement seems very relative and a matter of little clarity. That is why, it seems, the man unquestionably and without second thoughts decides to help Koomson escape. The metaphor of shit as both self and not-self works its effects on the man and shapes his ethical choice not to leave Koomson to the Soldiers' jaws.

<sup>14</sup> Ayi Kwei Armah, "Our Awakening." (1990).  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0wrTdqlBHK&feature-related>

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<sup>15</sup> Kirsten Holst Petersen, "Loss and Frustration: An Analysis of A. K. Armah's *Fragments*" in: Derek Wright, (ed.), *Critical Perspective on Ayi Kwei Armah*. Three Continents Press, (1992), p. 217

<sup>16</sup> Kirsten Holst Peterson, "Ibid.", p. 218.

<sup>17</sup> Kirsten Holst Peterson, "Ibid.", p. 220.

<sup>18</sup> Owusu opines the following: " Society's unreasoning 'reason' condemns Baako's reasoned 'unreason' as 'madness'. Society's wrapped notion of 'reason' defines Baako's 'madness'; but the 'dialogue' between Baako and the society which consigns him to a mental hospital is 'faked'..." Kofi Owusu, "Armah's *Fragments*: Madness as Artistic Paradigm". *Callalo*, N° 35, (Spring, 1988), p. 363.

<sup>20</sup> William Walker, *Major Ghanaian Fiction in English: A Study of the Novels of Ayi Kwei Armah and Kofi Awoonor*. PhD Thesis, University of Texas at Austin (1975), p. 201.

<sup>21</sup> Sources go even to report that there exists even today "Some cult members [who] believe they must imitate the foreigners. They even drill with wooden rifles and hold flag raising ceremonies. They adopt western dress and imitate western behavior. They have built wharves, storehouses, airfields, "radio masts," and lookout towers in anticipation of the arrival of good fortune. Cult leaders make contact with the deities by using "wireless telephones," often nothing more than wooden posts or carved totem poles." C. V. Gilnes, "The Cargo Cults", *Air Force Magazine*. January 1991, Vol. 71, N° 1 <http://www.afa.org/magazine/magz:asp>.

<sup>22</sup> C. V. Gilnes, "Op.cit."

<sup>23</sup> Braden Ruddy, "Hubris in Greek Mythology". <http://www.gradesaver.com/>

<sup>24</sup> We can witness some of these platonic principles in the famous Socratic dialogues. Trying to fix the meaning of Holiness, Socrates works out these analogies for his interlocutor, Euthyphro: "...if something is coming to be so or is being effected, then it's not the case that it *gets to be so* because it's *coming to be so*, but that it's *coming to be so* because it's *being effected*, but that it's *being affected* because it *gets affected*." Plato, *The Last Days of Socrates: Euthyphro; Apology; Crito; Phaedo*. Trans. Hugh Tredennick & Harold Tarrant, Penguin Books, (2003), p. 21. (Emphasis in the original)



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<sup>25</sup> John L. Hemingway, "Recovering the World: Varieties of Philosophical Experience", *Scholar*, 8, (1993), p. 5. [http://faculty.wiu.edu/J-Hemingway/Publications/Hemingway\\_\\_Recovering\\_the\\_World.pdf](http://faculty.wiu.edu/J-Hemingway/Publications/Hemingway__Recovering_the_World.pdf)

<sup>26</sup> After knowing that his case is almost desperate, Socrates turns furious as he attacks his main accuser, Meletus. The language, as we notice, is more rhetorical than economical. The reason for that switch to rhetoric can be explained on the ground that by then Socrates merely wanted to gain the audience's sympathy: "[B]ut perhaps someone will say, 'Do you feel no compunction, Socrates, at having pursued an activity which puts you in danger of the death penalty?' I might fairly reply to him, 'You are mistaken, my friend, if you think that a man who is worth anything ought to spend his time weighing up the prospects of life and death. He has only one thing to consider in performing any action; that is, whether he is acting justly or unjustly, like a good man or a bad one. On your view the heroes who died at Troy would be poor creatures, especially the son of the Thetis...Do you suppose that he [Achilles] gave a thought to death and danger?'" Plato, *Ibid.*, p. 54.

<sup>27</sup> John L. Hemingway, "Op.cit.", p.7.

<sup>28</sup> In fact this opinion is not only Armah's. Molefi Asante shares roughly the same idea. At one instance Asante positions the centrality of ancient Egyptian history at the heart of his Afrocentrist philosophy. He states that: "But my aim...is to show that the very intense concern the Afrocentrist has with psychological dislocation, that is, where a person's psyche is out of sorts with his or her own historical reality, is a legitimate issue for any African corrective. You cannot have an African building a church in the heart of Ivory Coast that is larger than St. Peter's in Rome without wondering what do we Africans think of our own ancestors? A one hundred or two hundred million dollar shrine to an African deity might have changed forever the religious respect for Africa. But a people who do not respect their own gods should not ever expect respect from anyone. I am saying this as one who is not religious. I am talking pure symbolism here, pure rationalism, not irrationality, but common sense. If you are not going to use the money as you should to improve the health conditions of African people, the educational standards, and the economic circumstances, then by God, use it to showcase your own ancestors, not to compete with Rome for who can build the largest European building in Africa." Molefi Kete Asante, *The Afrocentric Perspective*. Temple University Press, (1998), p.8.

<sup>29</sup> Tsegaye Wodajo in this regard finds that "Baako's choice to struggle alone is partially based on his naivety in believing that the disease could be cured solely through individual efforts. He fails to see that the disease is too deeply entrenched to be dug out and removed by an individual regardless of that individual's position." Wodajo, *Op.cit.*, p. 105.

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<sup>30</sup> Wodajo, *Ibid.*, pp. 161-2.

<sup>31</sup> Ode Ogede notes the highly symbolic framework on which Armah structures his novel. He declares that "the significance of *Osiris Rising* lies in the fact that it is allegoric and parabolic in conception, for, as in the preceding works, the characters presented in *Osiris Rising*, while aspiring to the status of flesh and blood humans, also illustrate attitudes, emotional states, and experiences that are representative." Ode Ogede, *Ayi Kwei Armah, Radical Iconoclast: Pitting Imaginary Worlds against the Actual*. Athens, Ohio University Press. (2000), p. 140.

<sup>32</sup> Gbemisola Adeoti, "The Re-Making of Africa: Ayi Kwei Armah and the Narrative of an(Alter)-native Route to Development". *Africa Media Review*, Volume 13, N° 2, 2005, p. 11.

<sup>33</sup> In this connection, Armah recently comments that "Literature was used as imperial propaganda; for Africans this made it part of a program for deadening natural sensitivities, a form of social anaesthesia." Ayi Kwei Armah, *The Eloquence of the Scribes*. p.71.

<sup>34</sup> Asante bases his philosophy of Afrocentrism on taking over from Orientalism and Africanism when it comes to the definition of Africa and Africans. His opinion is that: "We remain one of the few people who have allowed others to become experts on our history and our ancestors; this is the source of our confusion. The Ghanaian often refers you to Rattray for information on Asante customs and some Nigerians still believe that Lady Lugard's *A Tropical Dependency* says everything about Nigeria. ... , ...all Afrocentric analysis is a critique on hierarchy and patriarchy because the analysis stems from all forms of oppression." Asante, *Op.Cit.*, Temple University Press, (1998), p.9.

<sup>35</sup> Kwame Ayivor, "Op.cit.", p. 65.

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