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### **Abstract**

Armah's second and third novels, *Fragments* and *Why Are We So Blest?*, are essentially statements about the alienation of the educated elite from the people, and the sense of dissociation and personal dissolution which this induces in those of the elite who feel that their place is among the people. *Fragments* and *Why Are We So Blest?* are both strongly influenced by Fanon's study of the psychology of the African bourgeoisie and of the process by which the colonial power attracts the aspirations of the bourgeois.~

## The Human and the Divine: *Fragments* and *Why Are We So Blest?*

Armah's second and third novels, *Fragments*<sup>1</sup> and *Why Are We So Blest?*,<sup>2</sup> are essentially statements about the alienation of the educated élite from the people, and the sense of dissociation and personal dissolution which this induces in those of the élite who feel that their place is among the people. *Fragments* and *Why Are We So Blest?* are both strongly influenced by Fanon's study of the psychology of the African bourgeoisie and of the process by which the colonial power attracts the aspirations of the bourgeois.<sup>3</sup> Both novels are studies of men who have recognized the fatal nature of the processes acting upon them, but been unable to escape the psychological dissolution which comes with their realization of the futility of any gesture in another direction. *Why Are We So Blest?* goes further, to explore the place of the intellectual in the African revolution, and reaches a somewhat ambiguous conclusion.

Armah's first novel, *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*,<sup>4</sup> had also examined the post-colonial situation in Africa, and it has been noted that the imagery of *The Beautiful Ones* is reminiscent of turns of phrase found in the political writing of Fanon.<sup>5</sup> Certainly, Armah's treatment of the black/white men, the members of the new black élite who ape their former colonial masters, resembles Fanon's observations of the behaviour of the colonized black bourgeoisie.

*Fragments* picks up many of the ideas of *The Beautiful Ones*, and some of the images in which these ideas are expressed are the same.<sup>6</sup> As in *The Beautiful Ones*, the novel focuses on a man's refusal to tread the dishonourable path which would give his family the material things they desire, and again his refusal seems to make him abnormal in the eyes of others and even to himself. In the second novel, *Fragments*, Baako's assumption of guilt for his refusal to behave in the normal, acquisitive way leads to a mental breakdown when he is unable to resolve the conflict between his own expectations and those of his family.

Far more than in *The Beautiful Ones*, however, Armah develops in *Fragments* the dichotomy between the material world and the spiritual one. The central images of the novel, the cargo cult and the mame water, involve the idea of a communication between the mundane and the divine realms. So too in *Why Are We So Blest?* the central image from which the novel draws its title is of a dividing line between human and divine. Those who cross it are the 'Blest' of the title; those who fail to do so are Fanon's 'Damnés de la terre'. Those elevated to the status of the Blest are acclaimed as heroes, but they are alienated from the wretched, perhaps permanently.

In *The Beautiful Ones*, life was perceived as an unending state of entrapment; the cycle of birth and death was represented as a physical cycle occurring only for objects in the material world. In *Fragments* it is the human essence which enters upon the cycle of life, and death is merely a stage on the journey, welcomed by the dying as being itself a birth into a spirit existence. The new emphasis on the spiritual in *Fragments* and the novels which follow it is the major difference between the later novels and *The Beautiful Ones*.

In *Fragments*, there is hope that Baako's acceptance of the false values of his family may be countered by the arguments of his friends. The novel is not wholly pessimistic, and the fact that the closing words are a reaffirmation of the cyclic nature of spiritual life does much to counter the despair of the central character. In *Why Are We So Blest?* the note of despair dominates the last half of the novel, and its pessimistic narrator-editor allows it to end with the callously naïve voice, a voice 'like a retarded child' (p. 267), of the woman who has helped to destroy the hopes and the life of the central character, Modin. In this novel there is no sense of a spiritual life cycle continuing after death; instead the death of the spirit precedes that of the body. If there is any hope in the novel it lies in the early pages, which set up the myth of Prometheus' defection from Olympus to aid man as a model for Modin to follow, but the myth is concluded in the novel not with a Prometheus unbound but with Modin's death.

*Fragments* is the story of the return of a been-to to his home in Ghana and his reluctance to conform to his family's expectations of him. Baako's mother, sister and acquaintances are disappointed when he does not return from the United States laden with the wealth of the West. Baako, who has had a nervous breakdown overseas, finds a true friend and lover in his psychiatrist, Juana, a Puerto Rican who has come to Africa in search of a struggle to share in. His work as a scriptwriter is

rejected and ignored, and when Juana goes home on leave he is overcome with guilt at having disappointed his family and has a second breakdown. In the last section of the novel, related in flashbacks during the tale of his breakdown, we learn that his mother has been unable to build her big new house because he has not returned wealthy, and that his sister's greed for money has contributed to the death of her newborn baby. At the end of the novel it seems that Juana will be able to rescue Baako from the asylum and relieve him of his crazy guilt, with the help of his former teacher.

The novel is framed by chapters in which Baako's grandmother, Naana, reflects on 'the circular way' (p. 5), as she calls it. In the first chapter she is concerned with the completion of a ritual circle of events and observances which will ensure the return of the departing son. She recognizes Baako's departure as a kind of death, but in the circular way death leads to rebirth. In the last chapter, while she herself is moving gladly towards death, she is thinking of the hurt inflicted on her grandson Baako, and on the newborn great-grandchild who died, by those too eager for power and goods. Their materialistic vision has resulted in a loss of connection with the spirit world which can only be deleterious to those modern Ghanaians who are losing their way and misdirecting their journey. Naana's framing vision provides a sane view of the world against which we can measure Baako's vision as he moves towards the insanity of believing that he is wrong and the people who surround him are right. Where Naana and Baako concur in dissenting from the common view we can be reasonably sure that their vision is more valid than that of Baako's demanding relatives. *Why Are We So Blest?* also contains two important points of view: those of Solo and Modin; but in this novel Solo's pessimism and 'sense of terminus' (p. 113) prevails over Modin's early hopes.

Naana is a vital figure in *Fragments*. It is her emphasis on the spiritual which changes the focus of the novel from the mundane and temporal despair of *The Beautiful Ones* to a positive affirmation of a cyclic world. Much of the meaning of the novel rests on our appreciation of cyclic relationships.<sup>7</sup> Through Naana we see that the cycle of night and day can be upset by modern technology, with street lamps replacing the sun (p. 14), and that the modern set of priorities which emphasizes material goods can interfere even in the cycle of life and death — for the death of Naana's great-grandchild is a result of the premature ceremony of outdoor-ing (pp. 283-4) which threw it, 'like forced seed', into the world before the proper day in order to catch the guests with money in their

pockets.

Baako's journey to the United States was a cycle. It is seen in different terms by Baako and by Naana. For Naana, his departure is a death which will lead to a rebirth. For Baako, too, his departure from Ghana is like a death, but his return is the ghostly return of a spirit who should bear gifts to the living, but who in Baako's case comes empty-handed.

The reaction of Baako's relatives when he arrives home without so much as a car to show for his years in the United States makes him think about his own situation in metaphorical terms, and he comes to see in it a parallel to the Melanesian cargo cult. This cult arose out of brief European trading contact with a people who conceived of the spirits of the dead as white. When the source of goods, the white trader (or in Baako's Ghanaian context the colonial power) withdrew, it was identified with the spirit world, and the cargo cult arose. In its best known form it is a millennial cult, and rests on a belief that on some future day the spirits of the dead will return in an aeroplane, bearing wonderful gifts from the spirit world for the living.<sup>8</sup> Armah uses this deification of the source of worldly goods after their withdrawal as a metaphor for the colonial experience in Africa. In the post-colonial world all things Western are exalted; the man who has been to Britain or the United States has a special status and brings with him the magical gifts which fulfil the dreams of those left behind. In his confusion Baako comes to believe that in returning from this magical ghost world without the appropriate treasures<sup>9</sup> he has not only failed to fulfil the anticipations of his family but has broken the proper cycle of events. To him it seems that the modern 'cargo cult' of Ghana is validated by the African traditions of seeking the mediation of an ancestor when requesting the favour of a god. To have failed as a cargo bearer comes to seem a genuine failure of vocation. From this conception of what his proper role ought to have been spring the guilt and distress which lead to his nervous breakdown.

Naana recalls a vision of Baako's departure for the United States which is similar in interesting respects to his own later articulation of the cargo expectations:

I closed my eyes against the night that had disappeared outside, and I saw Baako roaming in unknown, forbidden places, just born here again after a departure and a death somewhere. He had arrived from beneath the horizon and standing in a large place that was open and filled with many winds, he was lonely. But suddenly he was not alone, but walking one among many people. All the people were white people all knowing only how to speak the white people's languages. Always, after saying anything, however small or large, they shook their white heads solemnly, as if they

were the ones gone before. Some touched hands, slowly. But Baako walked among them neither touched nor seen, like a ghost in an overturned world in which all human flesh was white. And some of the people bore in their arms things of a beauty so great that I thought then in my soul this was the way the spirit land must be. (p. 15)

This pre-vision of a world of white ghosts bearing beautiful objects suggests Baako's use of the cargo cult parallel much later in the novel.

But Naana's vision of Baako's return is not that he has come back as a ghost. Rather she sees him as a child reborn, a 'new one' (p. 4), entering afresh on the cycle of life, and asking the questions before which her weak spirit fails. Hers is the more positive interpretation and the one which ultimately prevails, since it is her thoughts which end the novel.

Baako's pessimistic view is a way of describing the expectations of others. Baako's relatives, once their fear that he might remain in the United States for ever has been allayed, expect his return to conform to the pattern of other such returns. He will bring with him at least one car, and other shiny trinkets from the ghost world. To return, as Baako does, without tangible proofs of his been-to status, is unheard of. Baako's perception of this attitude as a cargo cult mentality is valid; his error lies in deciding that their assumptions are correct.

The gifts which Baako bears with him when he returns to Ghana are not material ones. The only tangible signs of his status are his certificates and diplomas, which prove to be totally valueless when he tries to get a job. His training is ignored, and his personal gift of creative vision is rejected by the bureaucrats who run Ghanavision, where his former teacher has found him a job. The relatives want material gifts, not gifts of vision, nor even certificates of qualification. Yet these are the gifts which Baako brings from overseas; and at the end of the novel his former teacher is trying to make him understand that what he has offered his people is important, although they have rejected it. Baako's guilt at his inability to provide what his family wanted can only be countered by the realization that he has fulfilled the cycle by bringing spiritual gifts from his experience of the ghost world, even if these are not appreciated by the earthbound ones to whom he has brought them.<sup>10</sup>

The image of the cargo cult is not the only one in the novel which involves the idea of contact between the mortal and the non-mortal worlds. Baako's account of himself as a ghost returning with gifts is echoed in his sister's account of Naana's teaching about the nature of man:

'You men are not supposed to be concerned with these things of the earth ... Has Naana never told you what a man is? ... Man is pure spirit and should be free and untouched, and it is only for a little while that he comes down to live in a body borrowed from us women, the females of the race, living trapped like sunlight that goes into a house through a window or into the earth through a hole ... So men should be spirits, ghosts, according to Naana.' (p. 124)

Men are ghostly by nature; it is women who provide them with their earthly bodies, and women who provide them with their mundane desires for material wealth. Women have the power either to save or to destroy (p. 257).

Set against the materialistic model of contact between mortal and non-mortal provided by the cargo cult, with its gift-bearing ghosts passing between the dead and the living, is the idea of the mame water. In the terms in which Baako explains the legend to Juana, the psychiatrist who becomes his friend and lover, the mame water is a goddess who comes from the sea at long intervals to meet her lover, a musician. The musician, knowing he must one day lose her entirely, is torn by the pain of love and longing, and from this pain produces his richest music.

Both the cargo cult and the mame water are images of a kind of gift passing from one world to another, but in the former the gifts and the passage between worlds are conceived of in mundane and material terms, while in the latter they are spiritual: gifts of vision and the power to express this vision. In the novel, Baako has received these gifts during his training in the United States, but his family rejects such spiritual offerings.

To a certain limited extent Juana herself takes over the role of the mame water. Juana comes from that ghostly land across the sea. Her affair with Baako begins by the sea (they even make love in the sea), and he feels for her an intense emotion 'like a growing happiness' (p. 175) which he tries to take hold of. It is to her that he explains the myth of the mame water which is a metaphor for the painful nature of his artistic inspiration.<sup>11</sup> During her absence overseas he has his second nervous breakdown. Her presence has been an assurance to him that he is not alone, and in her absence he has no confidant or sympathizer except his teacher. She relates to the spiritual part of him, and in her absence he becomes subject to the guilt which is brought on by his failure to perform the mundane functions expected of him by the earthbound women of his family.

The mame water myth is the spiritual equivalent of the materialistic cargo cult mentality, and is thus a more precise reflection of Baako's real

position than the cargo idea which leads him into self-destructive feelings of guilt. The aeroplane from the ghost world and the tangible gifts of the cargo-bearers are the warped, misunderstood notions of greedy people. The spiritual reality is expressed in Naana's sense of Baako's return as a rebirth in which, like the baby introduced to the world of the living too soon, he is at hazard, and in the mame water myth. As Baako says, the myths are good (p. 172). Only their use is degenerate. The transformation by a Ghanaian poet of the legend of the mame water and her gift of vision into a story of the bringing of electricity reflects in miniature the kind of distorted interpretation of which Baako becomes the victim. His studies overseas have given him the power to express his expanded vision<sup>12</sup> as he tries to do through his film scripts. But in the estimation of the world his vision is irrelevant and his gifts intangible and therefore valueless. When he accepts the judgement of the world his guilt and the mental strain caused by his attempt to deny his own way of seeing bring on his mental collapse. That he is in fact insane, not sanely visionary, at this point is made clear by his insistence on his own fault and the correctness of the cargo mentality. This is insanity. It is for Juana and his former teacher to help him regain his real spiritual vision and reject the worldly view.

Baako's film scripts reflect a true vision. In the United States he attained the expanded consciousness which separates him from other been-tos. It is his experience of the ghost world across the sea which is the source of his artistic inspiration, which proceeds from the clarity of his new expanded vision. Like Modin in *Why Are We So Blest?*, Baako has found that separation from his people enables him to see them more clearly. Like Solo and Modin he suffers for his knowledge, but Armah seems to be using the myth of the mame water to suggest that Baako's experiences overseas have been beneficial to him. Although his situation is one of acute alienation from the people at home, although he briefly accepts the false aspirations of the colonized bourgeoisie as correct, although his personal distress brings on a psychological dissolution, Baako is nevertheless a man who has been granted vision. He is an artist; and it seems that this, though it causes him great pain, saves him from being utterly condemned. If Juana can save him he may even live to write the truth again.

*Why Are We So Blest?* goes even further than *Fragments* in its study of the futility of effort and its picture of the African intellectual as radically, intolerably and inescapably alienated from the people. Yet still, I would suggest, the metaphor on which the novel is based suggests that to

have vision is worth something, that to make the futile gesture is better than not to make it.

In *Why Are We So Blest?* the United States, now not simply a ghostly world but the Land of the Blest,<sup>13</sup> is a destructive world. Yet only by passing from the world of the wretched to the world of the blest does the hero gain the vision which enables him to choose to cross back again and rejoin the wretched. Whether, having separated himself from his people, he *can* again rejoin them is the question raised by the novel. But it appears that however pessimistic Armah may be about the role of the intellectual in Africa, the man who has joined the blest but attempts to rejoin his people has a vision which is valuable, and which can never be attained by those who have never escaped their wretchedness.

*Why Are We So Blest?* explores the fate of an African intellectual, Modin Dofu, who realizes that the West is destroying him and returns to Africa in search of an opportunity to make a revolutionary commitment to the people from whom he has been estranged. He is accompanied by his white American girlfriend, Aimée Reitsch, whose predatory nature ensures that the destruction begun by the impersonal West is completed by her personal agency, first through the soul-destroying nature of her love, and finally when Modin is sexually tortured and left to die in the desert by a group of white men. This ill-assorted pair of lovers is observed by Solo Nkonam, an intellectual and writer who has already tried to regain his sense of identity with the people by involvement in the 'Congherian' revolution and failed.

Every thought, every utterance, every relationship in the novel is presented only as evidence for the operation of the polar opposites, Blest and Damned, on those who are moving between them.

The image of Blest and Damned is Modin's. It is he who reads a complacent newspaper editorial written for the Fourth of July and entitled 'Why Are We So Blest?' in which the author congratulates Americans on being among the blest (pp. 98-9). The terms in which the editorial is couched have a bearing on the metaphor which Modin has already been using to distinguish his own position: that of one who has attained a lonely eminence from which he can see farther than can the mass of people, but which denies him their companionship. The editorial extends this metaphor to apply to the separation between the sacred and the profane, and in the discussion which follows Mike the Fascist (the student who has shown Modin the editorial) tells Modin that the eminence which he has attained above his people is equivalent to his having crossed from the profane world to the sacred one.

Modin is already acutely aware of his own separation from his people. The educational system which selects and promotes progressively fewer people has finally selected him as the only one on a scholarship to Harvard. Modin's metaphor for the loneliness and spiritual dislocation which this separation causes is similar to Solo's. Solo sees it in terms of climbing a hill, from which one can see humanity below as a pattern, not as a collection of suffering individuals (p. 47). Modin sees it as a movement towards the 'central heights' (p. 33), that 'lonely eminence'.<sup>14</sup> Once he has been exposed to the Thanksgiving Day editorial this idea of an estranging, alienating distance between the educated African and his people is converted into a new dimension, the distance between lowly humanity and the demi-divinity of the Blest. The writer of the editorial sees the United States as another Eden. The crucial factor which makes the American Way paradisaical is its separation from the rest of the suffering world. The editorial suggests: 'The myth of Paradise finds its full meaning here in the New World. Paradise is a state of grace, and grace is space — the distance that separates the holy from the merely human, the sacred from the profane, separates and protects' (p. 98). That separation which for Solo leads to a shameful ability to forget the pain of the masses below the hill, and which for Modin is itself a painful alienation and an agonizing loneliness, is for the complacent American a matter for self-congratulation.

Mike the Fascist will not allow Modin to reject the premises of the article. When Modin protests, Mike retorts by pointing out that Modin himself has attained the Olympian heights of the system. He has made the crossing from the outer darkness of the mortal, non-American world to the divine realms of the Ivy League élite. Mike says, 'In the Greek tradition you'd be a crossover. One of those who rise from the plains to live on Olympus. A hero. Part man, part god. Therefore more interesting than either' (p. 101). In this image the lonely mountains on which Solo and Modin stand have become sacred mountains, and the separation from the world below is a complete change of existence, from mortal to divine. The heroic transition from mortality to divinity is seen by all the mortals below as a desirable change; only to reluctant heroes like Modin does it become a nightmare of loneliness.

Modin asks Mike about the possibility of the reverse transition: the Promethean change from divine allegiance to a compassionate descent to man, bearing the stolen gift of fire from heaven.<sup>15</sup> Mike scoffs at the idea, but in Modin's return to Africa, looking for a revolution to give his life in, we see his attempt to make the Promethean crossing. The punish-

ment for the attempt is Prometheus' punishment.<sup>16</sup> Modin finds that his education dooms him to a lonely elevation above the people; his loneliness is shared only by Aimée, harpy daughter of a race of destroyers. At the end of the novel he is tied to a jeep by a group of white men with wild, predatory eyes, and his penis is severed while Aimée fellates the bleeding stump. Clearly the punishment of Prometheus is suggested, in a particularly gruesome variant form, in this scene, but the situation of Promethean punishment is presented in the whole of Modin's alienated existence and relationship with Aimée, not just in the final scene. His isolation on his separate, lofty peak of education parallels that of Prometheus, chained to his crag, and the whole of his relationship with Aimée is an intimate and totally destructive torture masquerading as love.

Modin's phrase for what is omitted by Mike's theory, 'the Promethean factor' is one of many puns in the novel on this word and others.<sup>17</sup> The Promethean 'factor' refers both to the notion of the reverse crossing from human to divine forgotten by Mike and to the slavers' agent with whom Modin associates Africans received into the ranks of the blest. Modin wants to serve the revolution but he ends by destroying himself without any assurance that his gesture has born fruit. Herein lies the pessimism of the novel. Prometheus was punished for successfully providing man with fire, formerly the exclusive possession of the gods; Modin is doomed to die without having succeeded in communicating to his people the gifts of education, vision and hope which he has gained during his sojourn among the blest.

Solo sees that Modin's chief weakness is his love for Aimée. In seeking white companionship as a way out of his loneliness Modin has completed his alienation from Africa. He has embraced the very race which has engineered his alienation in the first place. Solo feels that Modin's death was a wasted one. For life to have been worthwhile there must be some point to death. Solo clearly wants to see death as an investment in a better future for others. He faces this problem while he is in hospital with 'mental problems' (p. 53). He is approached by an old man who has lost a leg in the revolution. Now he spends all his time reading about the French Revolution in an attempt to find out who benefitted, who gained. In response to the old man's appeals to Solo to explain why, if 'l'essence de la révolution, c'est les militants', the militants do not gain from the revolution, Solo is forced to evolve a metaphor which relies on a second meaning of 'l'essence':

'You are right,' I said. 'The militants are the essence. But you know, that also means they are the fuel for the revolution. And the nature of fuel ... you know, something pure, light, even spiritual, which consumes itself to push forward something heavier, far more gross than itself ... The truck represents society. Any society. Heavy. With the corrupt ones, the opportunists, the drugged, the old, the young, everybody, in it. And then there are the militants, pushing the whole massive thing from the lower to the higher level. But they themselves are destroyed in the process.' (p. 27)

If we can allow Modin's attempt to return to Africa and identify with the people to have been a Promethean crossing, even though he is not permitted to join the revolution, we might enrol him honorarily among the militants. Certainly his Promethean crossing has shown the way for other Olympian 'heroes' to follow. There may be only one Promethean crossing in the Graeco-Roman system, but as Modin says, there are other myths, elsewhere in the world, involving the crossing from divine to human.<sup>18</sup> Perhaps Modin's effort alone could have been a sufficient gesture. Like Promethean fire, 'something pure, light, even spiritual, which consumes itself to push forward something heavier, far more gross than itself', he tries to become fuel for the revolution. He has descended from his lonely height in order to help push society upwards.

In Solo's opinion, Modin's actual death is an unproductive one. As far as Solo is concerned, Modin's fine fire of revolutionary purpose was consumed before he went out into the desert to meet his death. Yet the thrust of the imagery in the early part of the novel, and particularly the use of the Promethean myth, pushes the reader towards the view that Modin's Promethean crossing is a positive gesture, and that his death is the punishment for daring to attempt such a return. It is Solo's negative interpretation of his death which colours the end of the novel with despair, as Naana's view suggests hope at the end of *Fragments*. Solo's view is that Modin's death is 'useless, unregenerative destruction' (p. 263), a sign of the futility of a failed gesture. The parody of Promethean punishment in the novel leaves no room for a Prometheus unbound. Solo finds literary inspiration in Modin's journals, making of the pieces of his life 'that most important first act of creation, that rearrangement without which all attempts at creation are doomed to failure' (p. 231), but it would be too optimistic to suggest that Solo is left carrying the Olympian flame. Solo recognizes that in his attempt to present Modin's experiences he is 'a mere parasite, feeding upon spilt entrails' (p. 232).<sup>19</sup> Solo's interpretation of Modin's end is the interpretation of a man whose own life is a failure and who is unable to see beyond his own despair.

We need not accept Modin's death at Solo's valuation. The man who attempts the Promethean crossing is more admirable than the man who does not, and Modin has the grace to see that life is not worth living once the spirit is dead. There may be a man who is strong enough to endure the pains of the crossing and keep his dreams, but Solo's analysis of mankind in the opening pages of the novel suggests that the visionaries are automatically 'the losers, life's failures' (p. 14), while those who are tough enough to survive the Promethean torment are less than admirable in Solo's eyes:

*They are certain they are in a struggle that gives an answer to the ultimate why of life, making tomorrow's revolution. Their entrails have an iron toughness mine do not have ... But they are ignorant. They have learned as much about the things that have gone on and the things still going on as seeing eyes and hearing ears can teach anybody. Yet after all this knowledge, from somewhere within they find the enthusiasm to continue answering to the name of militants. Their entrails are hard, that I must say in justice...*

Our time demands from us just one great observance: that we should pretend. To live well now means to develop as highly as possible the ability to do one thing while saying, and preferably also thinking, another thing entirely. The successful livers are those with entrails hard enough to bear the contradiction and to thrive on it. (pp. 13-14)

The fact that Solo sees all effort as futile does not make Modin's effort valueless. Attempts to push the state uphill may be Sisyphean, but this is no reason to cease trying. The commitment of despair may be as effective as the commitment of hope, and the belief that one is inevitably doomed to suicide need not prevent one from dedicating one's death to a good cause. Nor is the intellectual hopelessly removed from the revolution while he may bring the fire that will light the fuel.

In both novels, *Fragments* and *Why Are We So Blest?*, Armah considers the aspirations of the bourgeois towards a Western model in terms of the communication between a mundane African world and the essentially dead, destructive world of the West, and explores this in terms of the psychology of individuals. Yet one must recognize that Armah uses the myths of transition and communication between the two worlds to express a beneficial form of contact as well as a deadly one. Against the acquisitive cargo cult mentality in *Fragments* are set Naana's view of Baako's sojourn in the ghost world as one which precedes his return in newborn form, and the mame water myth of ecstatic, potentially destructive inspiration. And, while aspiring to a position in the land of

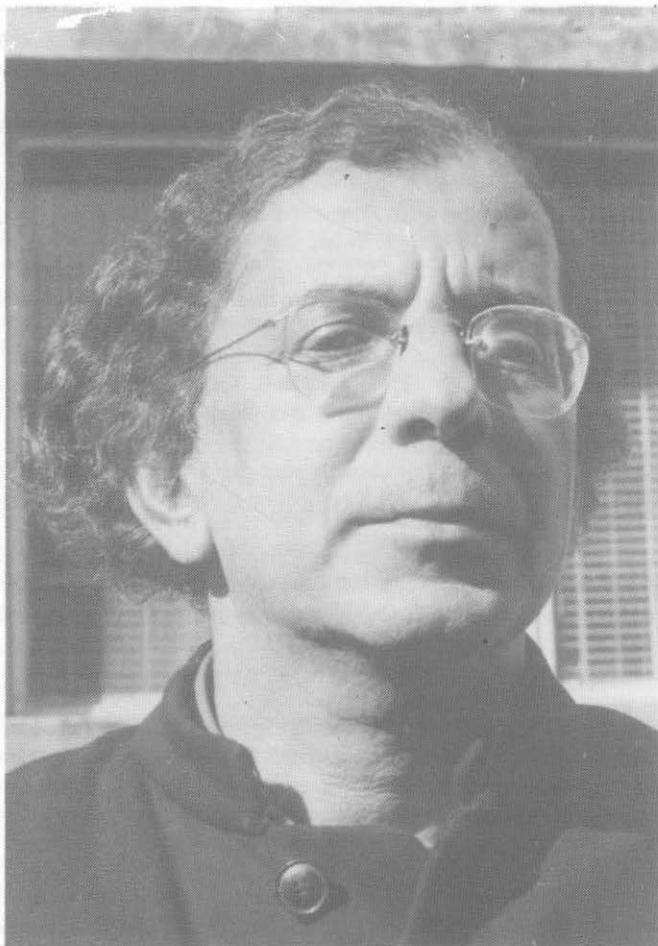
the blest may lead to a lonely alienation for the harpy-ridden 'hero' in *Why Are We So Blest?*, it also offers the possibility of a reverse crossing back to the people, bearing Promethean fire.

#### NOTES

1. Ayi Kwei Armah (Boston, 1970); page references in the text are to the Heinemann edition of 1974.
2. Ayi Kwei Armah (New York, 1972); page references in the text are to the Heinemann edition of 1974.
3. Armah's interest in Fanon appears in his non-fiction also, for instance Ayi Kwei Armah, 'African Socialism: Utopian or Scientific?' in *Présence Africaine*, 64 (1967), pp. 6-30.
4. Ayi Kwei Armah (Boston, 1968); hereafter referred to in the text as *The Beautiful Ones*.
5. Gareth Griffiths, 'Structure and Image in *The Beautiful Ones...*', in *Studies in Black Literature*, II, 2 (Summer 1971), pp. 1-9.
6. For instance the image of the eating of ripe and unripe fruit.
7. These are discussed at some length in B.J. Barthold, 'Three West African Novelists: Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka and Ayi Kwei Armah', unpublished doctoral dissertation (University of Arizona, 1975).
8. See Kirsten Holst Petersen, 'Loss and Frustration: An Analysis of A.K. Armah's *Fragments*', in *Kunapipi*, I, 1 (1979), pp. 56-7, for a fuller explanation of the existence of the cult in New Guinea, or Ronn Rassner, 'Fragments: The Cargo Mentality', in *Ba Shiru*, V, 2 (1974), pp. 55-64.
9. But note, *Fragments* p. 224, that Armah sees the been-to as an intermediary, definitely not a creator of goods. In this respect he is like the factor of *Why Are We So Blest?*
10. Edward Lobb, 'Armah's *Fragments* and the Vision of the Whole', in *Ariel*, X, 1 (January 1979), pp. 25-38 deals with the ideas of seeing and understanding in the novel. I would suggest that Baako sees, but needs Juana and Ocran to help him understand what he sees.
11. She herself does not provide him with artistic inspiration, and he uses her typewriter only for his letter of resignation from Ghanavision.
12. His first nervous breakdown is the result of an 'overexpansion of consciousness'. His second is caused by his attempt to *limit* his mind to the cargo consciousness of those around him.
13. The word is carefully chosen by Armah: on the one hand the Blest are mortals beatified and raised to the status of demigods as Mike suggests; on the other the Isles of the Blest are the Western lands of the dead.
14. Edward Lobb, 'Personal and Political Fate in Armah's *Why Are We So Blest?*', in *World Literature Written in English*, XIX, 1 (Spring 1980), pp. 5-9 points out some of the many references to the separation between high and low in the novel.
15. The gift to the people is represented in the novel by the vision seen from a lonely

height, by hope, and by life which is the fuel of the revolution.

16. Prometheus was chained to a lonely crag, where a predatory bird daily devoured his liver.
17. Lobb, in *WLWE*, p. 6, draws attention to the pun on 'factor' at this point. Such word play is common in the novel, for instance the use of the words 'blest', 'eminence' and 'essence'.
18. At least one such myth involves sacrificial death as well, but to suggest a parallel between Modin's death and the crucifixion would be to take the analogy too far.
19. Lobb, in *WLWE*, has an interesting argument about the parasitic nature of Solo's literary efforts. In connection with the Promethean parallel in the novel, Solo's emphasis on his position as the scavenger of 'spilt entrails' is worth noting.



Nissim Ezekiel. Photo: Anna Rutherford.