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Abstract
This Earth, My Brother (1971) can be described as a dramatized autobiography. We can also assume from the narrative itself that the world of the novel is, for the author, decadent. Awoonor’s indignation at the ‘moral decay of the nation’ (p. 116) is unmistakable in the closely-knit, densely allusive method of the novel. But this essay is not concerned with the details of the novel’s autobiographical feature or social criticism perse. Aesthetically Amamu, for instance, has to be seen, if only for his narrative role as a protagonist-narrator, not as ‘homo sapiens’ but as ‘homo fictus’ whose principal function is to complete a structural or verbal pattern. It is possible to say that Awoonor is in this novel as man and artist concerned to master his personal emotions, allow the artist to be stronger than the man, and create a critical distance between author and fictional character. Hence, this essay is solely concerned with This Earth, My Brother as an artistic creation, a structural or verbal pattern, which is far more than a subjective dramatization, or even a satiric exposition.
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Awoonor’s This Earth, My Brother: A Personal Memoir

This Earth, My Brother (1971) can be described as a dramatized autobiography. We can also assume from the narrative itself that the world of the novel is, for the author, decadent. Awoonor’s indignation at the ‘moral decay of the nation’ (p. 116) is unmistakable in the closely-knit, densely allusive method of the novel. But this essay is not concerned with the details of the novel’s autobiographical feature or social criticism per se. Aesthetically Amamu, for instance, has to be seen, if only for his narrative role as a protagonist-narrator, not as ‘homo sapiens’ but as
'homo fictus' whose principal function is to complete a structural or verbal pattern. It is possible to say that Awoonor is in this novel as man and artist concerned to master his personal emotions, allow the artist to be stronger than the man, and create a critical distance between author and fictional character. Hence, this essay is solely concerned with This Earth, My Brother as an artistic creation, a structural or verbal pattern, which is far more than a subjective dramatization, or even a satiric exposition.

This Earth, My Brother is a personal memoir both in content and in form. It consists mostly of Amamu's personal recollections and reflections, narrated in the main by Amamu himself. And the novel is a-chronological in order to throw into relief those moments of his heightened sensibility. The other main narrative mode in the novel is the third-person omniscient narration which functions essentially as an authorial commentary on the apparently subjective first-person narration. Thus, the narrative technique of the novel belongs, in sum, in the personal memoir, the 'narrative or epic'. And the aesthetic value of the novel is impelled by aesthetic scruple rather than by any didactic zeal; and by this organizing principle the novel achieves an organic unity which maintains balance, proportion and composure against the characteristic diffuseness and uncritical subjectivity of the first-person narrative. This essay will concentrate exclusively on this text so as to show as much as possible how its narrative structure intriguingly objectifies and realizes its material.

As a narrative technique, the personal memoir is first concerned to define unmistakably the central theme of the novel: Amamu's self-alienation especially in his society, during which time he is shown groping for self-understanding. The originating impulse of the narrative is to 'return to the magic hour of our birth for which we mourn' (p. 29). And the narrative impulse is to discover why and how to achieve the return. It is all a joint impulse — urgent, irrepressible and enervating to Amamu; and the course of the narrative, which constitutes the search, is apparently disordered, non-sequential, opposed to 'epic regularity' as the narrative emanates from Amamu's upset mind, the centre of consciousness. Coming back home from abroad as a lawyer by profession, Amamu feels moral disgust at his people and the entire social situation: 'Aren't we all dreaming of our native land in this great city ... Aren't we all, my brother?' (p. 135), he notes introspectively. He develops inner conflict and an acute sense of self-alienation. He withdraws unceasingly to live inwardly, pondering over all experiences he can possibly remember right from his childhood in order to discover how they bear on his present
unease. It is important to note that the dissatisfaction is dramatized mostly in and through his mind and the method shows the turmoil and the search for solution to be inmost and private: 'I am able by my own strength to renounce everything, and then to find peace and repose in pain' (p. 29). It is therefore possible to say that the main concern of the novel is to illuminate the protagonist's intense personal feelings about the social situation and his mental and emotional separateness within the society. In his own meditative account of his people's view of him in the very first few lines of the novel, it is his own apartness that is noted:

So they said, this is it. I know them all. They are pretending not to be looking at me; casting furtive glances, and withdrawing their eyes like hawks that give not to their offspring, averting their eyes. As if I wanted something off their backs. They knew. I didn't ask them for anything. When I say it, then they become gentle and they pretend. Show him sympathy. He is a well-educated man, they say. He comes from a great family. He went to England, read books big fat books of wisdom. I planted the tree of wisdom. (p. 1)

The oblique view is to stress right from the prelude Amamu's own consciousness of his own position in his society and his own personal sensibility. He is aware that his education is the 'tree of wisdom' that makes him penetrate his people and the social situation. In the mock-heroic vein characteristic of the entire novel, 'the tree of wisdom' apparently alludes to the prelapsarian Garden of Eden, just as his affairs with his prostitute mistress Adisa, his only serious intimacy presented directly to us, recalls the Biblical Hosea's marriage with the prostitute Gomer on God's instructions. Presumably, God wanted Hosea to discover through practical experience the nature of His own (God's) spiritual alienation from the decadent children of Abraham. But, ironically, Amamu is unaware that 'the tree of wisdom' triggers off his sense of dissatisfaction causing his mental and emotional isolation, and the real danger to himself from his own sensibility. The narrative concern is, at bottom, to discover this danger for us, if not for him.

Amamu is convinced that a re-discovery of their fallen gods will be highly instructive to the entire nation, while his own private re-view of his sexual relationship may intensely illuminate his present dissatisfaction:

My search for a repose in pain is not an act of faith. It is an act of worship for fallen gods, gods burned out by colonial district commissioners armed with a governor's order-in-council...

The self-illumination that comes of the losing of senses in a twilight field of new sensations and new physical dimension will provide the avenue of final immersion, of the incessant and immutable necessity to be aware of our strength. (pp. 29-30)
His irrepressible longing for the sea in search of his personal mermaid in the person of his cousin Dede, dead twelve years before, in order to discover his true self is illustrative of the national need to re-view their pantheon of native gods in order to discover their true national identity and the root-cause of the present social malaise.

However, the intensity and intimacy of the feelings make them remarkably personal. The main theme of the novel can be described as Amamu’s self-alienation while the narrative subject is in actuality Amamu’s perceptive awareness. It is important to realize that Amamu is very individual, atypical. He is endowed with a sensibility that is scrutinizing, discriminating and distancing. Throughout the novel, Amamu is presented as set apart from the morally insensitive world basically by his pensive probing of practically everything:

Conversation flowed on. Amamu was leafing through a book he was holding. He had suddenly withdrawn from the discussion. His friends and the other club members were aware of his habit of sudden withdrawal. And they said he was a queer man. He also had a habit of introducing such outlandish topics as philosophy and theosophy... Whenever he launched into these learned monologues, his friends listened with a shy deference, and admired his learning, but said to themselves: The man is mad. He would go on and on. Suddenly he would realize that no one said anything, no one interrupted. So he would become silent, withdrawal was his immediate refuge. Then he would gaze away to sea, his mind wandering away.

(p. 25)

Undoubtedly, Amamu is always concerned with the inner essence of his experiences, but this mental attitude amounts to his separateness, actually his ‘immediate refuge’. Thus, the novelist Awoonor has to discover this unusualness with all its meaning to us, if not to the man Amamu.

The solution Amamu contemplates as being meaningful and satisfying is to ‘Despair and die’ (p. 116). The main objective of this search is to achieve a spiritual union with ‘my mermaid’ who once came to him ‘from the sea’ when he was a child. However allegorical this quest may be, it has a romantic colour and form which intensify its individuality. Again, the deliberation as well as its materialization is basically nostalgic and visionary. Awoonor has to adopt a technique that will avoid sheer romantic introspection, separate the protagonist-narrator from the subject of the narrative as much as possible, and realistically evaluate Amamu’s search and deliberation for what they are. In this way the emotion can be mastered, and the novel can realize the full implications of the subject and the possible breadth of aesthetic meaning and
response, while the truths of individual observation are reconciled with the veracity of the external realities. The diverse experiences outside Amamu’s own immediate modes of thinking and individual feeling are therefore realized by means of the third-person omniscient style of narration. Also, to lay before the reader the full nature of Amamu’s outraged sensibility and mental alienation, Awoonor gives his material a broad scope in space and time. He lets the memories cut across as many nations as Amamu has ever been to and many stages of his life. And to manage the rank and extensive flood of associative memories and maintain balance and proportion, he must find means of narration which can encompass and explore them for their significance.

The personal memoir is in this novel all-encompassing. It is here a highly self-conscious narrative method that defines the quality of the protagonist-narrator’s experience, and then evaluates it. What has happened to Amamu is that everywhere he is, morally, man apart, man alone. And by the end of the novel the apartness is completed when he drowns himself in the sea in his belief in a spiritual re-union with his childhood mermaid. In form, the novel keeps fundamentally to the personal memoir. A large number of the important events and characters become important to the reader through Amamu’s recollections and reflections. The first-person narration is basically concerned with his inner life and moral perception: not for self-justification but primarily for self-knowledge. A notable feature of this first-person account throughout the novel is its backward movement. Memories are by their nature recollective; but the narrative urge here is not to vindicate himself but to discover the links of the disordered events for the root-cause of the social and personal unease. Moreover, the narrative action begins at a climactic point when the only meaningful step is to retrace, as in Dante’s *Inferno* quoted on page 92 of the novel: ‘As my sight went lower on them, each seemed to be strangely twisted between the chin and the beginning of the chest, for the face was turned towards the loins and they had to come backwards since SEEING FORWARD WAS DENIED THEM’ (Dante’s *Inferno*, Canto XX). Thus, the narrative technique seeks first to define the main theme.

Throughout, the fragmented first-person account brims with intensely personal experiences:

Remember the pinewood summers, blue mist descending over the city of Malmö when I stayed with Ernest and his Danish landlord plus his girl Eva of fictitious blonde beauty and the manner of arctic winters. Now the fire exit of lovers’ passion is the path through a woman’s legs to stare at the moon slanted taking a pee over the ocean...
My brother and I we used to search through the sacred grove of Sofe among shrines of where carvers of deities from Abomey, where the thousand gods lived, cut out gods for hidden shrines among tall boababs...

There was Tanya who lived off Leninski Prospect. We met at a party in the brief sojourn in Moscow when we roamed dialectical materialist streets to the tune of 'Moskva Viechera' and spoke Russian phrases of I love you, I will love you till communism engulfs the whole world, till imperialism is dead, till the capitalist hyenas boil in their own blood, till Africa returns to her own...

Stones, oil lamps, rings, landscape flashes, my milkbush is on fire, my people, it is on fire. The yellow lights of streets paved with human excrement from flying trucks pronounce and witness it. Underneath them painted prostitutes are hawking their pussies to Lebanese merchants, cedi a piece with the prospect of dzara, ntosuo, and if you know where they sell penicillin you can buy and buy. The Lido is swinging tonight, brothers, and big men have brought out their harridans; they are in concubinage with them. Soon they — the harridans — will go on European tours, to villas outside Rome and have audience with the Pope. Among the dancers is the man with the golden bed... (pp. 83-84)

Indeed, Amamu's stream of recollective thought, in form of disciplined interior monologue, is highly selective. This is because the novel is concerned to delineate the movements of Amamu's individual sensibility and all its complexities and implications, rather than to stir our social conscience per se. And the oblique method of the personal memoir gives emphasis to the salient fact that the sense of individuality derives from memory, and that moments of heightened awareness derive from all the moments of the past: a man is the sum of his past. Throughout the novel, the first-person account is inspired by that sense of the inseparableness of the present from the past, almost in the way the Bergsonian theory of durée is informed.

The originating impulse of the instant recollective account becomes apparent only at 'That Lido is swinging tonight', and the thematic link between 'lovers' passion' in 'the pinewood summers' of Europe and his own childhood escapades with his brothers at home 'to search through the sacred grove' emerges. Notably, the sexual and religious search is always inseparable. Also, the mode of these recollections is panoramic and picaresque. Amamu is indeed a journeying hero. But he is essentially a present-day product of a greater self-analysis and of a more sophisticated social criticism than a Spanish picaro was. His peregrination is born of reflective memories orchestrating mental movements/insights back into human behaviour and associations the world over; rather than along a country's high-roads. This method of mental exploration is primarily meant for the searching analysis of Amamu's individual sensibility in particular, while it accommodates the depiction of large historical and social events. Temporally the retrospection reaches back to the
earliest of his childhood memories, while spatially it ranges from Ghana to the whole of Europe and to Asia. And the recollections are all equally pungently satirical of human behaviour everywhere.

The most prominent and vital constituent of the recollective narrative is his sexual affairs. On the surface, Amamu is loose and depraved even when he is engaged in laudable aspirations:

In my room we talked about the changes that must come, that Africa needs a spiritual, psychological, mental revolution. Look at African education. Look at the corruption of our politicians, look at the moral decay that has engulfed our beloved homelands... Then we went our several ways, some to sleep with our wives, others to fornicate with willingly lonely spinsters in one-room apartments in Golders Green. Tomorrow too we shall meet and discuss the revolution that Africa needs. (p. 136)

But the sexual recollections actually assume serious dimensions: ‘The long road begins from here, begins from the foetal tunnel’ (p. 48). The sexual affairs in effect emerge as the means by which he explores life: ‘She came again. And each time was a different journey into the open mysteries of life’s incarnation’ (p. 58). They represent to him a metaphor of life which he exploits energetically in search of his own ‘whatness’. And in every girl he relates to he is at bottom yearning to re-discover his childhood mermaid: ‘Loving the memory of her my first love through all lands and all claims’ (p. 59). When, for instance, he has just slept with his mistress Adisa, it is his deceased cousin Dede, his ‘first love’, who comes up in his mind while he is reflecting on the affair. And what follows immediately in the four subsequent pages is a recollection of a number of his relations with girls both at home and abroad; and all ending significantly on his unrelenting search for his goddess, cousin Dede:

I found her among the dancers sweating on the floor in one of those wild new dances of youth. She is my woman of the sea. She is the one who appeared through the cleft sea in the slash of the moonbeam to come to me under the Indian almond. She led me then through all farmlands, she led me over the wide lagoon where the sprats sang a song from the salt basins, over bird island we flew with the gulls returning from sea, over the sugar cane farms over the lagoon landing stage into the strange land, into the strange land, into Lave the forest of animals where we sat under my grand-father’s blackberry tree...

My stones and oil lamps wore rings of rainbows, and shadows run like the ghosts of my beginning, whining nims of May in the storm of sowing season’s rains into the fire-exit of the future exile. For love’s passion flees to the moon slanted in a pee pose her legs long astride the ocean where her sword blazed that day in the urinal hour to find me under the Indian almond.

Dear one, hold on, for I come. (p. 60)
The notation-like prose here stresses the nature and cause of his attachment to his first love, his cousin Dede. The environment is pastoral, and the relationship is idyllic. It all constitutes the very happy background of his life and the motivating force of all his sojourns and desires. The idyllic wanderings depicted in the first paragraph yield in the second paragraph to a mythical world of his own inner self. The predominance of the moon symbolism is strongly indicative of the mythical world, only where imaginatively the ideal is apprehensible if not immediately attainable physically. And the brevity of the last paragraph pithily expresses his irresistible desire to be re-united with her. In brief, the narration is investigating and analyzing. The juxtaposition of the paragraphs is dramatic: the contrasting effect achieves an analytical interpretation of Amamu's subjective feelings and self-expression.

Again and again he re-views her analytically to himself in order to grasp her significance all the better as she has impinged on his consciousness hauntingly:

Sometimes she comes into my dreams, moon-faced, smiling, her coral teeth glistening in her dark round face. Then she will sit and talk for a long time. I will not understand a word she speaks. Suddenly as if in anger she will gather her tiny waist cloth and go away. It is always at that time that I will begin to fall fall from a great height, fall far far down. But I never reach the earth. Sometimes I will be in flight across the sky. I will fly in a blue heaven with clouds trailing my feet. We will career through the sky, like gulls over seas.

In the morning she will be gone. The bells will be ringing the second bell — and my mother's oil lamp will be put out. (p. 149)

This method of mental re-view projects and illuminates her, and the 'projection' is increasingly frequent in proportion to the nearness to the ultimate realization. However, the retrospections appear to be repetitious, as self-revelations are usually fluid. But the fluidity is controlled in the same breath by the analytical interpretation underlying the narration. And by the frequent, pensive focus on her, he is able to distinguish the sordid, humdrum world about him from the idyllic world she elevates him into. This haunting perception is underlined by the interplay of the first and the second paragraphs of the excerpt: the bare, concrete details of objective, awakening reality of the second paragraph reinforce the unpleasant perception of the dreaminess of the idyllic, pastoral first paragraph — the dreaminess is depicted not only by the moon atmosphere but also by the plain admission in the passage, 'It is always at this time that I will begin to fall fall ... across the sky.' In any event, he has
painfully discovered that he no longer inhabits mentally this cloddish
world, 'for a restlessness has gripped me and this earth' (p. 148).

Apparently, his association with his cousin Dede has been the most
edifying experience, and has remained the sole touch-stone of his inner
feelings. Inwardly in terms of authentic feelings and emotions, his
numerous experiences of love amount to a single one — the apparently
platonic one with his cousin Dede. This is not an oversimplification; it is
because the other girls are only passing incarnations of Dede or objectifi-
cations of his search for the ideal human intercourse. In other words, the
lyrical recollections function as a psychotherapy for a serious emotionally
disquieting experience. They constitute the Aryan thread that guides
Amamu in his ontological search for 'self', his own inner essence. The
point is that Amamu has come through long and deep introspections and
not through the mere physical experiences to be able to remember that
the 'ancestors — revered now for their infinite sagacity — decreed long
ago that this land, this earth, my brother, shall witness a crashing
collapse' (p. 147) since it is 'the land of death' (p. 149). And like Kierke-
gaard, he has come to realize he can still save his own soul, as quoted on
page 145 of this novel, because he had not wholly lost his own moral
nature: 'I can stand everything — even though that horrible demon more
dreadful than death, the being of terrors, even though madness were to
hold up before my eyes the motley of the fool, and I understand by its
look that it was I who must put it on, I am still able to save my soul'
(Kierkegaard). And like in Dante's *Divine Comedy*, Amamu's mental
survey of his own life and the nation's is in actuality a device to enable
him to map out a world of illusions and disillusions. The 'I' can be
regarded as a depersonalized expression of the suffering sensibility; and
the incessant apostrophe 'my brother' of the first-person narrative (the
whole first-person narrative can be regarded as a dramatic monologue)
pertains to the reader's human involvement in his plight.

The personal memoir therefore functions technically as a means of
examining the situation and of discovering the truths and the best
possible solution, all through analytical retrospection. However,
Amamu's language becomes increasingly mythopoeic as the narrative
action becomes increasingly a self-quest. The texture of the whole novel
is given its richness and subtlety by emotions which find more than one
level of significance. Instead of a logical sequence of physical events, it is
the interior logic, the imaginative force of the narrative, that holds
together the diverse memories retrospectively to 'the first memorials of
my journeys from the womb', and makes him conclude on how best to
save his own soul:
The lyricism of this affirmation underlines the imaginative moral force and the individual joyful conviction of his resolution. The instant moment recalls in the mock-heroic vein of the novel the ominous sentiment that Amamu ‘should be their torchbearer and servant all his life’, expressed when he was given ‘the rum name of his great-grandfather’ (p. 12), Amamu. He has now uniquely discovered his own goddess, while the nation is still groping in vain ‘for the spirits of the departed priests of thunder’. He has a reliable symbol — a guide — to follow: the almond tree. The almond tree rests finally here as the principal evocative symbol of their meeting-point. So, the language is incantatory, the atmosphere is charmed and the action becomes ritualistic. Now that Amamu is absolutely convinced that he must join her, his sensibility is heightened, his perception solemn, his expressions elevated. His relationship with her is in this tremendous instant transcendent. The moments of perception have been countless, but it is the business of reflection — or rather, of introspectively recollective narrative — to gain conviction systematically and find the moral courage to take the ultimate action.

As a narrative method, the personal memoir clearly defines the central theme of self-alienation, by giving special prominence to the meditations of Amamu and showing him to be undoubtedly endowed with a high degree of perceptiveness and self-expression. Aesthetically, the method helps to safeguard artistic detachment on the part of Awoonor the novelist, while depicting highly personal impressions of the ‘persona’. Here, the method is even more telling in its emotional impact in the dramatization of Amamu’s consciousness as prelude (the prefatory chapter) and coda (chapter 12a) for Awoonor’s rendering of Amamu’s personal account of his own situation and final decision.

This process of self-quest has, however, gained tremendously from the third-person omniscient narrative which functions basically as counterpoise. The key external events of the novel are narrated in the third
person. The naming of Amamu himself, his encounters with corrupt, spineless law agents, his visits to his club and hotels, the home-coming of his bourgeois wife and the burlesqued reception party. Most significantly, the last three chapters — 13, 14 and 15 — are narrated exclusively in the third person. The chapters deal with his last journey to the beach, his drowning and the search for him. The first-person account stops at chapter 12a, notably immediately he has taken the ultimate decision, that is, immediately his introspective retrospection has come to its logical conclusion. Earlier on, the narrative arrangement has been that each chapter is in two parts: the first part in the third-person omniscient narration, while the other part is in the first person. Even from these seemingly outward narrative arrangements, it is quite clear that the first-person account and its concern with Amamu’s quest must have been aided by the third-person account as a complement or as an ironic commentary. The third-person omniscient account essentially describes the social milieu with reverberating sociological connotation, while the first-person account further interprets the different parts of the milieu through Amamu’s mental survey and reflection. For instance, Nina, ‘The city within city’, is presented obliquely through Amamu’s socialist perception of it, in order to heighten the revoltingly dehumanizing squalor of the place while, technically, externalizing his inner dissatisfaction in form of objective social realities. Thus the narrative action is being defined and developed at both levels.

One distinguishing feature of the third-person omniscient narration is its anecdotal form. Minor but significant characters and vital incidents are presented as closely-knit anecdotal interpolations into the narrative mainstream, instead of the digressive homilies of the traditional picaresque anecdotal narrative. The anecdotes are various and complete stories-within-the-story, and they are so well integrated that they coalesce into the main narrative as panoramic echoes of the general moral decay. The Revd. Paul Dumenyo, the Colonel and Susie Manley and the four civil servants at the club, for instance, are caricatures elaborating on the general decadence. The third-person narrative consists mainly of anecdotal and digressive material of the broad comic satire — the serio-comic satire in the picaresque manner. In its picaresque form, the panoramic omniscient style of narration best suits the social satirist. So, while the personal memoir accommodates the searching analysis of inner conflict, the third-person style depicts large historical and social events and exposes follies. It is this serio-comic satire in the picaresque manner that obviously gives the novel a description of social criticism. The novelist appears in the inclusive panoramic author whose portrait of life
employs a wittily scathing combination of comedy, irony and satire as the instrument of its critical strategy, and the admixture makes the satire as serious as it is funny. In this way, Awoonor remarkably blends the inclusive writer's art of surface portraiture (from the third-person authorial narration) with the exclusive writer's art of the inner workings of the human mind (from the first-person narration), to achieve a total dramatization of Amamu's dissatisfaction.

Finally, it is worth pointing out as regards the last three and concluding chapters that the narrative method evaluates the experience. What has actually happened to Amamu is continuous alienation from life itself. The last three concluding chapters, which describe the completion of the alienation and are narrated in the third person, lack the lyricism and the imaginative force of the first-person account. The narration is bare and matter-of-fact in the manner of objective social realism. For it is an ironic comment on the value of Amamu's personal sensibility and personal life. Amamu's self-alienation is a denial of the human element of environment: it is a loss. And the austere third-person all-knowing narration here stresses the loss as being very personal. This is the essential tragedy the novel portrays — the mock-heroic or the travesty of the individual human life. The cloddish world with the description of the grief of Amamu's parents and the continuing rhythm of mundane life including the eternal sea connotes an ironic note on Amamu's death. The sea, for instance, survives particularly well in the novel. The sea metaphor maintains its own intrinsic structural value by giving the novel an organic unity as the first-person narrative is entirely tethered to it, with Amamu's mermaid situated there and the search for her providing the narrative direction of his inner vision. In the end the triumph is all on the side of the cloddish world which survives. The authorial omniscient account of his last moments portrays both Amamu's personal joy about his own end and its disturbing unusualness. It makes the reader-viewer of this final step feel uneasy:

He had arrived home at last. The Atlantic breakers boomed across the memory of years; sea gulls careered upwards and downwards above the surf, and rose and crashed into the sand like the madman at the rise of a new moon. The tumult was the signal for the calm that was promised, it was the legend of a final peace.

Then slowly he saw her, the woman of the sea, his cousin love of those years long ago rising from the sea. She rose slowly, head first, adorned with sapphires, coral and all the ancient beads her mother left for her pubertal rites. ... Here at last, he realized with a certain boyish joy, was the hour of his salvation. It was coming at last. She rose now up upon the waves, her breast bare, her nipples blacker than ever...
They found him kneeling in the sand, a vacant look and a smile and a joy upon his face. And the waves beat their eternal notes upon the shore, as they washed against his body.

The old man arrived in the city at noon the following day. Yes, he received the telegram. He was met by Sammy and Adisa at the lorry park.

He is missing? How can a grown man be missing? First they must make a complaint at the police station. Yes, they knew him. Wasn't he the tall lawyer who lived in Kaneshie? He would turn up. They should all go home. He would be angry if he heard a complaint had been lodged about him missing. He would be very very angry. Wasn't it the lawyer they were talking about? He would turn up. Everybody must go home and sleep.

Children playing on the beach saw him under the Indian almond. People from his household came. It was the third day. The old man had returned from the city. He also came and saw him. He was not asleep now. He was gazing out to sea, a sad quixotic smile on the face. His eyes were blazing. He didn't seem to notice anyone. He was not aware of anyone. (pp. 179-180)

This passage registers the two possible views of Amamu's life and death — an idealist and a madman simultaneously. The two views interrelatedly touch on the eternal pair of idealism and illusion, between which the dividing line is ever thin. In other words, the degree of his idealism is a direct measure of his 'madness', or, in urbane terms, his unusualness. For his individual idealism is in terms of the social reality self-destructive while it is the only means to eternal salvation from the irredeemable decadence. Again, the language of this passage above clearly illustrates the basic paradox of Amamu's perceptive awareness and ultimate action. The lyricism and the mythopoeic language of the first half of the passage mirror the emotive quality of Amamu's own personal narrative, and capture the intensity of Amamu's ardent desire for an idyllic subterranean existence and his sense of joyful self-fulfilment. But in a simultaneous breath the passage denotes a fantasy world. And this rhythmical and mythologizing part yields directly to a bare, objective description of the mundane life around in the second half. The stark, emotionless details show the world around unshaken by the death of a man who has just chosen to die as 'the man singled out to be the first carrier and the sacrifice' for his entire society. Ironically, the first part is all the epitaph given to Amamu. The aesthetic beauty of the omniscient narrator's rendering shows his deep personal appreciation of Amamu's inmost feeling and desire. But it is still the mock-heroic. The reader only has to recollect the ironic tone of the third-person narration right from the beginning of the novel. For instance chapter 2 shows that Amamu's club members' view of him is half-admiring and half-sneering. (See the quote above on page 76 and especially pages 25-26 of the novel itself.) The
relationship between the omniscient narrator, Amamu and the people in general is intriguing throughout the novel. While Amamu maintains a critical distance from his society and the people’s view of him is half-deferring and half-deriding, the third-person omniscient narrator preserves amused detachment from both Amamu and his people. In this regard, the first-person narrative is in effect Amamu’s own myth-making: his personal expression of his own personal search for his lost ideal.

Might one not say that the intellectual severity of one narrative method is the counterpart of the other? And that the final part of This Earth, My Brother stresses the illusory nature of Amamu’s resolution? Has Amamu not enacted only ‘the legend of a final peace’ with his own outraged sensibility for his own individual salvation? Is the first-person account not actually a statement of self-quest — the mythically original innocent self? For This Earth, My Brother does not create any social conscience. In reality, the novel is an ironic statement on inner conflict. It registers our personal frustration, the example of Amamu’s. For Amamu, gripped now by frustration, is the cold man divorced from the human, no less than from the institutional environments. He gets coldly analytical. Every environment and incident and personage define his detachment, though he is touchingly groping for moral bearings. Amamu has undergone a lot, but Awoonor as the artist is still more mature than Amamu. As the all-knowing creator, Awoonor can lavish his pity on Amamu (the mock-heroic epitaph) but he knows as well what Amamu means and how much, through consummate application of technical resources, Amamu can be made to mean. This Earth, My Brother is like a pattern of circular movements, as Amamu perceptively laments towards the end: ‘We will be caught in the simple logic of survival again and again. What a futile struggle’ (p. 164). And there is the passing on and out to the spiritual dilemma of the perceptive mind, and especially to the limits of our experience of endurance in the teeth of an inexorably oppressive world.

But the novel does demonstrate the ontological quest for ‘self’, with the ‘purging’ of one’s own individual passions and emotions oppressing oneself — as the sexual recollections actually become in effect psychotherapeutic reminiscences in the total meaning of the narrative. The cathartic process restores one to that other ‘self’ from whom one is exiled in time and space. Aesthetically, this narrative part demonstrates the novel’s principle that the inward drama is more absorbing, searching and authentic than overt action. Thematically, the two possible ‘views’ of the narrative action, as it were, are not contradictory but inseparably inter-
related in the inherent paradox of the human condition. The ironic narrative interplay dramatizes the tragic impossibility for a human being to catch up with his veritable self here in this mundane life. The human personality tends to disintegrate and the only remedy to this agonizing condition is either mockery, psychosis or death. The third-person account underlines Amamu’s ‘remedy’ as being psychotic; while the first-person account cannot be simply regarded as mawkish personal lyricism in that it does show that man is constantly yearning for the ideal, situated in visions or in memories since the human condition is ever far from satisfactory.

The novel, through adequate resources of technique, discovers the complexity of the modern sensibility, the difficulty of personal morality and the fact of social evil — all the intractable elements under the surface which surface technique or impatience with technique cannot reveal. If we find This Earth, My Brother satisfying, it is because its author holds a positive attitude towards technique and technical analysis of subject matter which enables him to order coherently a large amount of retrospective and reflective experience. So, This Earth, My Brother’s contribution is to fiction universally rather than to the history of fiction in a particular place despite its rich local colour. After all, Amamu gains purification and peace with his self-knowledge and self-fulfilment, in some respect as Malone does in Samuel Beckett’s Malone Dies (1951) and Samuel Mountjoy does in William Golding’s Free Fall (1959): the process of artistic rendering of their personal experiences functions in effect as a psychotherapeutic process of self-examination, self-purgation and self-realization.

NOTES

1. This Earth, My Brother has notably been the only novel produced by the celebrated Ghanaian poet Kofi Awoonor.

2. All page references are indicated in the brackets after the quote, and are from the African Writers Series edition of This Earth, My Brother (1971), published by Heinemann Educational Book of London Ibadan Nairobi.