

Inflationary and Deflationary Characterization in the Novels of Ayi Kwei Armah

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Abstract

It is a truism of course, that much of the pleasure of contemporary readers comes from the study of characters. For every literary work is an artistic response of the perception of man and his society. The purpose of this paper is to examine how Ayi Kwei Armah employs the inflationary and deflationary technique of characterization which is shown to be his foremost stylistic method in his novels. Armah does so by revealing that his technique is a means of objective correlative, meaningful within the African society. Armah's technique as this study reveals brings to the fore that characters who perpetrate corruption and the destructiveness inherent in the African continent are deflated. And morally upright characters are presented in the inflationary mode.

Introduction

It is common critical knowledge that the basis of fictional writings character creation, perhaps nothing else. Characters not only add depth and complexity to the novels by giving readers perspectives of situations, but keep the readers engaged at all times. Armah is one of the African novelists that has continually captivated his readers for the experimental quality of his literary output (Wright 12, Obiechina 53, Folarin 117, Fraser ix); the yardstick of experimentation in African fiction (Ogungbesan 68). In critical parlance, Armah's richly textured characters contribute to his strength and provide the central point of attention in his novels. According to Gerald Brace, one of the greatest charms about narrative is "The representation and revelation of human behaviour" (78). He also points out that "the creating and animating of characters is the most important job that the author has to do ... without good characters fiction is nothing" (78). That is precisely why literature's primary objective is more frequently with the "portrayal of characters than with action itself" (Anderson 4)

Clearly, literature is a discipline that entails in-depth knowledge to grasp the devices employed by creative writers. In this respect, characterization is one such literary device used for creating characters in a narrative (Harrison 51), including the process of describing the attributes of characters either directly or indirectly, in such a way that they appear credible or real to the readers. According to Abrams and Harpham, characterization is the act of endowing the persons presented in either a dramatic or narrative work with moral, intellectual and dispositional qualities (33). It is the business of assigning behaviours to fictional figures to "bring the story to life" (Udumukwu 39).

Three broad distinctions have been identified as the fundamental method of "characterization" in a narrative: the explicit presentation of characters through direct exposition, the presentation of characters in action and the representation from within a character (Holman 80). There are however other methods of characterization that expand on these three essentials and in this paper, attention will be focused on the inflationary and deflationary techniques which Armah uses to fashion or give shape his novels. It should be recognized from the start that in the context of this study, inflationary characterization basically functions as a means of increasing or exaggerating the size or importance of a character; while deflationary characterization serves to reduce or destroy the self-esteem or confidence of a character. Using these modes of characterization, Armah's characters become memorable in the corpus of African literature. Attention must be drawn also to the fact that the characters that run through the entire length and breadth of Armah's novels are usually a combination of traits, conflicting impulses, motives and are strongly influenced by events in their lives. They have at one time been seen as "generally not whole persons but active and passive senses" (Izevbaye 22); at another time, "are merely functions of a collective or ramble episodically over spans of time in pursuit of racial destinies" (Wright 223); at yet other times, "functioning as archetypal figures who bring the tensions and conflicts in the community to life" (Gikandi 24).

Analysis

Striking in Armah's portrayal of characters in his novels is his tactical move to reduce or deflate characters that perpetuate corruption in the society while at the same time advertising or inflating characters that are morally upright. Characters that are deflated in Armah's novels are nothing new. In fact, Armah magnifies them mainly for the purposes of satiric representation.

In *The Beautiful Ones*, characters that are thus deflated include Amankwa; the timber contractor who tries to bribe the Man. Amankwa is censured even before the readers get the chance to meet him:

In through the door came a belly swathed in *Kente* cloth. The feet beneath the belly dragged themselves and the mass above in little arcs, getting caught in angular ends of heavy cloth. (27)

But the ultimate deflation comes when Amankwa is beastly described: “*The visitor’s mouth was a wolf shape*” and his teeth “*come in rows a second and even a third set pushing impatiently against the first*” (27).

Koomson, the corrupt politician however is described as a “suit” (36), a glittering “shirt” (37), flashing cufflinks (38) gleaming in the dark. A little later in the novel, when we meet Koomson in the Man’s house, Armah deflates Koomson as he shows the readers that: “*Koomson himself looked obviously larger than the chair he was occupying*” (130-131). Interestingly too, the Man, when he shook hands with Koomson “*was again amazed at the flabby softness of the hand. Ideological hands, the hands of revolutionaries leading their people into bold sacrifices*” (131).

But the decisive deflation of the powerful politician Koomson comes when he reduces himself to a person of no importance: “*it is nobody, just the Minister*” (173), Koomson tells the boatman during his escape after the coup. This prompts Derek Wright to comment that Koomson, “*Fallen from fame*”, now “*joins the ranks of the other nameless people*” in the society “*on whose behalf the man is seen to act*” (131).

The tables having been turned after the coup, the influential Koomson degenerates. We witness “*The individual man of power now shivering*” (162), exuding while hiding in the Man’s house “*flatulent fear*”, excremental “*smell waves*” and “*the rich stench of rotten menstrual blood*” (163). In physical motion, Koomson is no longer able to walk. He was “*walking stiffly*” (170), like “*some wooden thing ... like a being for whom the world had ceased to exist*” (170). At this crucial moment, Koomson who appears to be going insane “*walked like a man without a will of his own*” (166).

Koomson as the narrative points out, a man now “*completely doomed*” (175), is forced to escape like a criminal through the shit hole, is symbolically a passage through hell. Ironically this is the same messy latrine that nauseated Koomson during his visit to the Man’s house. Clearly, this escape by Koomson is ultimately the degeneration of the man of power and influence to a beast wallowing in shit and other corrupt matters, “*a signifier*” as Ibitokun puts it of “*moral bankruptcy*” (27). Thus, Koomson becomes an embodiment of “*decayed body wastes*” fit to be “*evacuated down the national latrine hole*” (Wright 131). Being shit himself now, Koomson and shit no doubt merge. On this note Ibitokun writes:

Shit stares at shit. He (Koomson), does not only see it or smell it, he touches it, as if in a reciprocal gesture, the shit embraces him. In Koomson’s ritual of passage is powerfully semiotized the oneness of shit, moral and physical. (27)

Estella, Koomson’s wife however, is reduced to a mass of wig (36), a glittering diamond (131), a piercing voice “*thin as long wire stabbing into the eyes*” (36). While Koomson typifies the thoroughly corrupt political elite, Estella represents the false values of the wives of the elite who indulge in luxurious living. She proudly declares that only European wines are good enough for her. In her own words: “*This local beer does not go with my constitution*” (131). Armah also satirizes the grotesque attempts of Estella to behave like a European. She imitates the colonizers by wearing a wig with a curl which she constantly pushes back into the mass of false hair in the “*manner of the languid woman in the films*” (131).

The Man, the protagonist of *The Beautiful Ones* is presented differently by Armah. The Man displays an acute sense of morality, honesty and uprightness. He is a character whose inner conviction is at variance with the demands of the loved ones or the life style of the larger society who have taken a leap towards the gleam. We are told that in this society where the Man lives, “*he was the only thing that had no way of answering the call of the night*” (47). Though the Man is an idealistic character who thinks much and acts little, inwardly he is intellectually and actively alive in his condemnation of corruption and moral decay of the society. He is a man of unquestionable integrity. The Man, though nameless symbolizes everyman, the only beautiful one among the whole lot. Whether the anonymous Man is the representation of the “*everyman*” of literature or “*atypical*” of his society is infinitely debatable. The outstanding importance of the Man lies in the fact that he is the only saint in the novel. By implication, the Man is the only hope of positive change for the society.

In Armah’s second novel, *Fragments*, Armah’s notion of limited perception, the inability of morally corrupt characters to see beyond surfaces and being uninformed by any guiding moral or intellectual vision is reinforced by Armah’s deflationary technique of characterization. Armah does not merely reduce characters like Brempong to the size of their object of worship: hero-worshipping, the “*cargo mentality*” (160), but Armah physically atomizes them into partial people, into disjointed limbs that seem to function independently of an organizing human consciousness.

In this connection, Brempong is described merely as “*a hand*” whose blackness is cut off by a “*lucent white cuff*” (41), later deflated as a “*single finger*” summoning an “*advancing stewardess*” (41). Eugenia, Brempong’s wife is a “*generous mass of wig protruding above the tall back of a seat*” (41), again as a “*dark*

head crowned” with a mass of wig standing “*upright*” (48). Another character notably deflated is Brempong’s sister. She is presented as a whirling mass of Kente, flashing teeth and “*blubbery buttocks*” (56).

In presenting the character Baako, his treatment is idealistic in a manner. Baako is a character whose sensibilities transcend the rest in the society. He symbolizes the moral idealism that interferes with the selfish materialism the people have taken over from western culture. Baako is detached from the class of the Brempongs, citizens who exploit the masses in order to satisfy the craving and yearnings of family members and friends. Baako is consistently presented as one whose moral standard is too high for the decadent society which has chosen the path of corruption and materialism. He has a strong belief in social justice, fair play and equal rights.

Taking on the issue of characterization in *Why Are We So Blest?*, the contrast is between two races: Black and White. It is pretty obvious that the characterization of the white women in the novel is unfavourable. They are given practically no peculiarity other than a frigidity meant to typify white America’s arid sensibility or alternatively depraved sexual cravings, which correspond to the draining of black sexual energy by white women, as a metaphoric transposition of the West’s devouring of Africa’s material resources and of Europe’s economic rape of the African continent.

In the characterization of the white lady, Aimee Reitsch, she is presented to the readers as an agent of destruction, Rosemary Colmer insists that “Aimee must be one of the most unpleasant women in fiction” (55). Solo refers to her as a “*devouring spirit, more than egotistic*” (116), a daughter of a race of “*destroyers,*” an “*American child of the tribe of death*” and one of the “*daughters of our white death*” (230).

There is hardly anything ennobling in Aimee. She is consistently depicted as a woman incapable of loving. She degenerates to using sexual relationships as fruitless antidotes for boredom. In Africa she sleeps her way through the ruling bourgeois elites --- with the likes of doctor Joromi Longai (143), with Ministers like Aganda Ochieng (144), including the “*head of state*”, Bombo Pakansa (145); at other times with anyone who “*propositioned*” her (144).

The white woman, Mrs Jefferson on her part engages in sexual relationship with Modin to fulfil her fantasy of sleeping with a black man. Accordingly she seduces him (129) and initiates all the sexual contacts. Naita addresses Mrs Jefferson as a “*horny white bitch*” (134). In Modin’s account, she would like to “*spend the rest of her life making love*” (133).

In the light of the foregoing, Modin’s relationships with these white women depict the disposition of blacks to whites as Africa’s deadly molestation by the West. These 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). Thus, frigid white women offer themselves to Modin expecting him to liberate them from their sexual clogs; nymphomaniac white women throw themselves at him craving his endless sexual vigour. Basically, these white women manipulate Modin as “sex object”. He becomes the exotic rarity needed to titillate their jaded sexual appetites. As Modin makes clear: “*I was another rare creature, an African vehicle to help them reach the strange destinations of their souls*” (167).

One more stand relevant to Modin’s sexual relationships 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. To this, Solo clearly points out that Africans: “*use the accumulated energy within our black selves to do work of importance to their white selves*” (208). Continuing Solo insists that “*of what other use have Africa’s tremendous energies been these many centuries but to serve the lusts of whites*” (208).

On the other side of the racial divide, the African American lady Naita is presented differently. She is idealistically presented: “*Naked*”, Modin tells us “*Naita is perfect*” (122). Love making with Naita is a complete harmony. Unlike the white women, Naita is in total control. Naita turns out to be an affectionate and skilful lover: “*No hands could ever imitate that gentleness of feeling. The sweeting filled my body, my head*” (123), Modin intimates us.

In *Two Thousand Seasons*, in presenting the characters of the Arabs and Europeans “whites” all, Armah uses the deflationary technique of characterization. For there is hardly anything ennobling in them. They are depicted as naturally evil and destructive. A group of alien forces, which have caused Africans, to go against themselves and therefore progress on a “*journey into their killer’s desire*” (2).

Regarding the European “*destroyers*” they are described first as “*monsters*”, soulless brigands (78), whose way is “*ashen death*” (xi). Then we are told that they are “*liars*” and “*pretenders*” as well who claim that they have come to Africa “*just to do us good*” (98). Pretending to be traders, the aim of these European “*destroyers*” is to profit from the schisms of the Anoa people of this African society. The Europeans who came to Africa were not merely predators but the armed colonial European powers, and Armah is certain: “*there is nothing white men will not do to satisfy their greed*” (78). Monstrous indeed is the greed of these white destroyers, boundless their avarice. The white “*destroyers*” determined only of the total annihilation of Africans, demanded for land, mineral resources, hides and skins as well as slaves (82-83). When Africans refused, the

result was disastrous. For the white “destroyers” “*sent flaming iron flying into ... their homes killing three hundred human beings in one night alone*” (99). At one time the white men had “*killed half the people of the town*” (177).

Among the white “destroyers” are missionaries too, with what the narrator perceives as a different poisonous religion. These white “destroyers” are presented as “*killers who from the sea came holding death of the body in their right, the mind’s annihilation in their left shrieking fables of a white god and a son unconceived, exemplar of their proffered, senseless suffering*” (2). Thus, Armah primarily depicts the Africans rejecting the foreign values of Islamism and Christianity, which are seen as institutions of cultural colonialism which have led the Africans into forgetting “the way” by discarding African values as they seek to identify with the enemies. Not surprisingly, one African Moslem is scorned for taking an Arab name, Abdallah, a name which signifies he was a slave of a “*slave-owning god*” (36). In his rejection of the white man’s Christianity, Isanusi says:

They say it would be reward enough when we have lost our way
completely, lost even our names, when you will call your brother
not Olu but John not Kofi but Paul, and our sister will no longer be
Ama, Naita... but creatures called Cecilia, Esther. (83)

Clearly, Armah sees Christianity and Islamism as “*myth*”, an invented fable “*a child would laugh at*” (3). Regarding these white invaders, the narrative voice tells us that: “*the white predators, the white destroyers came assailing us with the maddening loudness of their shrieking theologies*” (3). For Armah, the white men brought fables and deceived Africans with them in an attempt to exterminate the people and to subject them to perpetual slavery --- physically and mentally.

Another group presented through the deflationary mode are the Arab “predators”. The first impression for the readers is in the use of the derogatory term “predator” which denotes the act of one using weaker people for one’s own financial or sexual advantage. In the light of this, their name alone betrays their heinous image. They are harbingers of death who delight in the destruction of others. Thus, one is not surprised that Armah sketches them in a negative way.

The Arabs are consistently presented as selfish, lazy, greedy, simpletons, lacking in enterprise. The narrative points out that these “predators”:

plant nothing. They know but one harvest: rape. The work of nature
they leave to others.... It is their vocation. To fling themselves upon
the cultivator and fruit ... Robbery with force: that is the predators’
road.(40).

True enough, the Arab way was the way of annihilation, of complete destruction of all that was good, beneficial and creative. For them:

Force is goodness. Fraud they call intelligence...in their communication
there was no respect, for them woman is ... a thing deflated to fill each
strutting mediocre man, with spurious, weightless sense of worth. They
know but one manner of relation ... violence ... rape... to kill the one to
carryoff the other. (40)

To demonstrate the depraved nature of the “predators” Armah cast his aspersions on them, presenting them as pleasure seeking idiots and ruthless sex maniacs. They are lecherous, gluttons and drunks (21-23). Yet, they seek to convert people to the worship of their “*slave-owning god*” (36). The narrative tells us:

Came a Rhamadan, the predators’ season of hypocritical
self-denial ... the predators again threw themselves into their
accustomed orgies of food, of drugs and of sex. (20)

In an absolute sense then, the sexual obsessions of these Arabs are brought to the fore. Indeed in this group are Hassan “the syphilitic”(21) whose sexual perversion must be unequalled in fiction. For he lived every day to examine “*some new carnal pleasure*” (23), the narrative remarks. Hussein, whose tongue is his truest pathfinder to women genitals (21). Then Faisal, the homosexual whosang “*demented Arab praise song to black bodies*” (22). Apparently, these Arabs are specifically cited as among the most sexually notorious. It also hints squarely at their moral decadence. More ominous is the extent to which they subjected the women of “the way” to varied sexual humiliations, using them as mere “*things*”, “*turning them into animals for their pleasures*” (34).

Regarding the askaris and the zombis, another group presented in the deflationary mode, Armah describes them as black men who like the African kings betrayed their people for the white man’s shiny gifts (81). Pathetically called the “*white desert-men’s dogs*” (29), they become the willing servants and often very effective tools of the Arabs. They are also described as “*soulless*” beings, “*lost souls*”, and “*demented men*” (28).

The point to be observed of course is that in Armah’s portrayal of the “destroyers” of “the way”, the African rulers are the worst of the lot. Armah has nothing but disdain for African leadership of the colonial era. They are described as “*the hollow ones, the stupid ones, the uncreative ones*” (74), the likes of Koranche,

Kamuzu and others, names Armah sees as “*corrosive*” (64), because they savour of betrayal, hatred and folly. These black rulers infatuated by white men behave like them ---selfish, parasites, buffoons, murderers and deceivers. Assuredly, even: “*The quietest king, the gentlest leader of the mystified*”, Armah tells us “*is criminal beyond the exercise of any comparison*” (64).

Of Koranche, he is presented unfavourably to the reader. He appears as a superfluously retarded child, the slowest of all children of his time (66). He grows to become a “*fool among fools*” (67). Koranche is the worst possible alternative to any normal human being, for he is described as “*a dead spirit*” (67). He is deflated further as a man of “*formidable gift*” with “*a genius for obliterating the proofs of other people’s superiority to him*” (67). As king, Koranche is linked to the onset of slavery in Africa (74). He epitomizes “*evil, greed, betrayal, crass materialism and viciousness*” (196).

In a general sense, Koranche’s wickedness is said to express itself in the fatness of his body. One is aware that with Idawa, Koranche was a “*fat worm of a man*”. She also deflates Koranche when she says of him, “*a fat body was always the house of a rotten soul*” (103). The hardest blow is struck at the image of Koranche when he is christened, “*He – whose – penis – is – hidden – from – himself*” (103).

Kamuzu is yet another African leader branded vicious. He is presented as a man of “*divided soul*” (159). Kamuzu is sketched out as a microcosm of many post-colonial rulers who, empty of ideology or suffering from a “*poverty of vision*” (168), are slaves to the colonial mentality. Kamuzu like these African rulers does not delay to step into the white man’s shoes and to carry on with the political and social systems inherited from the colonial era, for: “*power*”, he informed us, “*was a thing always to be taken as it was found, just whichever way it was found ... we should not be hesitant to step into the white people’s shoes*” (172).

Being hollow, Kamuzu typifies the notorious African rulers who glory in praise and titles. In the narrator’s reflection: “*what spurious praise name did we not invent to lull Kamuzu’s buffoon spirit?*” (171). The narrator runs down a litany of praise names: “*Osagyefor!, Kantamanto!, Kabiyesi!, Sese!, Mwenyenguvu!, Otumfuol!*” (171). Continuing, the narrator emphasizes that “*Dishonest words are the food of rotten spirits*” (171).

The wife of Brandford George Bentum is quite another matter. She is frightfully negative: “*an apparition exactly like a ghost*” (119). This “*dry*” and “*ghostly figure*” is “*thrust on*” (91) Bentum the stooge as wife for his fidelity to the white “*destroyers*”. In physical motion, Bentum’s white wife moves with “*a disjointed severe, jerky walk*” (119). What is more, she is described as and her figure “*the shape itself of loneliness*” (119). The ultimate deflation comes when the reader is told that her body is “*so dead*” that she could never “*feel her husband enter her*” (91).

It must be borne in mind as attention is turned to the “*conservators*” of “*the way*” that these characters, have been presented by Armah in the inflationary mode. Isanusi the revolutionary leader of the twenty young “*freedom fighters*” is described as the “*Sweetest*” and “*most truthful*” (78) elocutionist. Later in the novel, we are told that he is the “*best spokesman*”; beyond that “*truth*” was said to be “*his food*” (81). His greatest desire we are informed is “*to keep the knowledge of our way, the way from destruction: to bring it back to an oblivious people, all else failing, as least as remembrance; he whose highest hope it was to live the way as purpose*” (89).

The revolutionary youths in *Two Thousand seasons* are treated superbly and idealistically. These youths stand out in their mastery of the different arts and skills of their people. They are “*experts in the arts of protection*” skilled at farming, hunting, “*the healing arts*” and so on (85). Abena is the militant in this group. Small wonder then, that she on discovering Isanusi’s death “*shot the king Koranche dead*” (196). Interestingly too, it was “*the beauty of Abena’s body that made the king wish to set her apart for his son*” (90), Bentum. Abena reiterates the underlying principle of communalism, group spirit and selfless sacrifice when she declares: “*there is no self to save apart from all of us*” (111).

Beyond the welfare of the community, their loyalty and commitment to the search of “*the way*”, Abena and her group exhibit various traits. Anoa is seen as the embodiment of “*the way*”, its seer and visionary par excellence. It was Anoa who prophesied the “*two thousand seasons*” of Africa’s “*enslavement*” (17). As the narrator reveals, Anoa is distinguished by her insights even as a child: “*an intensity of hearing, a clarity of vision and a sharpness of feeling marked her character*” (14). What is more, Anoa was not only “*slender as a fawn stalk*”; in fact it was said her “*skin could speak of depths*” (15). Of Ajoa too, in *The Healers*, her skin had that “*darkness that was a promise of inexhaustible depth*” (63).

In turning to Idawa, the black woman of Koranche’s lust (170), we are told she shows her boldness by refusing Koranche as a suitor (70). Idawa is described as a woman of great beauty with “*no counterpointing blemish*” for “*there was nothing wasted in her shaping*” (70), Her skin is “*perfect*”; her colour “*uninterfered with night’s own blackness*” of her movement, when seen from afar: “*her shape in motion told the looker here was co-ordination free, unforced*” (70).

In the novel *The Healers*, Armah presents manipulative characters in the deflationary mode. Ababio is first presented to the reader as an “*intruder*” (2); then Armah deflates Ababio as he shows the reader how ugly and physically disproportioned Ababio is. Armah tells us Ababio is “*short and bald*” (12) of physical motion,

Ababio moved gracefully (12) at another time he is seen “*groping unsteadily on his undeveloped legs*” (13), and yet at other times “*He waddled*” (14). Ababio we are told was not only “*fat*”, but what is more, “*he had overwhelmed his natural frame with fat and now looked like a deformed sphere balanced unsteadily on thin legs*” (12).

In turning attention to Buntui, Ababio’s henchman, we are told he is a “*giant*” (15 (9). If anything, Buntui’s “*ugliness*” stands out. He moves “*awkwardly*” (14). He was not “*merely huge*”, but his muscles “*pushed hard against the skin as if the covering it provided were not sufficient*”, his eyes were “*pig-like*” (9). But the ultimate deflation comes when we are told that “*Buntui has a huge body, and such a tiny brain to control it*” (17). Time and again Armah shows Buntui’s dumbness. There is no gain saying here that Buntui is one of Armah’s dumbest characters. Acting true to type, it is this brutal, mindless and brainless giant Buntui that Ababio employs to murder prince Appia.

The characters in *The Healers*, who act in inspiring ways, are presented differently –in the inflationary mode. In Densu, the protagonist of this novel, Armah has sketched a character that is idealistic. He has all the necessary qualifications. He is brave, strong, courageous, intelligent, honest, persevering, excelling at most sporting activities. This prompts Bernth Lindfors to remark that Densu is without the “*tinest flaw in his character*” (92). Densu is presented as “*tall*”, “*handsome*” and of a “*slender*” build. His skin was “*black with a suggestion of depth and coolness in its blackness*”, his motion is “*gentle*” and he is “*perfectly*” shaped (10).

In *Osiris Rising*, intellectuals like Asar and Ast who are working for positive change in Africa, are presented in the inflationary mode; whereas characters like Seth who are betraying these ideals, are depicted in the deflationary mode. With Seth, his manner of presentation appears superficially different. Besides having “*a doctorate in criminology*” (76), Seth we are informed is the chief of the nation’s security (28). The first impression of Seth conveyed to the reader is a favourable one. He is presented as a man completely in charge, an efficient coordinator of his security men at the airport. From the headquarters he sets the speedy motion of Ast’s interrogation. He had ordered “*Car 214 to take*” Ast “*with two dispatch riders*” (19), to “*reach him at HQ at top speed*” (20).

Then Armah deflates Seth when he shows the reader that Seth is a massive “*body*” of “*tight wads of meat*” that is “*monstrously solid*”. Additionally, we are told he has a “*massive face*” connected to “*over developed jaws*” on top of a “*short neck*” (27). When Seth degenerates to assaulting Ast, he is further deflated. The narrative tells us Seth is deformed: “*the scrotum loose and raggedy, one ball way lower than its brother*” (63). The ultimate deflation comes when we are told that “*Hot*” as Seth’s sensuous desires he “*had no erection*” (63). We are told on a number of occasions, he attempts to rape Ast. Interestingly, on one of such occasions, we are shown that his syphilitic condition incapacitates him during his rape attempt. That was when Ast saw “*liquid oozing from the DD’s limp penis, a thick, yellow pus*” (64).

As will become evident, the characters that will follow are treated idealistically. We turn our attention first to Ast, the African American female protagonist of *Osiris Rising*. Ast true to her name which refers to the “*most intelligent divinity*” (7) in Egyptian mythology is created as a character who holds a doctorate in Ancient Egyptian studies (8) and is endowed with the qualities of the original Ast, this is of creativity and intelligence.

Of her characterization, Ast is congenial to the strategy of the harbingers of intellectual change in the novel. By her admission to “*forward intellectual movement*” (188) in Africa, she thus becomes the point of convergence of the intellectuals who reject the “*ready made –syllabuses, the whole educational system*” (189) inherited from the Europeans.

In turning our attention to Asar, we are told he is an outstanding, intelligent and highly talented person (75). He is a Ph.D. holder in “*literature*” (191), whose dream is of a “*unified Africa*” (61). As an intellectual with a prophetic vision, he is working for the future change of the African society (115). Accordingly Asar mobilizes the intellectuals into a revolutionary force for the overthrow of the corrupt and inefficient system (204).

Of characterization in *KMT: In the House of Life*, the duality is between the “*keepers*” and “*sharers*” of the authentic knowledge of African history (with particular focus on Egyptian civilization), the “*sharers*” as the narrator makes clear are “*those who argued for spreading the growing knowledge*” (265), keeping alive the tradition of putting knowledge at the service of all members of the community, without discrimination. While the “*keepers*” are those “*anxious to keep knowledge within the circle of privileged knowers*” (265). Armah presents the “*keepers*” in a manner of speaking, as persons hypnotized by the power of the status quo. They use the power of their knowledge to raise themselves “*above a life of hard labour, into a life of comfort*” (266).

For their personal enrichment these “*keepers*” opted to mystify their ruling principle by using religion to hold sway over the people. To the “*keepers*”, “*Great faith supports great lies. The greatest religion must be found on the greatest lie*” (268). Accordingly the “*keepers*” declare “*The gods told us what we know. Listen to us, obey the king, and the gods will look after you*” (270). “*Ignore us,*” the “*keepers*” threatened the people “*disobey the king, and your life will become everlasting pain*” (270). In this way, the “*keepers*” “*organize spectacular ceremonies to make living under the gods feel good*” (268). Beyond that the “*keepers*” used these ceremonies as

instrument of entrapment and deception. The repeated ritual celebrations become “occasions on which the people will witness the magic” of the “keepers” “powers” (282).

The “sharers” based on Armah’s presentation are idealized preservers of African (Egyptian) civilization. These are groups of committed scholars and intellectuals whose “desire” is to expose the truth about the interior life of a people ignorant about their history. For as they see it, it is up to Africans to “find out what got buried” (170). The “Sharers” also make reference to the fact that a society built on lies and ignorance as the “keepers” are creating will not prosper, for the society will remain “practically motionless” (280). “The wider knowledge is spread, the “sharers” point out, “The greater the benefit for everyone” (266).

In the light of the foregoing, the narrator thus insists that “The time has come ... to return to the telling of truth” of “our lost narrative” (189), which history “ancient as the whole of humanity, was reduced by fraud and violence to a little fabricated story of mere centuries” (188). Consequently, all the information about “ancient kmt” (100) or ancient Egypt, the nitty gritty of who the ancient Egyptians really were, their outstanding contributions to the development of world civilization is derived from “the original hieroglyphic text” (209) recorded by the Egyptian scribes, the “scribes of the companions” (215) or “sharers” as this novel often refers to them.

Evidently then, it is through the recordings of these “sharers” that we become aware that Africans accomplished so much before her contact with the Europeans. As the narrator intimates us, ancient Greek scholars as Herodotus (49) and Aristotle (50), authenticate the blackness of ancient Egyptians. Basically too, the ancient Egyptians see themselves as black and consider their culture and art as black (13). The important point to note is that Europeans learnt from Africans while attempting to undermine African civilization. Very noticeable is the fact that Egypt is set up as the mother of civilization from which Europe borrowed. As the narrative tells us ancient Greek “philosophers” say “they’d trained in Egypt, describing the inhabitants” as “beautiful, and of deep black colour” and called the “priesthood on this continent a profound source of knowledge” (112).

Conclusion

As a writer who has mastered the tools of his trade, Armah employs various strategies of characterization in creating and developing his characters. The hallmark of Armah’s literary artistry is his ability to create compelling characters that are silhouetted against the institutions, traditions and general behaviours of his culture and age. Of characterization, this work has shown that Armah employs the inflationary and deflationary technique which is shown to be Armah’s foremost stylistic method in his novels. Armah does so by revealing that his technique is a means of objective correlative, meaningful within the African society. Characters who perpetrate corruption in the society are deflated and morally upright characters are presented in the inflationary mode. In this way, Armah positions the readers to like or dislike his characters by employing the inflationary and deflationary technique, thus increasing the enjoyment of his novels, while bringing his intentions to the fore more completely. Using these modes of characterization, Armah’s characters undoubtedly become unforgettable in the corpus of African literature.

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