

## QUEST FOR SELF: THE BEAUTYFUL ONES ARE NOT YET BORN

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### **ABSTRACT**

*The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born is a conspicuous tale of corruption prevalent in Ghanaian social order and the version of an upright man who repudiates to be tainted by this muck. In spite of all the intricacies and undesirable circumstances, Man keeps his veracity integral and surfaces out of the torment unscathed. The novel is an appalling work which delineates the infirmity of the human situation.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Filth, Putrefaction, Corruption, Gluttony, Integrity, Identity*

### **INTRODUCTION**

Identity is the prime concern of every human soul. All the way from birth till death one keeps on chasing the authentic quintessence of subsistence to discern the existent inner self. Ayi Kwei Armah, an eminent African playwright has poured out his heart while sketching the plot of his works. The narratives of the writer evidently portray the temper and the anguish of post-independent Ghana via his realistic characters. *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* (1981), a masterpiece in itself delineates the socio-political veracity of sovereign Ghana, a period of unwarranted murkiness and world-weariness. The unnamed protagonist of the work, 'Man' grows to be a lucid prey to this cynical mindset of the contemporary age. Despite the fact that he is a firm believer of his ancestral rituals and conventions yet the society - which is in a transitional phase - tries to make him accustomed to the altering westernized, money-minded communal set-up. Man's inability to metamorphose to this new-fangled establishment attests him as a misfit.

### **SIGNIFICANCE**

*The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* attains the accolade of being attributed with the label of a key flair on the African literary panorama. At the outset, the novel though carrying vital images and symbols depicting the real Africa got antagonistic previews and was condemned as a dismal version, a "dark haven, an unbearably pessimistic ... or worse in the context of Ghana ... uncalled for existentialist world" (Rao, *The Novels of Ayi Kwei Armah* 33). Symbolically, a profound insight into the work divulges Armah's spirited craftsmanship as a realist who paints what he witnesses. The writer's Ghana is akin to Dante's *Inferno*, wherein the transgressions viz., rapaciousness, insatiability and immodesty are the most prominent events which mollifies its sinners with the prevalent vices of corruption, grime and muck (Nnolim, "Dialectic as Form" 210).

### The Protagonists

The two leading characters – portrayed as ‘Man’ and ‘Teacher’ – stand for an ideal globe which inopportunately has been thoroughly gobbled by the dissipated disk of refuse and cynicism. The survival of such candid beings become a matter of utter apprehension as the charlatan social order repudiates to acknowledge these ingenuous fellows because of their denial to recognize and imbibe the universal fraudulent practices. Man, a simple clerk in Railway Administration at Takoradi, has chosen this scanty profession not only as a source of revenue but as a mode of escapism from the notion of being a crash, an eccentric. Indubitably, family is well thought-out to be a spring of tranquility and contentment, but Man’s dwelling holds a different narrative. Although he was married having children too yet his house is no more than a brick structure. His family, in particular his wife Oyo, resembling all other irksome wives yearns to lead a thriving life and urges her husband to earn this opulence at any price. However, the man determinedly embraces his candor and defies earning anything via conniving resources “a mind and body which together form ... nerve-centre of a radioactive kind of searchlight” (Aidoo, “No Saviors” 14). He is reluctant to involve himself in the “national game” (129) of fraudulence and self-aggrandizement. Consequently, hanging on to the righteous way makes Man desolated and forlorn, a gasping emblem of despondency and vulnerability of an honest individual and a laughing stockpile for the public who adores materialistic possessions more than uprightness.

Teacher, Man’s friend is a contrast to Man’s persona as he has meticulously become conscious of the insularity of the populace and subsequently stripped off his clothing denoting dissolution from all the societal ties. His disbanding corresponds to the superlative limpidness, a resistance to any sort of enticement. But Man, on the other hand despite knowing the covetous and self-absorbing temperament of his relations, struggles hard to brazen out all derisions because he desires ecstasy for his folk. Unlike Teacher he does not permit the world to squash his fortitude but as he is unable to meet the expectations of his kin he without any choice has to cope with derogatory annotations and disparagement. Oyo and her mother regard Man as an imprudent, frail, unreceptive and an impotent fellow who does not fit appropriately into the wheel of altering culture and as a repercussion humiliation and disdain become poor soul’s daily custom. Being a family person, he persistently puts up with the indictment as “there was too much of the unnatural in any man who imagines he could escape the inevitable decay of life and not accept the decline into final disintegration” (47-48). Eventually the poverty stricken family hauls man towards treacherous and crooked means.

### Man - A Virtuous Being

Man is neither a campaigner nor a recluse and has managed well to endure this conflagration of perfidy, deceit and greed. He is a superior individual who unlike Teacher acknowledges his state of captivity. Teacher although has detached himself from his people, still he puts up with the belief of a zilch in absence of his treasured ones.

There is my mother. Now at last she leaves me alone, but two nights past she was with me in a dream full of guilt and fear and loneliness. (60)

Teacher therefore, is a thorough despondent who despite of his superficial tranquil and blatancy, is a wretched fellow. Ghana’s situation is as pathetic as the teacher’s state where there is no deliverance. Eventually, the teacher stranded himself into the shield of seclusion wherein his sovereignty becomes identical with his non-existence.

It [Freedom] makes no difference. If we can't consume ourselves for something we believe in, freedom makes no difference at all.... I am free to do what I want, but there is nothing happening now that I want to join. (61)

Man's quandary is set in disparity with the swift affluence of his childhood comrade, Joseph Koomson – the Minister. Koomson holds a gigantic name in societal as well as political hierarchy and has fabricated the flair of analyzing the thump of his electorate and thus, takes inclusive advantage of the existing state of affairs, proclaiming communalism as a “nuisance” (136). The duplicity of the administration is unveiled when Koomson himself divulges that “the old man [Nkumah] himself does not believe in it” (136). Indeed, his ethical degeneracy denotes the philosophy of the entire populace. His sensational chronicle commencing from a dock-worker to the status of a minister all the way through scheming dexterity corroborates his conviction in clear-cut benefits. The minister symbolizes an intact desecration of the whole lot his organization stands for.

### **Ethics versus Hoax**

The obligation slouches exclusively on Man to remain optimist in this sham world and to make a progression in the lonesome struggle as well. He is such an untainted soul that he could not even envisage to be obsessed by the charade aspirations as revealed by Koomson and his spouse Estella Koomson. However, Man's circumstances are ultimately warranted by the eventual ruin of Koomson and his establishment in a coup d'état that compels the minister to rescue and flee the realm via man's assistance. The phony veneer of the glimmer unveils, but it carries a beam of optimism in the new-fangled age. The focal point still is the birth of the beautiful ones, whether they will ever come to life or not? Witnessing the words at the flipside of a Mammy-Wagon, “The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born” (183) crops up as gloomy, but this glum proposition carries the streak of its own buoyant incongruity, a precise abridgment of the social order. The work wraps up with anticipation that indisputably the existing scenario is a comprehensive version of dejection and disenchantment but there will surely be a dawn when beautiful ones will be around us who will emerge with the prospective fervor to raze the odds and ends of the colonial administration. Accordingly, the novel is absolutely sanguine with a crystal-clear expectancy for a thriving phase.

### **Oyo - A Depraved Partner**

Armah portrays Man's companion Oyo as an authentic incarnation of the civilization and its ideals, which her husband stands in disagreement. Man was being strained by both society and kin but the stress exercised by his cherished ones is the nastiest situation a man can ever stumble upon. Man wishes to be booming but simply through virtuous approach. The hounding matriarch, Oyo's mother, is the key engineer for all torments and even she is the one who was a frontier of the boat treaty with the Koomsons. She is an absurd lady who believes in aggravating the miseries of her son-in-law by attacking him through whimpering and growling. She accuses man for the poverty and appends an additional and an awfully grim facet to Man's trials.

Oyo's moral fiber accentuates the measure of Teacher's moral triumph. She is an illustration of the Biblical temptress, Eve.

Her tactics are obvious. The commonest one is ... of appealing to the man's natural desire for material wealth in... form of a long car and a big house or a romantic effect of a sweet smelling perfume. (Ola, “Ayi Kwei Armah: The Essence of African Womanhood” 1-15)

Oyo desires to live a life of opulence like Estella Koomson and accordingly coerces her partner for striking possessions as a wretched and disconcerted wife. Failure to acquire preferred stuff infuriates the lady and she eventually indicts Man with belittling annotations dubbing him a chichidodo.

Ah ... the chichidodo is a bird.... hates excrement with all its soul.... only feeds on maggots, and ... the maggots grow best inside the lavatory. This is ... chichidodo. (45)

The mounting covetousness for money-oriented assets and reflexive recognition for sleaze is articulated well by Robert Fraser, who deems that the characters in *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, “Give ... impression of being in ... grip of a covetous mania, an engrossing hunger for material possessions which prevents them from attending to deeper spiritual needs” (*The Novels of Ayi Kwei Armah* 12). However, like Shakespeare’s *Shrew*, Oyo goes through an itinerary of edification and moves toward valuing her husband’s veracity. Man meets Oyo after assisting Joseph Koomson, the expatriate, “He [Man] went back into ... hall and stood quietly beside Oyo. She held his hand in a tight grasp. Then, in a voice that sounded as if she were stifling, she whispered, ‘I am glad you never became like him’” (165). In Oyo’s eyes it was for the first time there was a genuine appreciation. Man too was unreservedly relieved and experienced the tenderness of treasured ones ever.

### **Societal Filth**

The Ghanaian social order delineated by Man is the civilization clogged with the credence of malevolence. The practice of dishonesty, dissoluteness of ethical norms, the fester and the putrefaction are so prominent in present-day Ghana that it becomes really intricate for public to subsist in an era of obtuse cupidity. Armah has expressed his sagacity of obligation and pained apprehension for his citizens as the humankind is heading towards a perilous climax because of the inhabitants’ “obscene haste” (88) to get to the zenith.

The knack of *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* is the steadiness with which the novelist utilizes the fundamental icon of grime to signify the disgust against sleaze and bribery. It assuages the edifying eminence of the narrative’s obsession with political and communal vice. Man witnesses a waste-bin which holds a caption in bold, shimmering, ruby capitals:

### **KEEP YOUR COUNTRY CLEAN**

#### **By Keeping your City Clean (7)**

The letters suggest an alliance amid debris and ethical foulness, limpidness and moral cleanliness. Sardonicly, the garbage bin which should denote inhabitants’ fortitude to safeguard definite filaments of affability and cleanness is exerting a pull on the nastiest genus of muck, eventually smearing down the glistening inscription indicating sanguinity. Man’s workplace is a throng of fester, rot and refuse, stinking of fetid turpentine. The balustrade and the timber bear a resemblance to the contaminated skin because of the incessant accrual of excreta over the time. Armah employs repulsive cryptogram of urine, faeces and snot to portray the wide-reaching repugnance of sleaze, ravenousness and hauteur.

The arduous struggle of Koomson all the way through the Man’s rancid lavatory, an icon of putrefaction delineates the politician’s spiritual rottenness which facilitates him to be aware of the tribulations, the real living of Ghanaians.

He [Man] could hear Koomson strain like a man excreting ... there was a long sound as if he were vomiting ... the man [Man] pushed some more, and in a moment a rush of foul air coming up told him the Party man's head was out. The body dragged itself painfully down, and the man [Man] got ready to follow into the hole" (168).

Following Koomson down the fissure, Man eventually asserts that all and sundry, guiltless or culpable, are drawn into the vicious circle of corruption. Koomson at last rescues himself with the help of a boatman and crosses the shore. Man too accompanied his friend till the shore and subsequently dives into the black water and comes out fresh, denoting his personal sanitization.

## CONCLUSIONS

The novel strongly discloses the existing Ghanaian state of affairs where sovereignty has delivered new-fangled native bosses who have been holding their white masters' status and have been following their chiefs' supercilious and avaricious footsteps. Conversely, the end of the work portrays optimism, firstly through Man's personal cleansing which reveals the general population's faith in righteous things and secondly through army takeover which suggests the existence of integrity in this world of chaos. Thus, the wait for the beautiful ones is still in progression with the hope that it will metamorphose the intact human race.

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