

**A SOCIO-LINGUISTIC SURVEY OF ARMAH'S POST-COLONIAL  
CONCERNS IN *THE BEAUTYFUL ONES ARE NOT YET BORN***

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**Abstract**

This paper examines the theme of corruption in Ayi Kwei Armah's **The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born**. In doing this, both the style, language and the predictions of Armah in this work were explored. The literature that has emerged from the African continent during the continent's postcolonial years, has placed writers in a position to describe the sociolinguistic situation as realistic because this period reflected a larger state of alienation in the society as a whole, a clear case of colonial legacy which has left scars on the body, heart and mind of the continent. **A man of the people; The Man Died; Things Fall Apart; No Longer at Ease; From a Crooked Rib** and the titles of many other novels in Africa also speak clearly of alienation, corruption or the dismemberment of the African people in parts of the continent that could have made a whole in the spirit, soul and body of an average African. In addition, critics' opinions on the work were painstakingly sorted out and carefully accounted for. From the foregoing, it is concluded that this literary work, **The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born** has presented a realistic picture of a corrupt contemporary Ghanaian society by reason of generalization of the experience in Ghana to other African countries and therefore remains one the most thorough-going expose on corruption in African literary fiction and a literary experience which will not be deleted from the sands of time and the memory of generations yet unborn while it serves as a lesson for the average Nigerian who is out to transform Nigeria's Higher Education in a realistic practical terms.

**Keywords:** Post Colonial Ghana. Politics and politicians, corruption, bitterness and civil war outbreak.

Literature, according to **The Encyclopedia Americana** is “one of the greatest creative and universal means of communicating the emotional, spiritual or intellectual concerns of mankind” (Vol. 17:599). Accordingly, **The Encycloedia Britannica**, (15<sup>th</sup> ed: 1041) sees literature as: “the art of organizing words to give pleasure”. This can be further analyzed to mean the effective manipulation of words by an author to arouse aesthetic and intellectual feeling in the reader. But literature means more than this; “it is the sum of the world’s past experience, present and future theories and at the same time an anthology and history of the multifarious characters which the world embodies” (Udondata, 1975:5). With regard to function, literature may instruct, inform and entertain, express personal joy and pain. It may also reflect religious devotion, glorify a nation or hero and even advocate or predict a particular development- be it political, social or aesthetic over a period of time. It is therefore, safe to conclude that literature is ultimately concerned with man and society. In the light of the above, literature has to do with reality, and has to be useful to man and the society within which it functions, (Enang, 1993:1). Thus, literature should be motivated by a sense of commitment to society on the part of the literary artist, no matter how trivial the utilitarian yield of his art may seem.

Raymond Williams (1978) in his book-**Marxism and Literature** agrees with Sartre’s stand about literature that:

.....if literature is not anything, it is worth nothing. This is what i mean by commitment..... if a written sentence does not reverberate at every level of man and society, then it makes no sense. What is the literature of an epoch but an epoch that is appreciated by its literature (p:201).

There are varied and complex factors which make literature a *sine qua non* for man and society. It touches on magic, ritual and the desire for self expression. It is not only invented and created but highly stylized and traditional. Any piece of writing has its own theme. It may seek to create cultural valued like Achebe in **Things Fall Apart** or reform religious documents of a community like John Dryden in his **Absalom and Achitophel**, or it may bitterly criticize certain development in the society like Soyinka pouring out his vengeance on corrupt leadership in **The Man Died**, and **The Interpreters** or Armah and Achebe’s **The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born** and **A Man of the People** respectively whose thematic concern-corruption, this paper preoccupies itself with.

Painful imagery dominated the pages of the literary works that emerged from the African during the postcolonial years. Ngugi described the sociolinguistic situation

of that time as “realistic” as it was full of imagery. The literary works in Africa in the post-colonial African society reflect a larger state of alienation in the society as a whole, a clear case of colonial legacy which has left scars on the body, heart and mind of the continent. Many novels in Africa speak clearly of alienation, corruption and dismemberment of parts that could have made a whole.

The novel, **The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born**, demonstrates the fact that African novelists are becoming less preoccupied with cultural matters and are more concerned with issues of corruption and incompetence which are so wide-spread in African circles. It is Armah’s assessment and judgment of the present order and also an affirmation that only the ugly ones are born and thieving in their corrupt filth.

### **The Writer in the Society**

No writer writes in a vacuum. Every writer comes from a place, a community or a country. Therefore every writer operates and functions in his society. The society in which he functions as a writer has a profound influence on his thoughts, feelings and indeed, his imaginative and creative constructs. Chinweizu et al (1980:253-254) see the betterment of a society as the duty of a highly perceptive artistic undertaking, which is achievable by any literary artist who cares. To them, the role of a writer in his society is: “... a matter of orientation, a matter of perceiving social realities and making those perceptions available in works of art in order to help promote understanding and preservation of, or change in the society’s values and norms”. Commenting on obscurity and commitment in literary work, Nwoga says that a writer has as his role to integrate his work of art to the event in his society:

Our literature must be seen as part of the struggle for the liberation of Africa politically and morally... any creative writing by an African where the writer is motivated not by the desire to speak his mind about the African dilemma but the desire to please a foreign audience deserves not to be classified as African literature. (Nwoga, 1980:26).

A writer should serve as a mirror of his society, reflecting the ills and the morally unaccepted developments that are perennial in the society in which he functions. O. p’Bitek, observing the role of a writer in his society informs that: ‘The poet is the agent of his society. He has the talent which other members of his social group may not possess of distilling the thoughts, joys, fears, anger and sorrow, not only of the individual but also of the group...’ (1974:9).

The writer and his society should function as one whole. It is the members of his society that make up his audience and his focus should cover the goings-on about his people who constitute the audience. Indeed, the writer’s concern about the events in the society is aimed at recording these events one by one, putting them together in sentences and pushing them back to his society for critical scrutiny. A writer who does this does

not intend to detach his audience from his writing. In so doing, he is able to carry his audience-members of his society, along.

The role of the Writer must never be compromised. Where a writer fails to establish and maintain real contact with his society, he is sure to fail in fulfilling the mission expected of him. There is no end to a writer's role or to the awareness of his duty to his people and society.

A writer speaks in the name of his people and society. Mohamadou Kane submits that: "a writer sings of the wealth and the soul of the society's culture and praises the hundred qualities in it but is careful not to delve into tradition and illustrate such treasures", (1973:68). A writer who takes a retrospective look at his society is able to offer a contemporary analysis and is thus better placed to give a panoramic view of such a society. As a torch-bearer for the society, the writer plays the role of watching what goes on in the society informs the society about any happening that will affect their welfare and takes pain to predict what is likely to be the outcome of such happening.

Enang, (1993:4) has cited Kane's publication of the resolutions reached at the Negro Writers and Artists' Conferences held in Paris, Rome and Dakar on the expected role of the African Writer in the following declarations:

When the Negro Writers and Artists held a congress organized by Présence Africaine in Paris and Rome and a Colloquium in Dakar, it was resolved that African writers must, as a matter of thematic concern, join in the struggle against colonialism and neo-colonial designs by putting their art at the service of the people.

This explains why a leading African novelist, Chinua Achebe went neck-deep in the struggle to expose the bastardization of the political destinies of young African states by Africans who took over from the colonial masters. It was also his determination to deal with the post and neo-colonial designs perpetrated by indigenous political zealots shortly after independence. His works have so clearly depicted his satirical intention, a result of his determination to work towards a literature that would bear witness to time, place and event. Soyinka sees the indictment of African political leaders by African writers as a form of nationalism in itself. He regards African art as an integral part of a social conscience in its primordial form. In his own words:

When the writer in his own society can no longer function as conscience, he must recognize that his choice lies between denying himself totally or withdrawing to the position of chronicler and post-mortem surgeon.... The artist has always functioned in African society as the record of mores and experiences of his society and as a voice of vision in his own time. It is for him to respond to this essence of himself. (1973:89).

Contemporary African Writer rises to the task of custodying the values of the African Society. The role of the African writer therefore, needs not be over-emphasized. He now takes a look at how his society had been badly presented in books by Western World Writers, bearing in mind that “the worst thing that can happen to any people is the loss of their identity, dignity and self respect”, (Achebe, 1973:8). It is in the light of this that Achebe further urges that African writer must help their societies to regain their images by showing them in human terms what happened to them, and what they lost.

Challenging African writers to their role, Achebe says:

There is a saying in Ibo that a man who can't tell where the rain began to beat him cannot know where he dried his body. The writer can tell the people where the rain began to beat them... in Africa, he cannot perform this task unless he has a proper sense of history, (1975:19).

Therefore, a writer who feels the need to right this wrong cannot escape the conclusion that the past needs to be recreated, not only the enlightenment of our detractors, but even more for our own education because according to Achebe himself “the past with all its imperfections never lacked dignity” (19).

A writer must have a proper sense of history and an acceptable literary orientation which may have made him very perceptive of social realities of Ghana, for instance, and Africa in general. This orientation has also motivated him to include the realities of his society in his works for the use of the society. His literary works are vehicles for social criticisms as he lampoons the foibles of his country and castigates the evils that are associated with it.

### **The Socio-political Background of Ghana**

The socio-political realities of Ghana during the period immediately after independence form the background of the novel – **The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born**, which this paper focuses on. This novel identifies with the interests and ideals of the people of Ghana featuring characters that are recognizable to their immediate audience while still being universally relevant.

Independence, for most African countries, ushered in a period of conflict and disillusionment soon after the euphoria of self-governance. Ghana, like Nigeria, has witnessed political chauvinism, social disorder, thuggery, deceit, financial mismanagement, misleading of the people and suffering under oppressive yoke of corrupt, greedy and intimidating leadership. The novel - **The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born** presents characters who attempt to effect a change just as we find in Achebe's **A Man Of The People** but are exterminated and grounded under the vicious power of the guns, the consequence which is military take-over in both countries as was predicted by the authors of the two novels.

Ghana attained political independence in 1957 with Dr. Kwame Nkrumah becoming its first president later when the country became a republic in 1960. From this time onwards, Nkrumah's link with the people began to loosen. He introduced a lot of measures that were contrary to his earlier ideologies. For instance, "he introduced a one-party system, banned official opposition and introduced the Preventive Detention Act which empowered him to imprison people without charge or trial. Again, his regime became very corrupt and the people he promised economic freedom found themselves wallowing in abject poverty. Thus, the people became totally disillusioned with the result that when Nkrumah's government was overthrown by the army, there was jubilation all over the country by both young and old" (Nwosu, 1992:52-53).

Even though Armah had begun to write the book before Nkrumah's fall, it was published in 1968 after the coup in 1966. This is why Armah was able to criticize Nkrumah so openly towards the end of the novel. It is worthy to note that despite the fact that Ghana is very specifically mentioned in the story, the events in the story are also true of other African nations. Armah demonstrates this commitment by carefully reflecting in the novel his country's political, economic, moral and social decadence perpetrated by the Ghanaians who took over from their colonial predecessors. Armah thus, advocates military intervention in Ghana. But unfortunately, even the military rulers themselves could not stop the mess which they came in to eradicate.

### **Corruption in *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born***

The title of the novel was lifted from a passenger or goods vehicle inscription. Such inscription statements make philosophical and reading entertainment for the general road users. There are other such inscriptions: "No Condition is Permanent", "Safe Journey", "God's Case, No Appeal", "Money Has No Master", "The Young Shall Grow", "Shut Up The Mouth!, Are you God?" to mention just a few. "The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born" is an inscription on a new small bus. The title is an affirmation of the assessment and judgment of the present order that "Those who would save the nation have not yet come" (Nwosu, 1992:52).

The novel presents a grotesque and ugly picture of a society that is about to go into destruction because the political system is in a mess. Estella is in the neck of her husband for not joining the other people to be corrupt. The husband is now ashamed of himself but is not perturbed. Commenting on the moral and social inexactitudes in Ghanaian society as portrayed in the novel, Nwosu says that:

The society is rotten because the people have lost  
good moral values and even those who are still 'good'  
are beginning to feel odd and guilty because they are  
not corrupt like other (Nwosu, 1992:12).

Indeed, it is Armah's refusal to hold back known and available facts, but holds tight to his moral earnestness in writing the expose on his people that has prompted a lot of criticisms and one of such indictments came from Aidoo, who says that:

The author is contemptuous of us but the only consolation is that he, like the hero, is of us too. For the hero whom one in a haste... thinks self-righteous in his seeming incorruptibility is..... he whose mouth water had dropped on the bus seat at the beginning of the story... we worry too much about what made Ayi Kwei Armah write this exposé on his own people and this almost in a masochistic manner (Aidoo, 1969:17).

Nevertheless, Aidoo has also regarded the exposé as a pains-taking literary work when he says that:

What the man (Ayi) knows about his country reads like a case book on African corruption. It is such incredible filth and shit and stink that will make anybody puke..... and hold his nose with disgust. It is a mess in which everybody from the establishments to the most oppressed urban worker is caught irredeemably.....(Aidoo, 15).

Be that as it may, what makes a permanent impact is that the society which Armah has presented to us is real- a Ghanaian society at its post-independence years with a high level of materialism and condoning of vice as a legitimate means of amassing wealth. The core of the matter is clear and simple: that bribery and corruption are shown as a people's way of life, a thriving culture of its own – from the political class to the office clerk, the policeman to the gateman and even the bus conductor; everybody is involved.

By the time the novel starts, the reader is confronted with the powerful incidence where Armah uses the bus conductor to starkly dramatize high level of carnality and corrupt practices physically. It is "Passion Week" (the most difficult period of the month before salary is paid to workers). The bus conductor knows that it would be virtually impossible for him to make large profit out of his corrupt practices. The man gives him a Cedi (Ghanaian currency), and the bus conductor cheats the man by short-changing him, but The man does not observe that:

In the weak light inside the bus he peered closely at the marking in the note. Then a vague but persistent odour forced itself on him and he rolled the cedi up and deliberately, deeply smelled it.... It was a most unexpected smell for something so new to have; it was a very old smell, very strong and so very rotten that the stench itself of it came with a satisfying pleasure (Armah, 1968:3).

The passage above is overtly critical of the society Armah is presenting in the novel. The “unexpected old smell” associated with the new cedi is relative of the corruption that has gained root in the Ghanaian society even before independence. The conductor is satisfied that corruption (the unexpected old smell), which is symbolic, is still in force in spite of independence. Therefore, the conductor’s “satisfaction” becomes tinged with shame when he turns to see. The man staring at him. Overwhelmed by the fear of exposure and in a desperate bid to cover up his crime, the bus conductor bribes. The man with cigarettes but the staring eyes are still persisting. In utter shame and despondency, the conductor clears his throat and eats the phlegm instead of spitting it out and says “Brother... Brother, you care for jot?, you see we can share it (p.5.)

This first scene thus prepares the reader for the central theme of the novel-rot, waste, decay, putrefaction - which Armah portrays in the text. In fact, the society which the author highlights in the novel is the type where everyone is in a state of inertia, for corruption becomes an overwhelming issue. From the government set-up to private agencies like the lottery houses, an instance of which is glaringly shown through this dialogue between the man and the first passenger to arrive at the Booking Office of the Railway Corporation:

‘You look happ’ the Man said to him....  
‘....I won something in the lottery’ he said.  
‘..... how much? Asked the Man. ‘one hundred cedis’  
the messenger replied. ‘that is not much’ the Man laughed.....’  
I know of people who won more than five hundred  
cedis last year. They still haven’t got their money....I  
hope some official at the lottery place will take some  
of my hundred cedis as bribe and allow me to have  
the rest” the messenger’s smile was dead (PP. 18-19).

Armah uses the dialogue above to show the plight of the masses in a society where corruption becomes the order of the day. The Messenger just wins a lottery. Instead of being happy, he is afraid because corruption would not allow the officials at the lottery place to give him his money. He therefore, prepares to offer them money, because money is the winning factor.

In **The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born**, Armah shows that bribe is not secretly offered; it is done openly and with impunity. In such a moving prose, Armah brings to light the illegal dealing of Amankwa, the timber merchant:

You can see the clerk for me. The visitor looked suspiciously  
toward the door, then plunged his left arm underneath his  
Kente folds. When the arm emerged, it was clutching a dark  
brown leather wallet.... The fingers brought out two.... Green  
tens... “Take it” the visitor said, “one for you and one for him  
(P.30).



In a society where hunger, poverty and disease are commonplace occurrences, people like Koomson are driving around in expensive cars and dressing in well-tailored suits. Koomson, the one time dock labourer and The man's classmate makes a dramatic rise from poverty to his present position of affluence as a minister. His overt materialism is contrasted against the poverty-stricken background with which the man is associated. Armah shows that in a society that is corrupt, nothing changes. Even the physical appearance of every place in the society stirs up nauseating feeling because there are not, filth, putrefaction and excrement everywhere. The ideal man alights from the bus and observes that the dust-bins are overflowing with refuse. Lost in thought, he is nearly run down by a taxi cab. He also notices that sign posts only have the new names changed from Gold coast to Ghana, while the physical appearance remains unchanged since independence. The leaders, who should be partners in progress become tyrants with insatiable greed, wielding power so ruthlessly that the people become desperate and cynical for they thought independence would usher in the dawn of a new day. Passing a comment on Ghanaian society which Armah portrays in the novel as the land that is morally and spiritually dead, Aidoo says that Armah's;

.....condemnation is t total.... for we are not just the casualties of a colonial past. He makes it quite clear that we are dead. Not freshly dead. No, we've been dead a long time. Especially the politicians and pricking them with any sharp point releases such poisonous gas that further poisons the atmosphere symbolically, metaphorically and literally. The stinks.... is a part of the false 'gleam' of the post-independence scene (Aidoo. 1973:16).

Koomson represents the capitalist class, which mortgages its conscience for unaltruistic gains. Frazer, who assesses koomson from the moral stand point says that:

The moral outlook of the nation.... His mind perennially occupied with money-making schemes. He glorifies in the kudos of his office with no apparent sense of responsibility toward those to whom he owes... his vapid materialism act as an intense focus of the craving of a nation obsessively bent on the pillage of its newly acquired spoils.... Materially opulent. He is morally bankrupt, a complete contradiction of everything for which the party officially stands (Frazer, 1980)

At the centre of the novel, **The Beautyfull Ones Are Not Yet Born**, is the hero - **The man**, whose anonymity epitomizes the ordinary Ghanaian citizen. He is a man of unquestionable integrity. Although, he and his family are living in the most abject

poverty, and he constantly has to endure the silent accusation of his wife and children, and the open hostility of his mother-in-law, yet he resolutely refuses to accept bribes which is given and taken openly in Ghana as the only means to prosperity. The issue related here, is simple and the author articulates the drive for materialism through Oyo, the realistic down-to-earth wife of The Man. Oyo explains that:

... life was like a lot of roads; long roads, short roads,  
wide and narrow..... human beings are like so many  
people driving their cars on the roads. Those who  
wanted to get far had learnt to drive fast..... Accidents would  
happen, but the fear of accident never keeps men from  
driving, and Joe Koomson had to learned to drive  
(pp. 58-59).

From the explication above, it is clear that those who are successful in life are those who can drive in the fast lane and are never caught in an accident. Using the other characters like Zacharias Lagos and Abednego Yamoah, Armah also discusses the illegal means through which ordinary men acquire their wealth. Zacharias adopts the life style of a rich man and sells the company wood to circumvent his poor income:

Zacharias Lagos, living so long here that he had  
forgotten he was ever a Nigerian. Working for  
sawmill..... lived like a rich man. Every evening....  
brought home great lengths of healthy wood.... And  
he sold all of it (pp. 95-96).

On the other hand, Abednego Yamoah steals petrol but he is never caught because of his cleverness to substitute and innocent messenger who goes to jail in his stead:

Abednego Yamoah, still free..... Never to be caught.  
Selling government petrol for himself so cleverly.  
Some on else, a messenger, a cleaner to be jailed.  
Never Abednego (p.96).

Indeed, the different corrupt practices highlighted by Armah in the novel show the different dimensions which corruption has assumed in the Ghanaian society. The Man and the Teacher represent the intellectuals who, also are impotent to what is taking place around them. The Man, despite his honesty is so passive that what he stands for is overwhelmed by the wave of corruption that pervades his society. When he refuses the bribe which the timber merchant offers him, clerk accepts the bribe from him and Armah comments that:

It is so normal... every one you ask will say the Timber  
Merchant is right, the allocation clerk is right and you are

A fool and every one is right the way things are.... The foolish  
Ones are those who cannot live the way it is lived (p.108).

The Man is incensed by the verdict of foolishness on those who refuse to tow the path of corruption of illegal affluence, but he can not convincingly tell people why he refuses to collect bribe. His honesty is mistaken for folly because of his attitude and response to things that constantly impinge on his life? His wife can no longer contain his Luke-warm attitude to what happens around him. Oyo makes a mockery of him, compares him to his class mate, Koomson, who buys a boat because he is pushful. She calls him “Onward Christian Soldier” and “Chi chidodo” for the hatred he (Man) has for corruption, but eats the fish from Koomson’s boat haul. Chichidodo is a bird that hates excrement with all its soul, but feeds only on maggots inside the lavatory. The Man bears the wife’s accusation for eating the fish from the boat that Koomson acquires through corrupt means and of course, uses Oyo’s name in the purchase to avoid suspicion. When his wife tells him that the fish was bought from Koomson’s boat, the Man’s slow response is; “Please, don’t cook any more fish for me” (p. 153)

The Man’s final escape with Koomson through the latrine mouth thus, shatters the Christ-like image in which he presents himself all long. This attitude is the Man’s attempt to resist corruption; which is a futile effort. It is as futile as the effort of the City Council created to keep the city clean. The Man, like the programme of the City Council which is to serve as a “shinning example of cleanliness”, succumbs to the very thing he, all along has run away from. He aids and abets Koomson’s escape and also encourages Koomson to bribe the boat man:

Like a deadman, Koomson stuck his hand in his left  
pocket and pulls out his wallet.... The watchman maintains  
a bargaining silence. Look, contrey the boatman said, ‘fifty  
Cedis..... The boatman hesitated. But the Man turned to him  
(Koomson) and said ‘Give it to him if there is another one  
(pp. 175-176).

The hero’s friend, the Teacher, on the other hand gets totally disillusioned with the state of things that he retires into and ignoble solitude. We see these two characters as persons whose convictions and choice to an upright life in a society where corruption is rife, become outsiders in their society. They feel a sense of guilt since they are epitomes of failure in their role expectation.

Despair is revealed in the novel through the images of Rama Krishna, and Billy Kofi, who, though are not live characters. We hear about them in the Teacher’s monologue in chapter Six of the novel. They represent the disappointed man of Ghana who anticipates a smooth and an upright political system but what comes out is to further make them deplorable. They join the Teacher and Maanan to smoke “wee”. Maanan represents those Ghanaian women who suffer patiently and are betrayed and

disappointed at the end and so take to prostitution in order to eke out a living. When we later see her in the novel, she is very old and mad. She continues to search for something in the sand. This search is symbolic of the promises of the Black Nationalists which are never fulfilled and so she says: "They have mixed it all together! Everything! They have mixed everything. And how can I find it when they have mixed it all up with so many other things?" (p. 180).

Armah uses this passage to demonstrate that even the mad person is disillusioned and frustrated as a result of the betrayal which people go through while in their self government. Kofi Billy's despair culminates in suicide when he can no longer put up with suffering. The Teacher explains that:

It was a Sunday after that, that Kofi's body was found.  
He was hanging from a sheet. Everyone of us was uneasy  
after that because we knew there was no reason he should  
go alone like that, killing his own self. (PP. 75-76).

The military coup that takes place is to oust Nkrumah's corrupt regime. But the people are soon disappointed as the new leaders are only "politicians in uniform" The case of the police taking a bribe on a road block while the coup is taking place shows that nothing changes:

The policeman looked and with pensive dignity at the licence  
folder and at what was inside it. With his left hand he extracted  
the money, rolling it up dexterously into an easy little ball hidden  
in his palm (p. 182).

In all, **The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born** is a novel which deals with post-independent Ghana, a satirical attack on the politicians of those early years of independence. Consequent upon the betrayal and exploitation of self by self, Armah thought it worthwhile to rip the Ghanaian society and empty the baskets of ashes through the smoking barrels of the gun in his novel. Therefore, the various aspects of corruption shown in the novel, **The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born**, and Armah's obsession in the exposé of such readily informs the reader the extent to which Armah is successful by "standing apart from the society and trying to help it create its own morals and aesthetic values which will allow it (society) to realize the potentials in itself" (Jones, 1973:117)

### **A Socio-linguistic Survey of the Literary Techniques**

#### **The Title of the Novel**

Armah's choice of title for the novel derives from the central theme of the story-decay and corruption that characterize the Ghanaian society and indeed, other African societies. The title is an affirmation that only the ugly ones have born so far and are waxing strong in their corrupt filth. The novel has fifteen chapters and apart from

chapter six where the Teacher's monologue is narrated and which is exceptionally long, all other chapters are of average length

### **The Narrative Techniques**

The narrative technique employed by Armah is predominantly the third person narrative point of view, where the characters are referred to by name, such as the Man, the Teacher, Koomson, etc. Elsewhere in the novel, the story adopts the first person narrative process, especially in chapter six the Teacher's monologue. The author also uses the authorial voice to pass some judgment, like on page 145, where he speaks directly, not using the characters:

Like a sidelong refrain that phrases jump to mind,  
a resemblance of part conversations with Man who  
had eventually come to the end of their resistance....  
what indeed, would anybody care (p. 145).

### **The Use of Dialogue**

Dialogue is the vehicle for showing what each character feels or thinks about the society in the light of the rot and decay in it. Monologue is also one of the narrative devices to provide for only one person to speak. Chapter six typifies these techniques where only the Teacher speaks.

### **The Irony**

Irony becomes a useful weapon for Armah to unfold his criticism of some situations, events and people. For instance, it is an irony that the Man was rather asleep while the bus conductor thought the Man was watching him commit his crime. Again, what could be more ironical and satirical than the fact that Koomson had to escape through the hole of the very toilet (pail system) which he earlier on refused to use during his visit to the Man despite the fact that he was hard pressed. It is also an irony that with the jubilation that followed the military takeover of government in Ghana, corruption still continues unabated. Estella now prefers European drinks to African-made ones. She frequently play-acts life's false values by constantly touching an imaginary curl on her wigs like a white lady. It is a self-mockery that black leaders love to live like the white in a black society.

### **The Use of Flash Back**

Flash back is another glaring device which Armah uses in order to enliven the stories of Kofi Billy as well as that of Manaan in the Teacher's monologue. The qualities of immediate or real present (now) have been brought into the stories although the happened in the past.

### **The Use of Allusion**

Armah does not fail to apply allusions for the purpose of effect and emphasis. He uses two types of allusion-Biblical and from other books. A few examples of this device are the references to 'onward Christian soldier', 'The first shall be the last', 'passion week', 'plato's Republic' and 'Gibran [prophet]' etc.

Conscious of the fact that this novel dwells on a serious issue- decay, corruption, filth, excreta, rot, putrefaction- all which attack mostly the sense of sight and smell, Armah finds time to fit in humorous situation, at least to give the reader a comic relief. He uses this technique to ameliorate the assault which these nauseating symbols mete out on the reader. Koomson's story of the drunk Attorney General who faints and the humorous posture of Koomson when he first pushes his head in into the hole of the pail toilet before dragging his remaining body into it while escaping are fine offers of comic relief.

### **The Language Device**

The language in Armah's novel is provoking and irritating in describing the bodily functions. He uses very coarse language and carefully selects words [diction] that point to events or aspects of corruption. He highlights such words as spittle, phlegm, putrefaction, rot, filth, decay and excreta deliberately selected to describe the central symbols of his theme. These words force the reader to feel disgust. It is disgusting and nauseating as the woman, for example, uses her mouth to suck out phlegm from her child's nostril and to arouse our indignation against the authorities for allowing her to languish in poverty, squalor and ignorance while they fatten themselves up on their country's riches.

Armah also modulates the language in the novel to suit the character and event. The Teacher and the Man use the language of the enlightened people. Koomson and Estella speak the language of politics and wealth and their language portrays corruption. The clerks at the Railway station office speak substandard and self-absorbing English.

### **Imagery**

There are images and analogies in the novel. The dominant images are those of gleams, water, speed, sleep, moving corpses, rot, filth, refuse, latrines, driving, darkness, corruption, excreta, etc. the banister is an object of rot, decay and filth. It combines with the dustbin and toilet to highlight the rottenness of the society. The image of the chichidoo bird which hates excrement with all its soul but feeds on maggots that grow out of it suggest pretence by even those assumed to be clean.

Further, the author uses the images of light and darkness suggested in Plato's cave myth to inform that the man and the teacher cannot change the situation. Again, the reference to Rama Krishna also shows that people cannot escape from corruption no matter how hard they try to avoid it.

### **Symbolism**

Symbolically, the hero of the novel that is, the Man represents everyman, the ordinary, suffering citizen of Ghana. Maanan, Oyo and her mother represent those who push their relations into corruption. Koomson symbolizes those who thrive in confusion and corruption. He is a representation of those men who procure riches and wealth by arts of corruption enhanced by their success in politics. Ghana is symbolic of all the sufferings in African nations while filth and corruption struggle side by side. It is a land that is physically and spiritually dead and the people living in it are symbols of walking corpses, for they are morally and spiritually dead.

The bus itself is symbolic of the Ghanaian society. What happens in the bus is a replica of what happens in the country as a whole. The bus therefore, like the country is in a state of decay. Its pieces are only held together by rust. The passengers represent the ordinary citizens while the driver and the conductor are epitomes of the authority conniving to defraud, exploit and subjugate the citizens and if caught, are ready to bribe authorities into silence.

The latrines are symbols of the body politics of Ghana. Just as the toilets stink of excrement, the body politics of Ghana has decayed and stinks with corruption. This is because as each user of the toilet leaves filth on the walls of the latrine, each politician defrauds the nation.

Another symbolic act is brought to light when the Man helps Koomson to escape and then he [Man] jumps into the sea and swims across. This act shows that the Man is cleansing himself from the filth and guilt of his association with the corrupt Koomson.

A drastic disease, they say, needs a drastic cure. Therefore, in the face of such corruption, vice and the suffering of the people, there is definitely the need to tell it all as a first-aid step toward an effective cure. Armah's realistic posture offends in order to correct.

### **Summary and Conclusion**

It is observed that Armah has fulfilled a greater part of his role as a commentator on social problems. His effort in handling the issue of corruption in contemporary Africa in general and Ghana in particular is quite commendable. There is the Armah's biting satire on the Ghanaian experience as vividly portrayed in the novel. It is on the basis of this involvement in the issue of contemporary Ghana and Africa that ranks this novel very high in African literature. As Adams observes:

The more a book represent important sentiments, the higher is its place in literature; for it is by representing the mode of being of a whole nation and a whole age, that a writer rallies around him sympathizers of an entire age and entire nation (Adams, 1971:614).

Armah has achieved a great success in his literary trip across the main stream of the Ghana's post-colonial experience by carefully capturing the mess made of the socio-political and economic destiny of Ghana in the novel. The author has indirectly made a prediction which a great many readers, on the one hand, and indeed, Ghanaians on the second hand come to realize when the only positive action that follows the coup is the ban on politics, destructions of political structures and the arrest and detention of corrupt politicians. In addition, critics' opinions on the work were also painstakingly sorted out and carefully accounted for. From the foregoing, it can be concluded that this literary work has presented a realistic portrayal of the posture of the corrupt Ghanaian society by reason of generalization and therefore remains the most thorough-going expose of corruption in African literary fiction and a literary experience which will not be deleted from the sands of time and the memory of generations yet unborn.

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