CHAPTER IV

WHY ARE WE SO BLEST?:
A Promethean Quest in an African Context

After the publication of his first two novels, The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born and Fragments, Ayi Kwei Armah received much criticism from his country men who were offended at the picture he presented of life in post-Independent Ghana. He depicted an African waste land where corruption in the government was rampant and where the African intellectual, educated abroad, felt totally out of place and frustrated to the point of rage or despair because of his inability to make any change in the system. Although Armah's criticism was specifically aimed at the sterility of contemporary Ghanaian life, indirectly it pointed away from Africa especially at western commercialism and neo-colonialism. Thus it seemed inevitable that it would only be a matter of time before this most talented African novelist would directly attack his anger at the source – the West, and especially the United States – where Armah received much of his higher education. This expectation is confirmed in many ways in his third and most disturbing novel, Why Are We So Blest? If in The Beautiful Ones and Fragments the narrative voice is singularly focussed with rare intensity, here in Why Are We So
Blest? the narrative voice is variously diffused. According to Robert Fraser, “In contrast with Armah's previous novels, Why Are We So Blest? moves from the tight circle of largely Ghanaian concern to embrace a world view, a total vision of the contemporary world whose limits of reference are defined as America, the Muslim Maghreb and Sub-Saharan Africa.”

The interpreters of the novel's themes, who move between the limits of America, Muslim Maghreb, and Sub-Saharan Africa are three: Solo, a failed revolutionary who now works as a freelance translator in Algiers; Modin Dofu, a Ghanaian who has recently dropped out of Harvard degree programme, and his girl friend, Aimee Reitsch, a white American, whose ill-defined commitment to the “revolution” has likewise caused her to abandon her own studies at Radcliff. The interplay of these personalities gives rise to the predominant theme of the book because Why Are We So Blest? marks the point at which Armah has escaped from his earlier intense concentration on the lonely artist figure trapped by the compulsions and inhibitions of his own ego and moved towards the problem of evolving a notion of communal redemption.

Why Are We So Blest? can be considered as the most pessimistic novel for in The Beautyful Ones and Fragments, at least a ray of hope for betterment is expressed through one or the other
characters. But in Why Are We So Blest? nowhere in the novel do we find such a tendency. Various versions of possible salvation are preferred in the book; none is finally compelling. There is some sign also, in at least two of the central characters, of a retention of the suffering protagonist, and the novel closes on an elegiac note of loneliness. The narrative presents African intellectuals and artists again as saviours, but now their failure as saviours is complete. In Derek Wright's words, "the community's would be revolutionary saviors are revealed as paralysed and emasculated by the luxuries of westernized exile."

Modin, a lonely African studying in the United States and disillusioned with western culture, falls in love with Aimee, a white American girl. She is neurotically frigid and yet at the same time sexually aggressive. Her uncle was, she discovers, a soldier who had taken part in massacres in colonial Africa. She conceives of sex in racist and sadistic terms. She approaches sexual satisfaction by concentrating on a fantasy in which she is the wife of a colonial officer seducing her servant-boy Mwangi while expecting her husband's return from the bush at any moment. Sometimes she imagines watching her husband aiming a gun at Mwangi's head through the window as they make love. Modin, despite his knowledge of Aimee's origin and her fantasies, cannot overcome his love for her. They both travel to Africa to take part in the liberation struggle in Congheria.
Aimee exhibits an immense desire to be a "revolutionary". At the end of the novel she acts out a version of her fantasy in grim reality. A group of French men tie Modin to their car, then rape Aimee one by one, and cut off the end of Modin's penis. They leave him to die while returning her to "civilization". She uses the "bourgeois money" which she had before refused on principle to touch to escape back to Denver.

As far as the structural patterns are concerned, Why Are We So Blest? is more complex than Fragments. Although the main action takes place in North Africa, lengthy sections of the narrative use flashback to record the main character's higher education in Cambridge. Not only does the narrative leap forward and backward in time, but employs three narrators as well as the central authorial voice. Each of the three main characters is given a chance to explain his/her predicament. Armah delegates much of his narrative and explicative function to Solo with whose weary view of things the authorial consciousness ultimately merges. The narrative of the novel is unfolded alternately, though not in a sequential order, from the point of view of Solo, Modin, and Aimee. One of the most outstanding features of the novel is that Armah attempts to elevate this case-history to the level of a universal metaphor of relations between white and black.
In *Why Are We So Blest?* the social and psychological factors which demarcate the distinction between the white and the black, the oppressor and the oppressed are portrayed in terms of husband-mistress relationship. Modin's fatal attraction for his white mistress Aimee is presented in terms of Africa's contact with Europe which had left a debilitating impact on the native mind and which is at the back of their psyche.

The entire story of *Why Are We So Blest?* comes to us through Solo Nkonnam either in his own words or through passages from the diaries of Modin and Aimee edited by him. Solo's narrative is punctuated with commentaries on the past, present, and future of Africa, the different slices of which are connected by a sense of gloom. Solo is a brilliant narrative device. As a would-be revolutionary who has travelled the same road as Modin, he is ideally placed to reinforce and generalize the lessons of Africa's fate. In the case of Modin, Solo's comments would be worth having. There is a considerable empathy between these two tortured figures and some similarity of temperament. The empathy is largely evidenced by Solo's sympathetic reading of Dofu's diaries at a time when he is already helpless to intervene. However, in his reminiscences he establishes a considerable imaginative rapport with his Ghanaian acquaintance. In *Fragments* the core of the work was the rapport between Baako and his grandmother. In this work it is between Solo and the younger Modin, a
classic case of unrequited love. They hardly speak to each other face to face, since Aimee's watchful jealousy comes like a wall between them. But when Solo gets his hands on Dofu's journal, through his empathic reading of it their eerie dialogue commences.

These three central characters meet in a North African capital called Laccryville, which is quite obviously meant to be taken for Algiers, but called for convenience here Congheria. These three are drawn to this spot because it provides the frame for their individual quests, each seeking in the capital city of independent Algeria something that elsewhere they have lost sight of. For Solo, Algeria is frankly a refuge. He is a refugee from one of the Portuguese territories. He has fled here for safety after an abortive attempt to abet the guerilla forces in his own country. Modin Dofu, a gentle, soft-mannered Ghanaian, and Aimee, his lean and restless white American girl friend, enter into the black environment of Laccryville with the intention of joining the revolution. Solo and Modin most vitally focus on the major thematic interest, namely, the twin problems of national reconstruction and the unbridgeable gulf between the masses and the elite. Aimee provides yet another aspect, that is the Eurocentric dimension to the polemics of narrative.

The significantly named Solo is "a ghost, wandering about the face of the earth", without a contact with the life about him(11). He is
a translator in the people's union of Congheria, seat of the government in exile. He carries with him the twin failure of his own past and the burden of African past. His participation in the revolutionary struggle leaves him with strong memories of failure and inadequacy on the one hand and desolation on the other. "Once full of love for his people and the revolution" (48), he has come to see his society as full of people "already empty of their souls, incapable of flight and not yet buried" (113) and the revolution as so many "cracked promises and maimed bodies of lost believers" (13). Whether his failure was one of nerve or of commitment is not explained. In either case it has left him with a vast overload of guilt and a general sense of himself as an ideological neuter:

We are easy to recognize. Our personalities are battlefields on which our subjective demands meet the harsher demands of life and time. While the battle goes on we are crippled by inactivity and depression. And the battle goes on seemingly for ever. I know. I; we have so little confidence left that I spend my time asking myself whether it is not only the arrogant fool who would want to offer truthful statements to people who must live. It is this lack of confidence which deepens into the despair of the guilty whenever I go out without first taking care to hide myself from the truths outside. (14-15)
Although the details of Solo’s participation in the struggle and the reasons for his failure are not specified, we come to realize through the bits and pieces of his reminiscences that he opted out of the revolution because of his reluctance “to pretend.” From his realization it can be safely deduced that something went wrong not with Solo’s participation but with the nature and orientation of the struggle itself. Solo sadly recalls:

To live well now means to develop as highly as possible the ability to do one thing while saying, and preferably also thinking, another thing entirely. The successful lives are those with entrails hard enough to bear the contradiction and to thrive on it. Then there are those who for some explicable reason want to bring what they do and what is done around them into the same territory as what they think and what they dream. These are the losers, life’s failures. (14)

Success, even in these circumstances, depended on pretension and he preferred to remain a loser, “life’s failure.” The same corrupting and hypocritical influences that characterize the revolutionary struggle are perpetuated in post-Independence African context and Solo considers himself a misfit in this sordid scheme of things. He stands apart and says: “I am surrounded by this ugliness, insistent and grim, and yet the only occupation I desire is with beautiful truths. When I have had a day’s fill of looking at what goes on, I wonder if anything exists that
is at the same time both beautiful and true” (15). Like the man in The Beautiful Ones, Solo refuses to compromise on basic values he cherishes most and is consequently faced with the prospect of being labelled as a loser. Since he cannot deceive himself as others do he is left with no goal but “to fill time, to survive emptiness” (232). He finds himself incapable of the creativity of writing and sticks with his safer translations. He says:

To write would have required the knowledge that what I write is of some value and is not merely the dishonest exercise of a mind which for some reason does not occupy itself with necessary things. I do not have this conviction. (12)

Solo spends his time in trivial pursuits, occasional bursts of translating, and in hanging around the offices of the people's union of Congheria where he seems to have the status of an affectionately regarded invalid, to be tolerated but not trusted.

The post-war scenario is presented in the predicament of the children who have been rendered fatherless. Solo watches orphans and beggars in the streets and is engulfed by a sense of guilt. The children now can speak about the death of their fathers. He wonders how they could have “understood death and learned to live with it as part of life” (16). At the beginning of the novel, Solo's perpetual remorse drives him to a state of mental breakdown and he is admitted to hospital. In
the hospital library he meets a one legged militant who took part in the revolution. The questions of the one-legged man – “Who gained? Who won?” underlines the reasons for the failure of the struggle. The questions prompt Solo to draw a diagram of a vehicle moving upwards:

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

The truck represents society while the fuel it consumes to move forward is like the sacrifice of the militants. He explains that the fuel, in the process of providing energy to the vehicle, has consumed itself, suggesting that the persons who fought for independence gain nothing. Once again, Armah would seem to be probing beneath the surface of corruption and he is of the view that it is the underlying cause for disillusionment. The post-revolutionary disillusionment is tellingly brought out in the running of the People’s Union of Congheria itself. Jeorge Manuel and Estban Ngulo run the office whom Solo initially treats as “brothers co-operating in the long fight.” But he soon discovers the division that exists between the two – Ngulo will remain a clerk while Jorge Manuel, the Foreign Minister of the government in exile, would usurp the credit and sweetness of their country’s freedom.
Thus, he could only find “inequalities within the struggle to end inequality.” The people are content with their master’s “hypocritical honors” and the place itself is filled with “peace indistinguishable from triviality”. The sense of failure introduced early in the novel is sustained throughout which in turn leads to the motif of death and a physical enactment of the death-crescendo in the last pages of the novel. Modin writes:

I am fated to undergo some form of death. There is no sanctuary. I have known periods of death where I have shut myself off from the world. There is loneliness that is a kind of death. (159)

For Modin, “the force for our own death is within us. We have swallowed the wish for our destruction,” in a world which is “a graveyard for my spirit. Not mine alone. Ours” (159). To make matters worse, Modin has a suicidal proclivity to get involved in friendships and situations that lead to nothing but frustrations, physical pain, and even death.

I see my manic pushes to the point of danger clearly. I have a hidden despair from my self, but lived it. Each push was another point in a search for self-annihilation I have wanted to destroy myself, but so well hidden has the desire for suicide been, its temptations have always looked like extreme pleasure offered, taken, tested. (158)
Solo can both understand Modin's need to involve himself in revolutionary activity and anticipate the course of his disillusionment. He perceives that Modin develops illusions about the nature of the revolutionary struggle in which he is seeking to participate. He is uneasy about Modin's attachment to the American girl, Aimee. Because, for Solo, Modin's love for his hysterically demanding mistress is a symptom of fatal weakness. He confirms this not simply by the contact and growth of the relationship with America as evidenced by Modin's journals which are in his possession. For he has access, not only to Modin's diary, but to the disjointed, histrionic notes that Aimee herself has collected over the same period. Extracts from both these are interpolated into Solo's own monologue which forms the framework of the narrative. And from these jottings Solo is able to piece together bit by bit the path of Modin's and Aimee's mutual destruction and the neurotic demands of one exploiting ruthlessly the loving kindness of the other.

In *Why Are We So Blest?* once again Armah traces the impact of alienation and isolation on the mind of the individuals who have their education outside their native country. Modin is an isolated individual in America. Like Baako he remains an alienated student and cannot identify himself with the alien culture. His problem is confounded by his inability to communicate with his own people back at home. His education proves to be a hurdle in the process of his
identification with his people. He feels the utter alienation of himself from his people and his past:

I feared the urging to isolate myself to cut myself off from where I came from, forget my origins and make the thinly glided present all my history.

The urging was seductive because my own pain and the social pain of being an African at a time like this repelled the young mind fleeing in search of a calmer life. The ease of the present reinforced the repulsion of the past, making the present, offered identity far easier to accept. (162)

As a student in Portugal, Solo also experienced the same kind of alienation as Modin and he also sees himself as the “rejected spume.... Split from the parent water, cut off from the current of Black history, unwilling and unable to return to the stream” (11).

Modin tries to overcome his isolation but he could not do it because of his presence among whites. The white scholars attempt to make him feel “all special on account of being with them” (121). They call him “unique” and “unusually intelligent” which in fact increases his sense of alienation. From the moment of his arrival in the States, Modin's clear-sighted intelligence perceives the implications of his training with great insight. From the beginning he is made to feel that the clue to his acceptance lies not in the fact that he is able but that he is an intelligent African, something hardly to be thought of. Take for
instance the welcoming remarks of Mr. Oppenhardt, Chairman of the Committee of the foundation which funds Modin's scholarship:

'Its because of your unusual intelligence that you're here,’ Mr. Oppenhardt continued. There was silence, and he looked happier. 'Don't ever apologize for that. You have earned everything you've got. I hope you will continue to earn even more, by recognizing the special intelligence that has set you apart, and never hesitating to use it'. (120)

Despite Modin's continuing protests, the Committee persists in regarding him as some kind of performing animal. It is in vain that he counters this argument by mentioning that his friends back home are every bit as gifted as he. For Oppenhardt and his kind, Modin's intelligence is unusual, not because he has proved himself smarter than his classmates, but because they regard intelligence is the requirement and hence must applaud the efforts of anybody who has been able to enter the United States. When Oppenhardt is all praise for his academic record and his bright future in America, Modin asks himself: "Why see through Oppenhardt and let Harvard remain opaque to me?" (160). The rejection of this manifest destruction should have taken place early in his academic career in America for in due course the nagging question of identity makes him in effect a double exile. He is unable to translate his ideology into action nor he can
remain attached to where he is best known by his colour and race and
not through his individuality. He rejects a scholarship offered on these
humiliating grounds, for to accept the money would be to accept the
assumption underlying it. When Oppenhardt says, “With your
intelligence, you'll grow in the best company” (161), Modin is filled
with angry but he can not give an answer. He silently expresses his
hatred:

To him the best company was European, white. I
had no answer for him then, only silence, and
inside me just the silent knowledge I could not like
this man. I rejected him, but he was not the whole
of what I should have rejected, I seem unable to
think of breaking away from our destroyers.

What a farce, scholarships! That blood money
never went to any of us for our intelligence. It was
always payment for obedience. BEFORE THE
WHITEMEN CAME. TEN pages of blood and
slavery. THE WHITEMAN COMES. ENGLISH
TENMENT CIVILIATION, PROGRESS,
development - any of the whiteman's words
for the white man's rule. It takes obedience, not
intelligence, to accept that as knowledge. (161)

Somewhere between Solo and Modin we get the most vivid novel form
account ever given of what it is that European education does to the
African. Modin's diary instalments are simply and consistently
uncompromising on the fact that European education is calculated
either to destroy the African or to beat him into a pathetic end in the neo-colonial oppression of the Black collective self. He says:

The search for knowledge should not be synonymous with increasing alienation and loneliness. In our particular circumstances it is so. It has been planned that way. (32)

That the Black student even returns home only “changed” is a miracle when we realize that:

Knowledge about the world we live in is the property of the alien because the alien has conquered us. The thirst for knowledge therefore becomes perverted into the desire for getting close to the alien, getting out of the self. Result: loneliness as a way of life. (32-33)

Modin begins to realize that his life is totally a creation of the whites and that his independent identity is an illusion. He is dominated economically, socially, and culturally. He sees himself as like the factors of the colonial period, black employees of the whites who handled black slaves for them. As an educated modern Black spirited away by an arbitrary scholarship from his own culture, he is being trained to plunder his own people on behalf of his masters, as did his factor predecessors. In a late passage Modin compares the lot of these people to the ‘factors’ or slave-minders who in earlier centuries
exercised control over their own people in the name of the white slave-trader:

Factors then, scholarship holders, B.As, M.As, Ph.Ds now, the privileged servants of white empire, factors then, factors now. The physical walls stand unused now. The curious can go and look at them, as if slavery belonged to a past history. The destruction has reached higher, that is all. The factor's pay is now given in advance, and sold men are not mentioned, not seen in any mind. Their price is given the factor for some mythical quality of his dead spirit. (161)

Modin slowly realizes that his soul has become the property of the whites. He has been subsumed in their rapacious search for material wealth and spiritual domination. Even his spontaneous emotions are all white-dictated, and his wish to assimilate into whiteness, like some disease, begins to involve the destruction of his black self – in reality his only self:

I am frightened now. These things I thought I was doing freely, out of my own desire – they are also part of the larger scheme that aims at our destruction. My friendships have been different invitations to different kinds of death, calls to a spiritual disintegration far beyond the merely social disintegration. Africa has suffered since how many centuries? This throwing out of the self, to have it caught in a direction not first determined
by the self itself, the projection of our persons in alien directions, this alienation with no overt, no visible force, this is the sign that our death complete. Europe has no need to destroy us singly any more. The force of our own death is within us. We have swallowed the wish for our own destruction. (158-59)

As Armah analyses, loneliness, especially as Modin describes it above, is the predisposition to death.

A great deal of the earlier Modin sequences are concerned with a radical criticism of America. At first, his experiences resemble those in a novel, a much more conventional kind of social satire on race. This is evident in Modin's argument with his fellow student, Mike, jokingly called the 'Fascist,' over the Thanksgiving Day newspaper article. Mike praises the greatness of his country and the all sufficiency of his country's way of life and reads out to Modin a write-up on America's blessedness published in the Sunday newspaper Times, with the headline 'Why Are We So Blest?' which gives the novel its title. The article clearly demarcates the distinction between the privileged and unprivileged:

The myth of paradise finds its full meaning here, in the new world — The blest among the best know what this vision from the new world is. They see its oneness with whatever has been pure in the western traditions: the perfect symmetry of
Olympic ideal, the unsullied wholeness of that Christian Eden ignorant of the fall from Grace! (98-99)

Mike says that “any one who can write a whole article on Thanksgiving and leave out the mass murder of the so-called Indians is a street-corner hustler, nothing better” (99). Mike’s answer is sharp and straightforward. Here is their argument:

“You and Your Indians. Don’t you see they don’t come within the scope of this article?”
“I see that. Your forefathers wiped them out physically. Every year you wipe them out symbolically. And your intellectuals wipe them out mentally”.
“You want every article to be all-inclusive. That’s impossible”.
“Are the African people here also blest?”
“We call them Negroes. Chum.”
“Africans. Are they also outside the scope of your article?”
“Not if they have class. Look, the piece is titled – “Why Are We So Blest?” The guy didn’t set out to write about the underprivileged”. (99)

Modin is much more disturbed by Mike’s comments on Africans. Shortly after this conversation, he vomits and in his nausea the headline “Why Are We So Blest?” keeps on running through his head like an idiotic refrain. His sense of dislocation here is due to the fact that Mike, in his apathetic blundering, has touched a sore spot. Modin
himself is increasingly worried about his position as one who, having been drawn into a metropolitan centre of supposed learning, will eventually be sent back to exploit his advantages over his people. Remarks to this effect are contained in the earlier passages of his journals, for instance:

Those who stay in the peripheral areas intellectually, emotionally, psychologically, totally, are not lonely. They are in touch with home, not cut off. But the price they pay is loneliness. (33)

The African student under those omnipresent conditions is forced to either engage in a constant battle for physical integrity, and thus for survival, or he is forced to compromise and become an accomplice in perpetual world murder. Hence Modin comes to realize that the oppressor's degrees and his money-scholarships, fellowships, grants, and educational loans are only tools with which to oppress African people better through a black intermediary. Realizing this Modin thinks of quitting his education.

Throughout his American experience, Modin is tortured by a feeling of loneliness. This sense of alienation forces him to seek companionship in sexual relations with white women. His black girl friend Naita in America warns Modin against such adventurous deeds in the initial stages itself: 'There's nothing like friendship possible between us and them. You get involved with them, you're just dumb,
that's all. They'll mess you up" (123). Modin ignores her words but later realizes that the words of Naita literally come true with frightening consequences. In America, as he realises, deep down in the heart of every white woman there is an irresistible urge to be sexually indulged with the black. Modin comes into contact with Mrs. Jefferson, wife of an aging Africanist scholar, Prof. Jefferson takes a patronizing interest in young Modin on his arrival in the States. Mrs. Jefferson shows an unusual interest in Modin by virtue of his being black. She is very much dissatisfied with her impotent husband. Consequently, it is left to the abashed and confused student to satisfy the nymphomaniac wife of the professor. Mrs. Jefferson's obsessive longing for Modin is not resisted by him and it becomes inevitable for Modin to maintain sexual relation with her. He also overcomes his loneliness to some extent in her company. Inevitably the relationship gets exposed and Mr. Jefferson, on discovering their liaison, stabs Modin with a dagger nearly to death. With multiple wounds Modin finds himself in a hospital. He survives this but he surely suffers a lot of pain. His friendships with white women are always tinged with some suicidal fatalism. Accepted academically despite being black, he is laid sexually because he is black. While the latter might seem superficially preferable, both methods of approach are in effect ways of denying his common humanity, the individuality that makes him a distinct person.
Disillusionment hardens into a deep distrust, and Modin is back where he started, alone:

Nothing surprising in all this. My life here has had a self-destructive swing all the time, only I haven't thought seriously about it. Loneliness. The search for a way out. Involvement the thing you warned me against, Naita. Catastrophic involvement. Disaster, Exhaustion. Then withdrawal, intense, complete. Loneliness again. (156)

Naita also leaves Modin abruptly to his loneliness and desperation, impatient with his compromises over white women.

Modin avoids all his contacts with the white women for some time. Deprived of his scholarship, he joins in the University's applied psychology laboratories where he earns a pittance as a guinea-pig. In one experiment, shocks are delivered through wires connected to the subject's ankles in order to test the threshold of pain. Modin cries out when the dial reaches a perfect average of 5.1, but one of the subjects tested has a threshold of pain which extends beyond the prescribed safety levels. That is Aimee Reitsch. Aimee, who came there for sheer experience of it, records a high of thirteen points much to the surprise of all. It is Modin's first encounter with the girl who will dog him for the rest of his life.
Even the realization of death-dealing sexual-dealings does not prevent Modin from his subsequent association with Aimee Reitsch. She is portrayed in the novel both as an individual and as a representative of her race, colour, and continent. Like her revolutionary fervour, Aimee's interest in Modin is part of her search for new sensations. This is what, in fact, guided her to undertake a visit to an East African country to do research on Mau-Mau risings. Here she had sexual relations with the leaders of Mau-Mau Movement and subsequently with the President of the Nationalist Government. The episode is significant in that it portrays the depravity of the post-colonial political structures and also the morbid search of the Europeans for the exotic in black Africa.

Like other white women, Aimee pursues Modin for possible sexual excitement. She shows more than normal interest in Modin and he offers himself as an easy prey. Modin's response in this case is motivated not by deceit or lust, but by gentler considerations. Aimee is frigid and Modin mistakenly takes it upon himself to awaken her to the full range of sexual experience. The reason is once again loneliness. Looking for a way out of his loneliness, Modin remains a spectator to the events that overpower him and from them it is Aimee's voice that prevails all the way. The alienation of the individual, thus, is diligently portrayed as part of cultural hegemonism sought to be established by the white masters. This is
evident in the character of Aimee. Her instinctual in-built mechanism not only saves her from being totally attached to Modin but enables her, in addition, to establish psychological superiority over her companion. The dividing agencies of cultural dichotomy and racial imbalance are so strong in this association that Modin remains a silent witness to and a helpless victim of the forces unleashed by his friendship with Aimee and gets carried away by his self-consuming streak. In the words of Robert Fraser, "With increasing disdain he blunders through this sexual Disneyland, servicing females in every direction. Bereft of the self-respect he so earnestly seeks, he is left to play out the role of the black buck familiar to Ralph Ellison's 'Invisible Man,' but with little of the latter's perspicacity or panache."4

Aimee's name is chosen symbolically. It means "beloved," for her entire nature is consumed by the need to be loved, "to suck others dry", a fact which Solo soon discerns with uncanny insight. Solo's opening impression of Modin and his ill-chosen psychotic American girl friend Aimee at the office of the People's Union of Congheria is as follows:

In front of the large display board, two figures. 
The male was black; the female white... 
The black face... itself was young, but the expression on it could have come from the depths of ages and ages of sadness. (59)
The Modin we meet in the American sequences seems to have little in common with the haunted, sensitive individual whom Solo encounters later. Instead, here we have a weak, vain, vacillating youth playing extravagant adventures. Modin's quiet movements are uneasy beside his companion's “long-loping strides” and “awkward angularity” (62).

For Solo, Aimee is a mere engine of destruction and instrument of death, and is a “white invention.” For him Aimee is not a human being but an object or thing mistaken by Modin for a human being. Solo questions: “Why could he not see his companion? This was an object, destructive, powerfully hurled against him from the barrel of a powerful, destructive culture” (115). For Solo, white women are “among the arsenal of consumable things” (207-208) that attract Africans. They are seen as “mere bodies” or “dead tissue.” Solo stares at Aimee “as if she were a body without life.” He concludes that American women are opposite of human, “they are corpses from which the spirit has fled and appear to have been inhabited by a demonic, succumbs – like sexuality that sucks life from Black prey.”

Aimee, in her first sexual encounter with Modin, finds him no different from others. But gradually she converts him into an instrument to shake off her frigidity and becomes her own normal self. But Modin is really in love with Aimee, and we see Modin as purely and simply the unwitting victim of Aimee's exploitation. Aimee
employs him as an object to stimulate her fantasy life and her fantasy reduces the Harvard scholar Modin to "Mwangi", the compliant steward-boy. By fantasizing like this, she arouses herself and finds sexual satisfaction. When Modin realizes that she has in fantasy been indulging in the embraces not of himself, but of a pet creature of her dream life, a black servant figure, he gets much irritated and disturbed and refuses to play that role because he seeks a deeper personal relationship with Aimee. But Aimee, once she realizes that he could be an effective weapon in regaining her womanliness, does not want to lose him. Gradually love grows between them and Modin feels: "The disgust I began to feel with Aimee is gone. A tenderness I cannot explain has replaced it" (213). Modin is of the opinion that he has led Aimee to a state of significant love, but he does not know that Aimee's is a disastrous reciprocation. She becomes all the more overbearing. Modin's relationship with Aimee runs into yet another kind of death, the denial of cultural identity. From this point on Modin makes every effort to attempt to meet Aimee on common ground, even to the extent of dressing like her. The falsity of this is immediately sensed by Solo as soon as he sees the pair together in the Congherian offices in Laccryville:

At first I had noticed the contrast they made – one black, the other white. What struck me now, as I went closer, was how similar they had tried to make themselves. I looked harder. It was true.
From top to bottom the two more identical clothes: coarse-women blue shirts in the American style with their collars held down by small buttons, light-coloured cowboy jeans with nothing to hold them up. Thick white socks and very strong canvas shoes with thick soles and a blue line over each toe-cap. Two people, so different, yet so willfully assimilated. The thought came to me; here was an acute case of love. Or ... A smile threatened to force itself to the surface. I was able to suppress it. Their clothes were not the only identical things they had. There were also burdens on their backs: soldiers' camping knapsacks made from green cloth over an aluminium frame. (56)

Their identical dress indicates that Modin has emphasized himself and he has accommodated himself to Aimee’s taste and physical personality. It is indeed the beginning of the last and most drastic kind of death – the complete surrender of his own identity. It is the superior agency that is set to win, by a complex set of psychological, sociological, and cultural advantages, in a racial divide that manifests itself in personal relationships. Solo thinks that something could have been done by Modin to avoid such a relationship with Aimee.

The truth is that Modin could not notice Aimee’s masochism, the cultural divide, and his own tragedy. He warns himself against such misadventures, but remains helpless. Once the contact is established with Aimee, he finds no means of escape. Their
relationship is not based on reciprocity. The devouring spirit of Aimee takes in whatever Modin could give and offers only her greed in return. As Frantz Fanon observes: “In the man of colour there is a constant effort to run away from his own individuality, to annihilate his own presence. Whenever a man of colour protests, there is alienation.”

Modin’s belief that he can exert a humanizing influence on Aimee is clearly self-destructive and his relationship with Aimee weakens his revolutionary commitment. Solo persistently parallels Modin’s experiences with his own. Solo’s own abortive love-affair with a white woman, Sylvia, a Portuguese girl, is linked to that of Modin and Aimee. Solo exclaims, “What is this love we suffer from, impelling us to embrace our own destroyers?” (150). But Solo’s Sylvia is a different thing altogether. She is unable to free herself from the cultural prejudices of her people as embodied in her friends, and breaks her relationship off with Solo. The race barrier is a predominant issue in their relationship. As Solo himself notes it, “The pull of her race was strong in her. It went against me, and she followed it” (229). She succumbs to the pressure of her own society in leaving him. We feel that Sylvia is incapable of destroying anything or anybody. Indeed Solo himself feels that the comparison is weak:
The American girl, for some reason I could not precisely grasp just then, had reminded me of Sylvia. And yet, thinking of her, I realized that she was not at all like Sylvia. (62)

Surely, the psychotic vision of Aimee is of a different order of destructiveness from this. Solo regards that the "inhibiting traces" of his love for Sylvia are the source of all his failure and concludes that the mere fact of attachment to a white woman is part of a larger racial betrayal. The failure of his love affair with Sylvia has heightened Solo's awareness of his limited acceptance as a black colonial in a white society. According to Joyce Johnson, "In the context of the novel Portugal is representative of the old imperialism, as America is of the new. Solo's experiences in Portugal and Modin's in the United States thus complement each other and suggest the continuity between old and new forms of colonialism, which is one of Armah's fundamental themes."6 What the novel shows is a plausible single relationship between members of different races. At one point Solo exclaims the love of white women for black men:

What is this love of their people's creatures but a love for the manipulable, the already manipulated, open to further shaping? What is this love but hate smilingly embraced by the hated?” (208)

Solo, like Modin, is an illustration of a particular perversion of mind due to colonialism. He parallels Modin's self-analysis in his
journals and draws universal lessons. Like Modin, he too cannot find any identity apart from that of a "factor" for or a "lover" of whites:

What is ordained for us I have not escaped – the fate of the 'evolve', the turning of the assimilated African, not into something creating its own life, but into an eater of crumbs in the house of slavery. Always finding the growth itself too crude, too bloody a thing to contemplate lucidly. We plunge into justifactory hallucinations, creating in our own minds saving spaces we know do not exist, will not exist, in our lives. (84)

Solo, in moments retrospection, appears more like a commentator on colonial experience and its microcosmic representation in the life of Modin. The nagging suspicion that he himself remained helpless in not being able to stop Modin's destruction underlines his point of view throughout the narrative: "Whatever I tell myself, I cannot escape the chagrin of not being able to stop his destruction" (115). The image of Aimee as a predator at the cost of Modin's suffering is sustained throughout the novel. It becomes evident in Armah's description of the final scene in which Modin is brutalized by the French men and Aimee drinks his blood. It is clear that although Modin becomes increasingly aware of Aimee's nature he is incapable of breaking up the relationship with her. Aimee clearly embodies the decadent aspects of western civilization. Modin's situation thus reflects the predicament of the African intellectual who is involved with western civilization, but
at the same time, is attempting to develop a commitment to his own people. Using Aimee as a representative of western culture, Armah suggests that there is no longer any relationship between the western idea of progress and the sense of moral achievement which is emphasized in the ruin of Modin.

Possessing a “revolutionary commitment to Africa” (31) and convinced that a university degree will merely give him the unwanted security of belonging to the elite (91), Modin gives up his research and writing, concluding that it is “busy work” and that “knowledge should be lived” (221). He decides to join his people in concrete struggle at Congheria. Aimee is presented both as an exploiter and as someone needing to be rescued. As the entries in her diary show, she is seeking a source from which to enliven an existence which is daily becoming more and more futile and boring. So in order to overcome that feeling she too wants to join the revolutionary struggle. Solo is of the opinion that Modin’s decision to join the struggle is a correct move, but however:

“... as a companion for his journey he took the American child of the tribe of death” (230)

Aimee, in her desire to take part in the revolutionary struggle, is primarily motivated by her sadistic streak. She is guided by her intoxicating desire to find new sensations in different kinds of experience. For her, revolutionary action is an adventurous sport,
exciting and stimulating. This sadistic desire leads one to conclude that her sympathy for the liberation movement is only a self-made façade for her volatile sexual urges.

Modin and Aimee formally apply to enter the Maquis. But the persons-in-charge of the People's Union of Congheria (UPC) try to dissuade them and actually prevent them from joining the scene of the struggle. They tell the couple that "battle-field" is not a place for "intellectuals" (252) and that they would be out of place here. They conclude that he is a romantic because, he is not a failure, but still wants to fight, and that his love for the white Aimee shows that he does not know who he is - "an African in love with a European is a pure slave" (225). They firmly decide that they would not enroll them into the ranks of the UPC. In order to reassure them they take applications from each of them and ask them to wait for two weeks for the result. But their statements are torn up in their absence and they are fobbed off by excuses and delays. Solo, who witnesses the discussion between Jeorge Manuel and Estban Ngulo, knows that the couple would be kept waiting for the decision indefinitely to the point of desperation. They fairly assess the intentions of the pair, particularly of Modin, which come out in the words of Ngulo: "He" is one of the intellectuals who wants to die. He should have the courage to do it himself. He can't come to us looking for an instrument of death" (255). Then Solo aptly comments on the devouring spirit of
Aimee: "I don't think he needs an instrument of death, as you call it... He may have found one. In which case what he needs is help" (255).

Even after repeated attempts Modin and Aimee fail to get permission from the office of the UPC but still they persist with frequent visits to the office. When their money is exhausted, Solo offers them shelter in his house. Initially Aimee bluntly refuses his offer, preferring to stay in the meanest and filthy hotel which she terms as "revolutionary". In her perception filth is synonymous with revolution. For her, the blacks are "in their minds the same as poverty, dirt and the smell of syphilistic goats". "Do all Americans think revolution is the same as filth?" (261), Solo enquires of Aimee. Solo's first impression of the couple gets confirmed by Modin's helplessness and Aimee's sadistic outlook. While reading the diaries, he himself is haunted by an eerie sense of insecurity:

I search her book. What I find worsens my chargin. It makes no sense. So much destructiveness caught in everything she said, everything she did, the way she moved, the tenor of her being. Why did he let her destroy him? I have said love, but that is an answer for fools. (149)

For Solo, the price Modin must pay for this ill-advised alliance is his own self-destruction. This sentiment is prominently endorsed by the novel's denouement.
Tired with constant delays, Aimee and Modin in sheer desperation decide to treck across the desert so as to enter the Maquis by the back door. This leads them into the heart of the unpolic ed Sahara region. Realizing the uselessness of the expedition, Modin pleads with Aimee to turn back. She is frightened at the thought of the public ridicule with which their failure will be greeted. Aimee urges, “what would I look like telling people I didn’t cross the Sahara after all” (283). For Aimee revolution, like crossing the Sahara, is merely another touristic coup. After a period of mounting, eventually, they are picked up by a gang of marauding OAS terrorists. They ask Modin and Aimee to get into their truck but when Modin refuses to do so, they forcibly tie him up in the back of the jeep. When the driver speaks of him “as if he were dead”, Aimee blithely muses about her happiness and freedom in the desert’s open spaces (284). The wider racial implications about the relations between the three continents are almost diagrammatic. Even the jeep might be thought to have its significance as representative of dominant, western technology.

The colour disparity of the couple accentuates the sadistic tendencies of the French terrorists and their actions cross the limits of barbarism, and the actual death scene, in the last pages of the novel, turns out to be one of the most horrifying in modern literature. They undress Modin, humiliate him, and use Aimee to arouse him to cut his penis and leave him in the desert to die. Aimee is forced to watch
Modin's torture and castration. She does not feel the pinch of his suffering but is engrossed in her own lustful thoughts at not having a final contact with the already dazed, bleeding Modin. She is eager to reach Modin and excite her lust for sexual domination on his captive and defenceless body. She writes in her dairy:

I saw Modin's face. It was calm, like the night we refused to be Mwangi for me... I wanted him so much, the desire was a hunger in my guts, my chest. My throat and mouth felt dry. They felt like huge spaces. I threw my self forward trying to reach him... (286)

Modin's own reaction shows that, however involuntarily, he too cannot help but continue to play his part as lover and servant of the whites.

On the realistic level, the action fulfils Aimee's Mwangi fantasy which explains her strange eagerness and exhilaration. It also echoes Modin's previous experience with the Jeffersons when he was sexually used by a white woman in a similar manner and assaulted by a white man. The final twist to the symbolism comes when the French men finally mutilate the African. The most appallingly symbolic act of the novel is seen here: Aimee kneels before Modin, drinking the blood pulsing from his penis in a parody of achieving sexual satisfaction and asks him, "Do you love me?" (228). No more horrifying embodiment than this could be imagined of Solo's verdict on the relations between
Africa and the West: Modin's diary on his last days shocks Solo by the extreme loneliness it reveals. Solo says, "these lines transmitted one overwhelming message. Loneliness" (268). Solo himself continually doubts his own objectivity within the novel, thus adding authority to his final conclusions. It is indeed only with pain and anguish that is reluctantly compelled to draw his racist deduction about Aimee, and through her, about all whites.

Even now, after his destruction, I catch my struggling to limit what my mind knows, searching for ruses to justify my unwillingness to achieve the rational, ultimate rejection of her destructive race. I want to say this kind of destructiveness in her alone, a personal evil which should not interrupt thoughts of possible harmony with her people.

But however much he wants to say this, the evidence of the book leads to only one 'rational' conclusion. Aimee is inevitably destructive because she is "a daughter of a race of destroyers" (149). However, it is not Solo but Armah who, in the East African and American scenes as well as the Congherian ones, surrounds Aimee with a rhetoric of "white delivery" so that she is imagined as an engine of destruction.

When Solo acknowledges his grief over Modin's death, we notice a kind of elegiac note with touching sincerity:
A sense of loss came over me. Modin had never listened to me, never heard me. That did not matter. Over my mind he exercised an influence of whose exact nature I am still ignorant. I wept for him, in impotent acknowledgement of a destiny shutting both him and me within its destructive limits. (271)

Solo thinks of his inability to avoid Modin's destruction. He could not get any chance to help Modin and he has been powerless to warn him in the presence of Aimee. Solo accuses himself for this and returns to the same theme again and again. He is often invaded by guilt for not having taken the initiative to avert Modin's tragedy. The nagging suspicion that he himself remained helpless in not being able to stop Modin's ruin underlines his point of view throughout the narrative:

I found no way to help him. Help: the word is conceited, coming from me. Between us the distance was so great. I spoke words to him, but sounds from the world I had re-entered did not reach him. (83)

And again he notes:

What would I have called him to? He saw my life. Everything I am, everything I do was transparent to him. Between us he kept that endless distance, an insulating vacuum giving him clear sight,
making nonsense of anything I could have said to him. (137)

There is a softer note in Solo's voice, a mood which carries us back to the mournful, vulnerable personality suggested by the opening sequences of his narrative. In the words of Robert Fraser, In his sense of loss of Dofu's presence, the feeling that with his death something has gone out of himself: there we have a moment of authentic elegy. This retrospective balances the bitterness, holds it in check, so that we are left with a final impression, not of stridency, but of pathos."7 So finally we are back with Solo's withered consciousness, his all-involving sense of failure.

It is perhaps in Why Are We So Blest? that Armah confronts the contemporary African artist with a more radical conception of his place in the new social order. Like Baako in Fragments, Solo sees himself as a failed writer caught between two schools of art. He emerges with an unambiguous stand on the irrelevance of his western-oriented artistic sensibility in the contemporary African setting:

To be a writer at a time like this, coming from such a people, such deep destruction, the most criminal only one issue is worth our time: how to end the oppression of the African, to kill the European beasts of prey, to remake ourselves, the elected servants of Europe and America. Outside that, all is useless; and I am outside. (230)
He laments his alienation from the mainstream of anti-imperialist struggle by virtue of his very training. Solo's predicament underlines the cardinal contradiction that defines most of Armah's visionary protagonists: to challenge the process that will usher in a new society which they envision while remaining artists at the same time. But Solo himself notes that he has been corrupted to the point where he cannot hate whites, however much they give him the cause to do so:

What would I not give to attain the healing simplicity of hatreds unmixed with love. (231)

Solo himself is too conscious of the good things about Europe and America, their art, their written and transmitted culture, to take this sort of a stand. According to James Booth, "Even the form of the novel which he has created shows his enslavement. It is a mastery exercise in the modernist techniques of the 'European' novel with multiple centres of consciousness and artful manipulation of disjointed narrative sequence." Solo is, as he himself tells us, caught and lured by western art which entrances him robbing him of the strength to resist his spiritual enslavement. His spirit,

Paced uneasily the wide territory between the destroyed people I had left behind and their enslavers, those whose words and ideas and whose art had drawn me with an attraction strong enough at times to make me wish for deafness
In Solo's career he comes to the realization that the African pursuit of art within the context of the western tradition is a way of advancing the cause of supremacist assumptions that produce colonialism. As an intellectual Modin also realizes the fact. "In the imperial situation the educational progress is turned into an elitist ritual for selecting slave traders" (222). Here we notice Solo's anguish over western art:

Why not simply accept the fate of an artist, and like a western seer, close my eyes to everything around, find relief in discrete beauty, and make its elaboration my vocation? Impossible. The western artist is blest with that atrophy of vision that can see beauty in deliberately broken off pieces of a world sickened with oppressions ugliness. I hear the call of that art too. But in the world of my people that most important first act of creation, that rearrangement without which all attempts at creation are doomed to falseness remains to be done. Europe hurled itself against us – not for creation, but to destroy us, to use us for creating itself. America, a growth out of Europe, now deepens that destruction. In this wreckage there is no creative art outside the destruction of destroyers (231).
For Solo, it seems the only solution to remain as an African artist and to lay his art at the service of his people. This was also Baako's aim in *Fragments*. It is also true in the case of Modin.

Modin gives the impression of a genius at work, which is really what he is an African 'rarity'. He considers his own life as an off-shot of the collective predicament. He ardently believes in the "Maji", the workable system, that "special something Africans needed to neutralize the material destructiveness of Europe" since he realizes that "revolutionary ideal is an actual, working egalitarian society" (222). The main postulate of his thesis is a search for a workable system "for creating new anti-European, anti-imperial, anti-elitist values" (222). The "non-elitist methods of disseminating consciousness" not only involve destruction of the elite structure, "the rites of secrecy, mystification", but pave the way for a positive direction. It quite naturally follows that Modin should question himself, his own standing on the elite structures which are like barriers - the thick walls. The thick walls and the elaborate rituals of education, Modin thinks, create proud tools, thus preventing him from taking part in the ongoing destruction. The inevitable conclusion he arrives at is an echo of the feelings of the oppressed: "This system has no justification" (224). As a result, he is no longer interested in the pursuit of "academic nonsense" which has effectively created barriers between him and his own people. Consequently he resigns his research
work and decides to offer his services to his own people by joining the revolution. It is evident that Modin's commitment to his people is genuine, unlike Aimee's pretensions.

Armah interprets the myth of Prometheus to explain the situation of Modin in *Why are we so Blest?* "for those intellectuals who welcomed the new order of political independence in various African societies and who became increasingly alienated from their political regimes, the myth of Prometheus supplies an appropriate symbolic structure for depicting the opposition of forces in contemporary African societies." This is one of the ways in which Armah has used the myth. In the classical myth, Prometheus was one of the earliest deities, the Titans. Having created man out of clay, he wished to convey to him the gift of fire, but was opposed in this by Zeus with whom he was allied to overthrow the unimaginative rule of his brother Titans. Despite Zeus, uncompromising nature, he stole fire from Olympus and took it down to men, where upon Zeus chained him on Mount Caucasus where his entrails were continually fed upon by a vulture.

Armah compares the relationship that existed between the Olympians and humanity in the myth of Prometheus and that existing between rich and poor nations and between the political elite and the masses in contemporary African societies. Prometheus has a specific
application to ex-colonial Africa because he is a hero who attempted to bridge two worlds. This aspect of the myth which relates to Prometheus' attempt to cross over from a position of privilege to the side of oppressed humanity is especially relevant to the situation of the Western-educated African like Modin who attempts to re-establish links within his traditional cultural background. An important point in the myth of Prometheus is his gift to mankind of fire stolen from the Olympians. In modern interpretations fire symbolizes the power to acquire knowledge and to use it to improve human existence. The relevance of this aspect of the myth to the situation of the African intellectual is clear. An important question for the African intellectual, Armah suggests in *Why Are We So Blest?*, is the nature of the transfer of knowledge and technique that should be made from the West to Africa. Armah depicts here the attempts of a conscientious intellectual to dissociate himself from the new political elite that emerged during the struggle for independence in African societies in order to serve the interests of the ordinary people whose lot has remained unchanged in the post-Independent era. In both *Fragments* and *Why Are We So Blest?* The protagonists are shown attempting to give up social privilege available to them because of their western education. They offend the privileged class whose principles they reject, but are isolated from the masses because of their special abilities as intellectuals. In the world of the privileged they are
regarded as betrayers of their own kind; in the world of the oppressed they are regarded as strangers. As a result, they are isolated figures between two worlds.

Armah's most specific reference to the myth of Prometheus is the metaphor of “Promethean crossing.” This metaphor is directly introduced in *Why Are We So Blest?* in a conversation between Modin and a fellow student Mike. The American student, Mike, attempts to justify the existence of social gradations and inequality by comparing the classes in contemporary societies to the levels of existence described in the Graeco-Christian view of the cosmos:

“Ther’s Olympus. Below that are the plains of mediocrity. Then Tartarus” (100). As Mike tells Modin, the new world is the paradisal top storey of a three-tier universe, a model derived from the Greeks. The bottom storey in this arrangement represents the “communal dirt,” while those whose honorary membership of the celestial club provides evidence of a special grace and hence justifies an otherwise unbearably hierarchical system. Modin, because of his special abilities, had moved beyond the limitations that cultural background or social class might impose upon the individual in western society. He should therefore accept as earned the privileges he enjoys as an intellectual. Mike tells Modin:
"Modin, you're nobody's plaything. That's vulgar. The question is deeper than that. You're a scholarship student. There's justice in that. You belong here. The arrangement that brings you here has to be a good arrangement. In the Greek tradition you'd be a cross-over. One of those who rise from the plains to live on Olympus. A hero, part man, part God. Therefore more interesting than either." (101)

Modin reminds Mike of the existence of the "Promethean factor," that is, the willingness of a member of the privileged class to cross over to help the oppressed. Mike replies

'I guess that's a reverse cross over. No, I didn't want it to shut out. But it's unique. Besides, who has the idiotic ambition to go through the crossing twice: first a heroic, than a Promethean crossing? That's insane.'

Modin replies:

'Only according to your mythology. There are other myths, you know." (101-102)

The analogy is with Modin's proposed course of action. After receiving higher education in America, he wishes to return to Africa to put it at the disposal of the masses. In this matter he is opposed by Oppenhardt, Mike and their kind who will wish him to reserve a certain amount of knowledge to himself so as to make himself a more
efficacious neo-colonial agent. Modin's journey to Congheria and his relinquishment of the opportunities for personal advancement offered to him in the United States are symbolic when considered with reference to the myth of Prometheus. Modin leaves a situation of privilege to associate himself with those who are oppressed. He leaves a rich industrialized nation to involve himself in a liberation struggle in a poor underdeveloped one. This parallel with a Promethean or “reverse cross over” is clear here. Armah's interpretation of the myth of Prometheus differs from the traditional western one. Whereas in the European context the myth has served to confirm the idea of mankind’s progress towards a new and better world, in the African context, Armah suggests, it has quite a different application. As Joyce Johnson says:

Armah interprets the myth to show the futility of endeavour for the African intellectual and emphasizes the extent to which the arrangements for fighting privilege were themselves structures of privilege. In both Fragments and Why are we so blest? the Promethean hero's attempts to intervene on behalf of the oppressed reveals the incredible patterns of dominance and dependence in the society.¹⁰

Like Baako in Fragments, Modin achieves nothing by his act of rebellion. His awareness of the equivocal nature of the role of the revolutionary intellectual in Africa renders him ineffectual. In Modin's
case, as in Baako's, the inability to develop a clear purpose or to influence events is due to his recognition of the strange inconsistency in the Promethean role when it is viewed in relation to the ex-colonial situation. Armah shows no hope for adjusting the power of balance between the two worlds he has depicted. As Joyce Johnson points out:

Armah's interest in exposing the inadequacies of the western myth of progress accounts for pessimistic outlook of his heroes and their general ineffectiveness. The Promethean hero in the African context, Armah suggests, is inevitably the "vector" of a "foreign" culture. Although he makes the "descent from Olympus," he cannot become part of the lives of the people whom he attempts to serve. Having voluntarily left the "realm of the gods," the hero becomes trapped within the gulf which lies between two worlds.11

What makes Why Are We So Blest? such a pessimistic work is that Armah extends the frontiers of his pessimism beyond Ghana: he makes despair and futility part of the twentieth century malaise. This malaise crosses national boundaries so that a major theme in the novel is the futility of forging friendships among people of different countries and races. They are bound either to withdraw within their own shell, or failing to change the world, go back where they have come from. In the words of Charles E. Nnolim:
"All things considered Armah is a dark writer, in the sense that Milton was a dark poet, Rembrandt a dark painter and Schopenhauer a dark philosopher. Writing in the post-bellum twentieth century (with its cataclysmic wars, economic wars and unimagined psychological tensions, Armah's philosophic pessimism places him in the ranks of writers who truly call 'representative'. He is one of those writers who articulate in bold language what others are modest or nice to put in print." ¹²

Armah's consistent use of pessimism and pejorism has become a major vehicle of meaning in his works; it has proved to be a very effective, consistent, and artistic-rhetorical device.

Why Are We So Blest? is a fascinating illustration of racism. It is not only an analysis of the psychological effects of racism. It is itself a racist book in its unrelenting depiction of whites as exploitative and destructive in all relations with the blacks. But the vehemence of the novel is directed much against the blacks who collaborate in their own destruction as it is against the vehicles. As James Booth point out, "the disturbing power of Armah's novel is that it confronts the individual or communal dichotomy of racism and ruthlessly insists that there is no personal or individual escape. The liberal white illusion of personal escape from racism attainable through 'love' or 'humanity' for Armah reveals a misunderstanding of the nature of racism. Indeed such liberalism is itself merely an inverted form of
racism – one which attempts to obscure the objective situation under subjective good will. This is the lesson we are meant to draw from Armah’s Aimee.”

No personal, individual escape from the racism of the community as a whole is allowed in the novel. The characters seem compelled to play their preordained parts in a morbid drama dictated by their race. The novel examines racial implications projected through personal relationships. The cumulative impact of psychological, political and sociological factors makes the blacks all along subservient to the whites who put their exploitative skills to their best advantage. The novel is an indictment of the group ethic which fatally draws itself to the inhuman manipulation of the whites as evidenced in the relationship of Modin and Aimee. It would be comforting to believe that Armah’s reduction of his characters to primal racial forces is a mode of criticism of them for reducing their humanity, as Edward Lobb puts it:

Armah is not making a simple division between a corrupt white Europe and an innocent black Africa: he is rather commenting on the nightmare of modern history, in which the effects of the past, particularly its mythologies, conspire to deprive individuals, black and white, of any significant freedom... The reality of history impinges upon even the smallest encounters, pushing the actors
towards the destructive pattern of Aimee's fantasy.\textsuperscript{14}

Armah's fragmented narrative is truly attested by a sense of suffering caused by the shattering impact of colonialism. Moving back and forth in time and space, it effectively catches the vicissitudes of the post-colonial African context. In its attempt to define the nature and extent of the devastating impact of colonialism in the personal world in which all things are blown apart, the novel remains an integral part of Armah's fictional strategy in approaching the African reality. By implication it also suggests a meaningful direction to the ongoing struggle in the process of decolonizing the African mind. \textit{Why Are We So Blest?} marks the end of the analytical phase in Armah's literary career and sets the tone and context for the brilliant exposition of the group consciousness. In his later novels, \textit{Two Thousand Seasons} and \textit{The Healers}, the consciousness of a whole people is sought to be unfolded. In a constructive sweep of African history and ideals, Armah attempts to designate 'the way' of the people of a continent in the second phase.
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