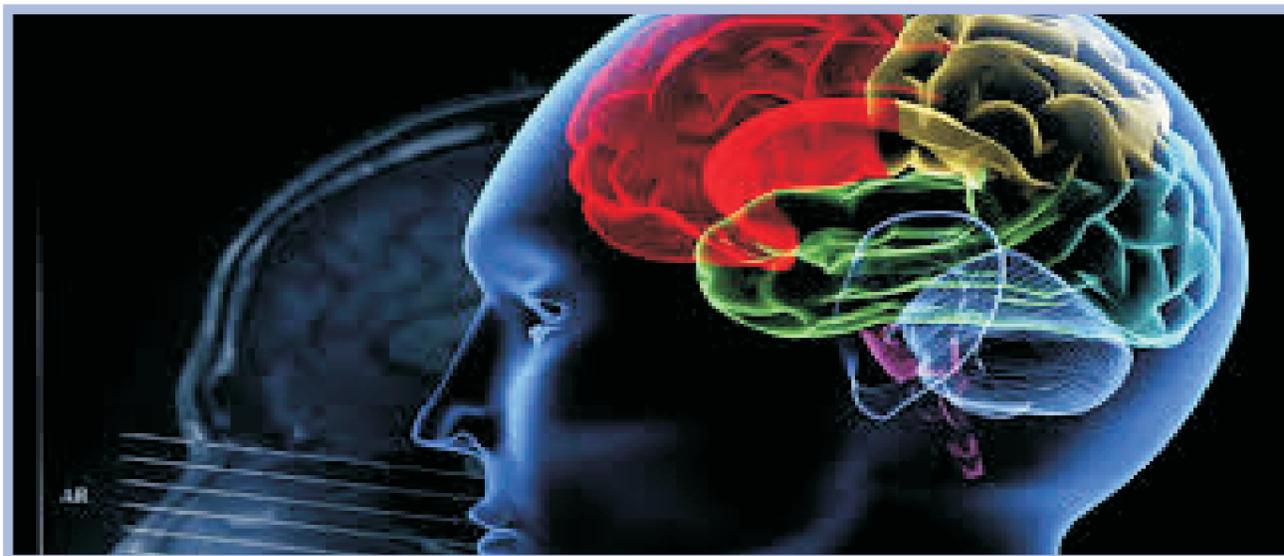
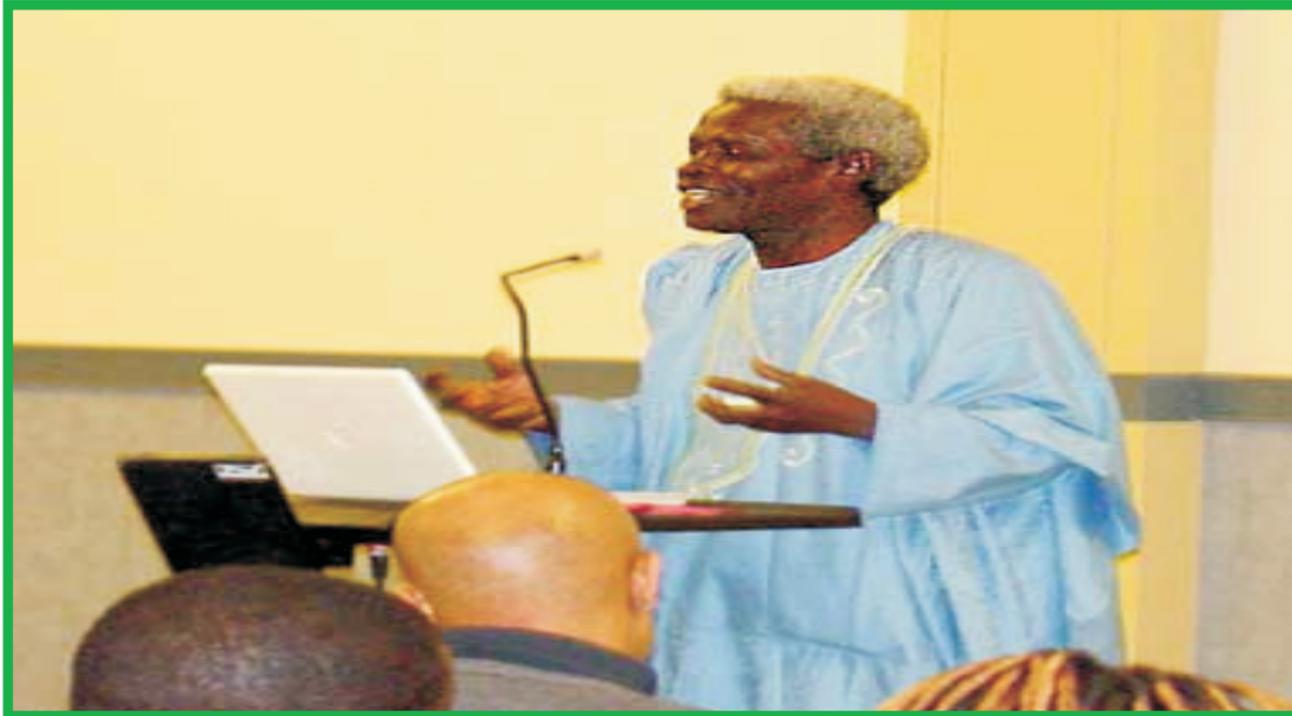


ARMAH, A BIRGHT STAR OF DARK WORLD



Abstract:-

Ayi Kwei Armah is considered as one of the leading fictional voices of Africa. His works typically explore the nuances of postcolonial Africa and focus on African existential conditions. Though Armah's vision is one of a unified Africa, he writes vehemently of the psychological effect of colonialism on the people of contemporary Ghana and Africa. His works have met with mixed critical reaction, but many reviewers laud his stylistic innovations.

Keywords:

Ayi Kwei Armah, leading fictional voices, psychological, Ghanaian novelist.



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INTRODUCTION

Armah is a Ghanaian novelist and poet, known for his visionary symbolism, poetic energy and the extremely high moral integrity of his political vision. His first three novels were hailed as modernistic prose, while his next two challenged the Euro-centric notions of history. Armah has lived and worked in the different cultural zones of Africa. Much of Armah's earlier work deals with the betrayed ideals of Ghanaian nationalism and Nkrumahist socialism.

Ayi Kwei Armah was born in 1939 to Fante-speaking parents in the port city of Takoradi, Ghana. He left Ghana in 1959 to attend the Groton School in Groton, M.A, afterwards, he attended Harvard. Much of his work deals with the problems of post-colonial Ghana.

Armah is a scholar, a critic, a university professor, essayist, poet and short story writer, but his reputation derives from his novels. He has written and published six novels: *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* (1968), an unflinching expose of government corruption; *Fragments* (1970), in which he deploys the auto-biographical mode to expose and lament the giddy suffocation of a post-colonial African society (represented by Ghana); *Why Are We So Blest?* (1972), which, while excoriating post-colonial African leadership for its privileging of European culture, encapsulates a vision of the contemporary world; *Two Thousand Seasons* (1973), which Wole Soyinka calls a 'visionary reconstruction' of the African past; *The Healers* (1978), a fictional re-creation of Akan society; and *Osiris Rising* (1995), which borrows its narrative structure from the Isis-Osiris myth cycle to tell a story of love, death, and the promise of creative renewal in modern Africa.

In an essentially autobiographical article, 'One Writer's Education' (West Africa, August 1985), Armah identifies himself not simply as an Akan, an Ewe, a Ghanaian, and a West African, but 'most significantly as an African'. His concern to work for change in Africa has made him perhaps not only the most controversial but also the most polemical African writer. In Armah's Africa, revolutionaries are the only creators, an ideological position that has elicited the wrath of both African and foreign critics. But although those critics have taken him to task for his position on race, it is pertinent that *The Beautiful Ones* and *Fragments* lambast not whites but the corrupt African leadership. Like his compatriot Ama Ata Aidoo, he sees Africa as a 'community without unity' and his writing particularly in *Two Thousand Seasons* stridently insists on a community with unity. Critics have also commented on the Western influences on Armah's thought and style. Although such influences are undeniable, his concerns in all his work are African, and his art, like that of many committed artists, demonstrates a synthesis between style and subject matter.

Armah's first three novels are often grouped together in critical commentary. They each are heavily symbolic representations of life in contemporary Africa. The first, *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, tells the story of a simple railway clerk during the regime of Kwame Nkrumah. The protagonist, known only as The Man acts as a representation of the common man Nkrumah has promised to represent. The novel dramatizes the conflict between hope for change and the betrayal of that hope by the nation's leaders and serves as a stinging indictment of the Nkrumah regime. Armah's first and best known novel, *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* (1968), describes the life of an unnamed rail worker who is pressured by his family and fellow workers to accept bribes and involve himself in corrupt activities in order to provide his family with material goods. The other workers who accept bribes are able to live a prosperous life, while he and his family live from paycheck to paycheck as a result of his honesty. At times he perceives himself as a moral failure for not providing his family with the money which would allow them to have the beautiful things that they seek. His honesty also makes him a social misfit, and he is a man who is truly alone. The book is filled with images of birth, decay and death, most notably in the form of a manchild who goes through the entire life cycle in seven years. This manchild is a metaphor for post-independence Ghana.

Fragments (1970), recounts the story of Baako, who returns to Ghana after studying in New York for five years. His family expects him to flaunt his Western education to gain prestige and wealth for the family. Baako, however, rejects what he sees as the corrupt values of the new Africa and only wishes to live a quiet life. In the end, Baako becomes so alienated he undergoes a breakdown and ends up in an asylum. His second, more autobiographical, novel *Fragments* (1971), also deals with the subject of materialism in contemporary Ghana. In it, the main character Baako is a "been to," meaning that he has been to the United States and received his education there. As a result of this privilege, he is expected to return to his family bearing the monetary gifts which this status yields in Ghana. As in his first novel, these material goods are bought with graft and corruption, which impoverishes the country's infrastructure. The author contrasts the decadence and materialism of those who see Baako as a cash cow with the philosophy of his blind grandmother, Naana, whose concerns are not of this earth.

Why Are We So Blest? (1972), tells the story of Modin Dofu, an African student studying in the United States who decides to return to Africa after becoming disillusioned with his experience with Western education. He brings his white lover Aimee Reitch, who acts as a representation of the white race in the novel. The return to Africa proves disastrous when the conflict between his rejection of Western values and his involvement with Aimee eventually destroys him. The novel is complex in structure, abandoning the linear progression of Armah's previous works. The emphasis of Armah's later novels is to clearly focus on the idea of returning to traditional African culture as a model for the future.

Why Are We So Blest? is a more fragmented novel than *Fragments*, jumping between three

narrators with no obvious narrative line, though we eventually discover that Solo, a failed revolutionary, is using the notebooks of Aimee a white American, and Modin, a Ghanaian, intercut with his own text. The savage irony of the title is sustained throughout the novel, which lacks the cynical comedy of the two previous works and is much more overt in its distortion of reality. All the white women in the novel prey on the black men: Modin, a student who drops out of Harvard to go to Laccaryville in North Africa as a would-be revolutionary, is used primarily by Aimee, who epitomizes the sexual sickness of all white women. She is frigid when she meets Modin, and uses him as an object to stimulate her sexual fantasies of intercourse with a black servant. Modin's attempt to liberate her into a fuller sensitivity destroys him. The horrific scene, in which Aimee is raped and Modin castrated by white men, fully enacts Aimee's fantasy. She is sexually aroused and kisses Modin's bleeding penis, asking him to say that he loves her. Solo sees Modin as an African who does not know "how deep the destruction has eaten into himself, hoping to achieve a healing juncture with his destroyed people."

Two Thousand Seasons (1973) covers one thousand years of African history and approaches epic proportions in its compressed meanings, descriptions of battles, and use of folk mythology. Armah condemns the Arab "predators" and "destroyers" and calls for the reclamation of Africa's traditional values.

The Healers (1978) is a fictionalized account of the fall of the Ashanti empire to the British. The novel dramatizes the struggle for African unity. The colonial invaders attempt to manipulate Africa's divisiveness while the healers in the novel attempt to strengthen Africa through inspiration and unity. Later works, such as *Two Thousand Seasons* (1973) and *The Healers* (1978), have a more obviously African focus, and have been characterized by some Western critics as inferior to his early novels. However, they have received a better reception from African critics.

Armah's first three novels are generally praised for their artistry. S.Nyamfukudza calls them "intricate in form and distinguished by a highly wrought prose style using violent imagery." While lauding Armah for his artistry and innovation, however, critics often label him a pessimist who offers little hope for the future. Greater critical understanding and acceptance of his agenda were realized with the publication of *Two Thousand Seasons* and *The Healers*, although his detractors continued to fault his fictional portrayals of a new socio-political order in Africa as vague and unrealistic. Some reviewers complain of Armah's change in tone in later works, and accuse him of being too idealistic to inspire real change. A few reviewers also note a lack of detail in his vision for Africa's future. Adewale Maja-Pearce said "Armah is a visionary writer in the strict sense. This much at least must be conceded, even if the details of what is effectively promoted as a blueprint for a social and political arrangement are far too vague and simplistic to be convincing at any but the most hopeful level." Some critics contend that Armah presents racist, simplistic views in his works when he portrays all that is black as good, and all that is white as evil and corrupt. Despite these criticisms, Armah is widely appreciated for the strength of his convictions and his desire to promote proper reconstruction of African culture.

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