

The Dialectic of Myth-Making in Contemporary African Novel: The Example of Ayi Kwei Armah.

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Abstract

This essay analyses Ayi Kwei Armah's novels from the perspective of contemporary myth-making process. By highlighting the synergy or affinity between classical and African mythological patterns of Armah's symbolic narratives, I contend that Armah's novels within the corpus of African literature are exemplars of the dialectical process of myth-making from the standpoint of socio-cultural construction. Anchoring my exposition on the close reading of Armah, I contend that the core of Armah's narrative novels lies in his use of myth as the structural organizing principle of his literary form which serves as provocative catalysts of positive change for the African continent.

Introduction

It is readily understood that in the contemporary world that the relationship between literature and myth is to be associated with modes of cognition (emotional and intellectual) adaptable to a broad range of cultural contexts. No doubt, myths are bound by patterns of depths of expressions of human reality. That myths are still valid in the life of contemporary man is reflected in the fact that contemporary novels still illuminate and explain succinctly various human conditions. Thus, "literature continues in society the tradition of myth-making" (Frye xxi) by being re-enacted with a specific social or serves as a programme of action for a specific society. Interestingly, every society finds a way to continually retell its myths which shapes its belief system and socio-cultural outlook. In a manifest way, since Africans care enough for their welfare, they endorse their myths as inescapable shaping agencies of African history; consequently, Africans recast their traditional stories in modern clothes through the creative medium of literature. What is at issues is that literature contributes more directly in African culture for the singular purpose of serving as a weapon of change.

Clearly, various African writers are seen as using myth at different levels of their story telling. These writers not only see their preoccupation with myth as a way of reviving African mythology, but as one of the richest sources of inspiration for the contemporary novel. It must be emphasised that the capacity for myth-making is part of the composition of every mind. In this sense, mythic thought forms the total mental framework with which humans register and make sense of the world. However, to continue attracting audiences, these myths must be presented in a new twist by portraying age-old issues in relations to immediate contemporary life. What crystallizes here then is that African writers by injecting myth as the structural design of their works thus address themselves to issues which engage their immediate society as well as the vast universe.

The word myth has been used by many scholars and critics in somewhat different ways (Segal 5). As a broad term, G.S Kirk refers to it as any traditional story (57). In John White's view, it should be perceived as a more specific form, linked to a particular culture and dealing with named characters and location; and subsequently communicated to us principally through the medium of literature (38). With Abrams and Harpham, it is "any story or plot, whether true or invented" (178). Chase insists that "myth is literature and must be considered as an aesthetic creation of the human imagination" (qtd in Preminger 539). Myth for Thomas Knipp is synonymous with history, "it is the reorganisation of the past according to the needs of the present" (40). Charles Nnolim sees myth as representing "a people's perception of the deepest truths about nature through narratives that stir us as something "at once familiar and strange" (17). Continuing, Nnolim adds that for literature to become mythical, it must suffuse the natural with preternatural forces (35). Myth constitutes a mode of recognition, a system of thought or a way of life by which natural events are interpreted. Following in the words of Nnolim, it is "a means of interpreting natural events in order to concretize or particularize a special perception of man or his cosmic view" (17). Isidore Okpewho declares that basically, a mythical work displaces present reality with a new and higher order of reality. The reader is willed to the ideals of a past heroic world which is shown to be still attainable (212). Elsewhere Okpewho distinguishes myth as that "quality of fantasy that informs the symbolic or configurative power of the human mind in varying degree of intensity" (1). Myths however, for Soyinka, "arise from man's attempt to externalise and communicate his inner intuition" (3).

Myth in the context of this study is understood as a form of storytelling with symbolized value, a narrative with compelling dramatic structure as Aristotle has postulated---a beginning, a middle and an end. It is necessary to draw attention to the fact that myths by their very nature are not the product an individual author but the collective representation of a society developed over time. It must be emphasised too that a writer does not invent his/her myth; the writer reconstructs or re-creates mythic stories in his/her literary work to suit his/her

aesthetic vision of life. Thus, myths as the creation of the psyche are by-product of a dialectical process that often engenders internally divergent elements as an assessment of the contemporary existential condition. In this respect, mythic works dialectically produces for us a new worldview.

True enough, to brand a contemporary novel as “myth” is not without difficulties, especially with reference to qualifying such a genre into an acceptable definition of myth. Here I will adopt the definition offered by the American mythologist Joseph Campbell. He delineates myths as having four basic functions: the mystical function (experiencing the wonder of the universe); the cosmological; the sociological function (supporting and authenticating certain social order); and pedagogical function (how to live a human lifetime under any situation) [22-23]. Likewise, myths in Armah’s novels qualify in all respect.

The attraction of this study seems to me most significant; prompted by the mythic values of Armah’s works. Armah’s myths are themselves a work of fine literary art. Each myth has something to say; something significant, said beautifully and logically. Critics are agreed that an understanding of a mythic mode of thinking is necessary for a precise understanding of contemporary human consciousness. Beyond that, myths serve as modes of social action; as forms of communication and instruction; giving considerable insights into aesthetic values of human concerns and serving as agent of change. It is interesting however to know that the value of Armah’s myth can be perceived in terms of Mazisi Kunene’s assertion:

There is some truth in the claim that change is possible only through myth, for myth can take many forms. It can reorganize the historical content in terms of modern perspectives. It can create an attractive vision defining in familiar cosmic terms the future possibilities of society. Myth can be used to celebrate the achievements of society, making them fall into an acceptable social order. (190-191)

Particularly important here for our purposes I would argue is the fact that readers will find a comprehensive reading of Armah’s myths intrinsically interesting. This is because of the opportunity his mythic re-envisioning affords us to see Africa’s past in a new light. To say this is to suggest that Armah’s novels show as Soyinka rightly observes, Armah’s primary concern to communicate through exploration of myth the African world or what Soyinka characterizes as “the visionary reconstruction of the past for the purposes of a social direction” (106). Acknowledging the importance of this fact, K.K. Ruthven asserts that:

Modern writers who explore the recesses of mythic (and historic) consciousness and deposit their findings in works of fiction should be valued for keeping us virtually in touch with the very spring of our humanity. (74)

It is well to remember that literature entails methods of scholarship attuned to its nature. Accordingly, in this study I propose to use the ontological approach (a close reading), which is at the same time interpretative, to determine the use, significance and function of mythic elements in the novels of Ayi Kwei Armah.

Analysis

Significantly, ever since Armah appeared on the literary scene, he has made use of myths in the interest of his novels, as one of the structural organizing principles of literary form. The profundity of Armah’s novels is comprehensible in the manner in which he explores the metaphysical dimensions of African life, incorporating both universal and African myths into his corpus. In this connection then, Armah uses mythic parallels as a way of controlling, ordering and giving shape and significance to contemporary African history. In this relative sense we may intelligibly say that we identify Armah’s mythical method as a way to understand the positive function of myth for African history. Lauri Honko’s comments are pertinent here, for she argues that the principal function of myth is to establish models of behaviour (49).

For one thing, as critics have come to observe, and based on Okpewho’s four classification of myth types: preserving, observing, refining, and revising tradition; Armah does not simply retell myths as most African writers do by “preserving” traditional myths and culture by translating them into English as J.P. Clark does in *Ozidi*; or the likes of Tutuola, who merely “observe” traditional myths by creating their protagonists and simply weaving the themes and techniques of oral narrative tradition around them. Others like Soyinka “refine” old traditional myths and fasten themselves to an angle of African cosmology, using a mythic character or essence (as with Soyinka’s Ogun, the Yoruba god of iron). Instead, Armah re-creates or “revises” old mythic traditions of Africa and in the process gives Africans a new impetus for the struggle ahead. Basically, Armah’s interest in myths has little to do with popularizing the archaic. His concern is that of discovering in myth certain principles upon which contemporary behaviours might be judged.

Armah takes one or two strands of myth for a whole novel. In his novel *Fragments*, it is the myths of Prometheus and the Melanesia Cargo cult which Armah’s brings to the fore. It is Baako’s highbrow essay on Ghanaian mentality extracted from Melanesian Cargo mythology (160-161), that Armah uses as model for defining the Ghanaian extended family institution and all their expectations of material possessions and prestige for all kinsmen of the returned “been-to”, a man who has been to the United States. Baako’s family sees him

as “Osagyefo”, the Akan word for Saviour. One who would transform their poverty into instant wealth, purely at the cost of the community (103), what Baako is not disposed to do. It is precisely for this reason that Naana, Baako’s grandmother says, the family “tried to kill” (190) Baako.

It becomes interesting for the reader to witness that Baako does not fulfil the materialistic expectation of his whole community and therefore does not re-enact for us what Armah terms “*the myth of the extraordinary man who brings about a complete turnabout in terrible circumstances*” (103). The family believed that Baako will bring back from his stay in America instant return of material possessions and prestige. In view of this, Baako’s mother, Efua lives in constant expectation of her son’s return so as to enjoy the wealth of an estimable son: “*he went away*”, she tells Juana, “*he will come back a man. A big man*” (34). Disquieted Efua enlists the spiritual services of a church prophet over her son’s return. In the words of Efua: “*the prophet has promised me something, if only I have faith and follow him*” (33).

As the narrative points out Baako is expected to “*be a transmission belt of cargo*” (157), that is a channel of wealth, but he fails and therefore shatters into fragments the hopes and aspirations of the family. Baako at last come to this realization as he admits: “*You don’t have to be told. The cargo, that’s it, really. Do you think the traveller should have come back just like that? Who needs what’s in the head?*” (190). Certainly no one in Ghana as the narrative makes clear is interested in what’s in the head of Baako with which he hopes to transform Ghanavision and educate the nation.

Again, Baako’s quest like that of the mythic Prometheus is to the region of the Olympians from where he like Prometheus obtains fire (western education), with which he hopes too like Prometheus to use to improve humanity (Ghanaians), through creative writing at Ghanavision. Having attained the privileged position with the Olympians through his educational advancement, Baako decides to shed privilege. He performs a passionate crossover to the world of the underprivileged; he pitches tent on the side of the oppressed humanity, a situation which infuriates the “*gods*” of Ghanavision and distresses the extended family. Baako, in spite of his return with estimable creative knowledge to aid his country, he is regarded as a betrayer and a failure for not bringing back the expected cargo. He also suffers the same punishment as Prometheus; he is caught and chained; whereas Prometheus is to the Caucasus Mountains, Baako is dumped in the asylum ward (194).

There is also the touch of the mammy water myth which Baako explains to Juana, the spirit who creatively stimulates a musician by imparting to him the anguish of love and loneliness. When the mammy water leaves the musician and goes back to the sea: “*the musician is filled with so much love he can’t bear the separation. But then it is the separation itself which makes him sing as he has never sung before*” (120).

Here as in the cargo cult myth, there is the bringing of gifts, passing from one world to another. In the former, it is comprehensible in terms of earthly and material possessions. In the latter, they are spiritual that is, visionary gifts and poetic energy, bestowed on the musician.

In the novel, *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, Armah uses the myth of Plato’s Cave (79-80). Teacher’s rendition of the myth of Plato’s Cave vindicates his isolationist and apathetic tendency to Ghanaian situations. The story of Plato’s Cave points to the fact that situations are unlikely to alter: “*men...would laugh with hate at the bringer of unwanted light if what they knew they needed was the dark*” (79). However, Teacher is not like Plato’s philosopher, for he appears powerless to return to the cave to inspire the people who reside there (Ghanaians). As in Plato’s allegory of the cave, people are happy in their ignorance and resent those who force them to recognize that they are ignorant. For like the bringer of light to people so accustomed to “*darknesses and chains*” (80), Ghanaians will view him with suspicion, distrust and hate and will perhaps destroy him for upsetting their approved mode of life.

For *Why Are We So Blest?*, it is the myth of Prometheus. This myth provides an appropriate symbolic structure for depicting the tripartite division of the universe based on the Greek model –Heaven, Olympus [which is also perceived as mount Olympus, the highest peak in Greece], Earth and Tartarus. As the narrative puts: “*There’s Olympus. Below that are the plains of mediocrity. Then Tartarus*” (100). This arrangement places Africa as the “*communal dirt*” – Tartarus (101), while America as the land of the “*blest*” is “*Olympus*” (100). As the editorial written for Thanksgiving Day, Fourth of July makes clear:

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. (98)

In this connection then, the Americans see themselves as the “*blest*” and consider the rest of humanity as the “*damned*”. We cannot help noticing that Mike the Fascist who praises the Fourth of July editorial for placing Americans as the “*blest*” and the rest of the world as the “*damned*”, tells Modin: “*You must agree that’s a much superior arrangement*” (100).

Modin, by coming to Harvard from Ghana, moves to the island of the blest, where divinely favoured humans live; he thus attains the Olympian heights which his education has lifted him; to a privileged position, a “*crossover*” in the Greek tradition, as one who rises from “*the plains to live on Olympus*” (101). It is the African,

Modin's rare intellectual prowess which qualifies him to belong to the American community of the "blest". "*An African rarity*" (101); Mike the Fascist, tells Modin; "*you are here on Olympus... you're here with us. You belong*" (100-101). As Mike the Fascist points out: "*The arrangement that brings you here has to be a good arrangement...you belong here*" (101) in the society of the blessed and not in the "communal dirt" of your home country. However, Modin reminds Mike of the existence of the "the Promethean factor", the "reverse crossover". Thus, Modin attempts like Prometheus to cross over from a position of privilege (Olympus) with forbidden gifts (creative knowledge), which he wishes to put at the disposal of the African masses. By this act, Modin offends the privileged class whose principles he rejects. Thus, Modin like Prometheus is punished. Unlike Prometheus who is chained on mount Caucasus, Modin is tied to the back of a Jeep "*straight up and naked*" (285), and mutilated; followed by Aimee's fellatio of his snipped off penis, Modin is left to bleed to death in the desert.

There is in this novel also the touch of the myth of Sisyphus. This myth is illustrated by Solo, a Portuguese black African, in his notebook of "the militants "orthe revolutionary force (27) pushing the vehicle of society uphill only to be consumed in the process. Solo intimates us:

The truck represents society. Any society. Heavy. With the corrupt ones, the opportunists, the drugged, the old, the young, everybody, in it. And there are the militants, pushing the whole massive thing from the lower to the higher level. But they themselves are destroyed in the process. (27)

The militants, like Sisyphus in the Greek mythology are the condemned or have the tedious task for eternity to push a massive force "*up a steep incline from one level stretch to another*" (26). However, in Armah's rendition, the militants who are the essence or fuel for the revolution (26) are consumed for the denser elements of society to move forward.

Equally striking in *Why Are We So Blest?*, is the drop of the myth of black sexuality (the view of the black man as a sex machine). In this novel then, Blacks are cast in roles dictated by the White culture stereotype, where white women exploit myths of the sexual superiority of Africans: "*searching for the excitement of life lived at the level of its culture's basic myths*" (157). To read Armah's *Why Are We So Blest?*, in this way would imply white American sexual illness—white American women's insatiable quest for sex and the corresponding white American male's impotence. It is no wonder then that Modin in fact is alarmed by this realization when he says: "*these women I have known have had deep needs to wound their men. I have been an instrument in their hands*" (162).

It is in this sense that Mrs Jefferson speaks of Modin's endless sexual vigour which she craves and that which her impotent husband correspondingly lacks (157). Mrs Quinn cannot stop commenting on Modin's "*versatile hips*" (96), as she conceives him in terms of endless pleasure, "you switched to hi fi...why don't you invite me next time?" (96), she tells Modin. Of Carol, Amiee tells Modin "*she wanted you, not just anybody to screw her*" (94).

Time and again, Armah in his American setting of this novel presents us with an atmosphere of sexual – indulgence. Mrs Jefferson is presented to the reader as a white woman who engages in sexual relationship with Modin Dofu to fulfil her fantasy of sleeping with a Black man. Accordingly she seduces Modin (129) and initiates all the sexual contacts. Even more, Mrs Jefferson hurls herself at Modin demanding love. Modin recounts his experience: "*she came towards me... she pressed her body hard against mine... I had not thought she would come to me like this*" (129-130). To be sure, Mrs Jefferson insists at various junctures when she tells Modin: "*we have to see each other again, soon, please*" (131). During their love makings we are informed that Modin retains the attitude of an observer. As Modin intimates us: "*I could not help it if part of me stood outside of us, watching her joy that had the motions of agony*" (130).

This, however, is by no means the complete picture. We are exposed to graphic scenes of mutual masturbation between Modin and Mrs Jefferson, right under the noses of her husband and daughter, Molly (132-133). We picture Mrs Jefferson suffering from nymphomania. To quote Naita more directly, "she is nothing but a horny *white bitch*" (134). In Modin's account, "this woman would like to spend the rest of her life making love" (133). In her perverseness, Mrs Jefferson leads Modin to a "*part of her garden*" for sex where her orgasmic moans guide her outraged and dormant husband to the spot where she lies with Modin, so that her husband almost stabs Modin to death (155-156).

Armah in this novel paints pictures of Modin's endless virility as he dissipates his energy for the satisfaction of white American females. Basically these white women manipulate Modin as sex object. He becomes the exotic rarity needed to titillate their jaded sexual appetites. Realization this, Modin declares: "*I was another rare creature, an African vehicle to help them reach the strange destinations of their souls*" (167). If anything, Armah flaunts the sexy disposition of these white women. Carlo like the other "*nympho cliffie friends*" of Aimee demands sex from Modin during parties (94). Primarily, Aimee offers herself to Modin in the hope that he will liberate her frigidity. By her own confession, Aimee "*wanted to feel...Anything. Just to feel*" (177), she seems at pains to tell Modin. Amiee's insensitivity is brought to the fore. Solo tells that "*she played at love*"

(232). During her love making with Modin, we are told she “*seemed to situate herself somewhere outside what was happening*” (178). In fact she uses Modin. To this, Modin queries Amiee: “*you really wanted me to become a servant of yours?*” (213).

It becomes shocking for the reader to witness that in America, Amiee’s sexual fantasies transforms Modin into Mwangi(199), a colonial servant boy and help her conjure up organism while listening to statistics of massacred African freedom fighters in history lectures (186). We cannot ignore the fact that although Aimee is unquestionably obsessed with sex, at the same time however, she is frigid and incapable of being satisfied. As she confesses: “*I’m insatiable. Goddamn*” (185).

One more strand relevant to Modin’s sexual relationship with these white women is the issue of the sapping of Modin’s energy at every contact. Metaphorically then, it signifies the siphoning off of Africa’s energies and material resources for America’s own profit. This preconception based on America’s race-myth of the passive complicity of the black race in its rape by imperialist erotic culture confronts Modin with the painful nature of his own existence. As it is well brought out in this reflection:

use the accumulated energy within our black selves to do work of importance to their white selves. Of what other use have Africa’s tremendous energies been these many centuries but to serve the lusts of whites? (208)

One striking feature of Armah’s historical novels is the fact that he does not rely on classical myths that “have become part of literature” (Kirk 95), rather he explores and recreates ancient African myths and puts them into modern perspectives. The poetical essence on which Armah thrives is his mastery of the succinct allusion, the capacity to turn to the past for mythical instance to illuminate the present for us [Africans]. Accordingly in his novel *Two Thousand Seasons*, Armah uses the myth of Anoa, a modern version of the myth of the Promised Land and the black people’s philosophy of “the way”, enunciated by the prophetess, Anoa, who speaks of the arrival and the destructive effects of the colonial forces, (the Arab “predators” and the European “destroyers”), which has not only caused Africans to lose sight of their origins but worst still to become exiled from their authentic values and tradition:

Springwater flowing to the desert, where you flow there is no regeneration.

The desert takes. The desert knows no giving. To the giving water of your flowing it is not in the nature of the desert to return anything but destruction.

Springwater flowing to the desert, your future is extinction. (xi)

Implicated here is that the people of “the way”, the Anoa people of this narrative go against themselves, therefore progressing on “*a journey into*” their “*killer’s desire*” (2).

Armah’s call in this novel is for Africans to come back to the way of the ancestors as the only means of salvation from total destruction and enslavement. The assertion of the oneness of Africans, the rejection of foreign values and the building of a great classless African society are the issues at stake for the Africans.

In *Two Thousand Seasons*, Armah recreates a new social order where gods play no role. Here, Armah presents us with symbols and images of man himself. In this novel, Armah gives us symbols of groups of men and women identified as the people of “the way”. And by the very process of abandoning myth in the traditional sense, Armah makes a greater and more affirmative use of myth in his *Two Thousand Seasons* (Okpewho 17). Instead of eulogizing the legendary figure as the oral Epic does, this novel irredeemably exposes his idiocy and corruption. This myth of Anoa, involves the totality of the black people migrating to their promised land. On their quest they are led by legendary pathfinders Noliwe and Ningome (55) who demonstrated valour and resilience as they led their people to the Promised Land. Armah’s use of Anoa myth enables him to treat Africa’s past with nostalgia, the present with assurance and the future with optimism. Armah thus by the very process of abandoning myth in the traditional sense, makes a more affirmative use of myth in this novel as a means of reviving the dignity of black people undermined by colonialism.

As in *Two Thousand Seasons*, Armah again thrust deeper into African recess to unearth the myth of Osiris, the most significant of Egyptian myths. In Armah’s novel *Osiris Rising*, a novel I dare say “is ingenious and remarkable in African fiction” (Amala 27), it is the Egyptian myth of Isis-Osiris which Armah uses as his organizing design. More than any other African writer, Armah in his *Osiris Rising* resurrects the ancient Egyptian myth and clothes it modern dress. This myth is about the dead god, Osiris, whose wife the goddess; Isis begets him a son from the underworld. Osiris in Egyptian mythology represents the male productive force in nature and Isis, the goddess of the earth as that of the female productive force. The reader must be made to understand that Osiris played a double role; he was regarded as both a god of fertility and the personification of the dead king. According to the Egyptian belief, the king (Pharaoh) at death becomes Osiris, the god of the underworld. In this novel, Armah revisits the issues of slavery thus the Diaspora and Africa. Armah advances his historical vision in *Osiris Rising* by including the effects of the middle passage and the manner in which the Diaspora comes to terms with displacement and reconnection.

In *Osiris Rising*, Armah depicts the life's journey into Africa of the protagonist, Ast, an African American scholar in her quest for her roots. It is gratifying to note however, that Ast upon arrival in Africa finds it a haven. As the narrative informs us:

Here she'd found the beginning of an inner peace she'd only imagined,
Never experienced in America, under this sky with these stars that seemed
To exist not so much above her as around her...she knew she was home. (233)

The implications I believe are worthpondering. This has much to do with the fact that Africa is the primordial "spiritual home" of American Blacks as well as the geographical location of their ethnic origin. Ultimately then, the "roots" of blackness are to be found in Africa.

Central to its mythic discourse are the fragmented minds of Ast, the African American female protagonist and Asar, her African former course mate hankering for the emancipation of the African continent from the cycles of defeat, of collapse and for healing following the devastation of the black people. The novel stresses that common ancient Egyptian ancestry might be redemptive to both Africans and the African Diaspora who return to Africa, (the primordial "spiritual home" of American Blacks), to re-connect with it. Clearly, Ast the African American female protagonist of *Osiris Rising*, true to her name which refers to the "most intelligent divinity" (7) in Egyptian mythology is idealistically created as a character who holds a doctorate in ancient Egyptian studies (8) and is endowed with the qualities of the original Ast, that is of creativity and intelligence. Ast, we are told represents a significant African American engaged both in the quest to recovery of the past (her roots in African) and the creation of a better future for the continent. For she says: "*it does not matter how clear my vision of Africa may be. If I can't connect through work, the vision is useless*" (244). It is precisely for this reason that she tells Asar: "*I know I want to do the kind of work you describe even when you're just talking casually. Innovation, creation, revolution everything necessary to remark Africa. Using, as you say, living essences brought up from hidden roots*" (243).

The relationship of the two protagonists of the novel, Ast and Asar is intertextually designed in the fashioning of *Osiris Rising* in the form of the bond between Ast (Isis) and Asar (Osiris). According to myth, Osiris, a king of Egypt, like Asar found his people plunged in barbarism and taught them law, agriculture, all the arts and crafts, religion and other blessings of civilization (educational advancement), which Asar feels will propel Africans away from the tailored educational system inherited from the Europeans to a rational system which is beneficial to the development of the African continent and which will liberate her productive intelligence. Like Asar, Osiris was murdered by his evil and covetous brother Seth (Set), who tore his body to pieces and scattered the fragments over the earth. Isis found the remains, restored Osiris to life temporarily. Their son Horus, sired by a temporarily regenerated Osiris avenged his father's death by killing Seth and then ascended the throne. Osiris lived on in the underworld as the ruler of the dead, but he was also through Horus, regarded as the source of renewed life. Thus, the idea of divine kingship became established in mythic dogma. As with Osiris, the novel ends with the death of Asar; his wife Ast, like Isis is pregnant for him and like the Osiris-Isis myth, Asar has a posthumous son who will later kill the Deputy Director of security, Seth, the murderer of his father and assume rulership and becomes the source of revitalization for Africa.

I would like to draw attention to a point that might easily be overlooked. The mythical significance of the Osirian myth is closely linked with those expounded by both Jung and Freud. It is common critical knowledge that Jung defined the "archetype" as universal myth, which occurs in somewhat different forms in all human cultures. Witness the example of the Adonis-Tammuz pattern of death and birth, which appears to emerge in parallel form in many cultures. Armah's novel *Osiris Rising* is taken from this archetypal situation. The Adonis-Tammuz pattern of death and birth parallels the Osiris situation in which the hero dies and is continually resurrected, usually in the manner connected with sexual reproduction and renewal of life; symbolic of the natural cycle of death and rebirth. We discover this same pattern in the Osirian myth, symbolized in the death and resurrection of Osiris. As already hinted, Osiris is the male productive force in nature and Isis, the female force. Isis resurrects Osiris to function to implant in her the seed of regeneration.

There is also the touch of the brother-feud, a Freudian situation in which one blood brother kills another out of jealousy. This is manifested in this novel as the Egyptian god-brothers Osiris and Seth (Set); this is depicted in the semblance of the Biblical story of Cain-Abel [Genesis 4:2-16]. In this Bible story, when Abel's sacrificial offering was accepted in preference to Cain's own, Cain slew Abel and thus became the prototype or first murderer.

Conclusion

The core of the literary writer's duty certainly lies in his ability to give readers insights into their cultural values, nature and their relationship to others in the human society through myth-making activity. In this paper, I explored the myth-making process in the context of the contemporary African novel and argued that myth is a dominant structural design of Armah's novelistic endeavour and how these experiences have shaped African literature. The significance of myth to the tone and substance of Armah's novels is crucial to the re-enactment

and affinity between the classical and African mythological pattern projected in his novels. The focus on Armah is due essentially to his consistent use of myth as the mode to transform the African continent. In his use of myth, Armah exhibits underlying possibilities of building new positive ways of life through mythic re-envisioning and his novels present the vision of recreating values that could revitalize African history.

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