Creative writing in Ghana has been remarkably dense and complex, and has generally materialized in words addressing current ideological and political issues. Quite recurrently we find Ghanaian authors raising fundamental questions on their societies and leaders, given the fact that the latter have not lived up to the national expectations. The question raised by the young generation of post-independence writers is how best to regenerate their national values, given the problematic and uncertain future of their new state.

Three outstanding literary figures of Ghana have been particularly discursive in this debate. They are Ayi Kwei Armah, Kofi Nyidevu Awoonor and Ama Ata Aidoo. They have dealt with the problematic relationship between citizens and government, as well as with the role that intellectuals should play in their changing societies. Their appraisal of the situation is bound up with a search for a “a vision of the alternatives values that could tame the tide of order on the continent” (Ode Ogede, 1991:529).

Their writings indeed are directly concerned with an anomy, a misapprehension of national values which has its roots in colonial times, hence the frequent evocations in the texts of the economically and socially destructive presence of colonials or ex-colonials in Africa. The blame is also laid on the fathers of independence in particular, who are shown as responsible in large measure for the diversion of mutually beneficial traditional customs to the frantic national indulgence in materialistic acquisition, and the squandering of he countries resources. To quote Gerald Moore, the gods are “neglected” (G. Moore, 1980:237), and in fact abandoned altogether, since writers, as intellectuals, lament that the spiritual essence of the traditional order is being negated.

The three novelists under discussion have contrasted approaches to such issues. If their creative works on paper seem to carry common concerns or ideals, they differ on what attitude, what commitment should really be taken up by the artist-cum-intellectual in regard to the notion of
collective responsibility. This question of individual conscience is examined intensively in the three following novels that shall be focused upon, namely Armah’s *Fragments*, Awoonor’s *This Earth My Brother…* and Aidoo’s *Our Sister Killjoy*.

As it turns out for Armah, the narrative strategy adopted is fairly individual and introspective; it reflects a quest for lost values whose basic ethos is anything but mundane - therefore impure – even at the risk of defying the modern financial and economic code of practice. The essence of existence, as his anonymous protagonist seems to advocate all along, should be to interconnect ethics, in accordance with tradition, and to come to “home” with an identity which would internalise a continuity between the past and the present of Ghanaian society. Awoonor’s aspirations are similarly related to the need for Africans to learn from the past, and to retrieve the spirit of mutual care that characterizes the traditional mores and customs. As for Ama Ata Aidoo, both male and female intellectuals are morally called upon to take part in the national reconstruction in the spirit of traditional communalism.

And yet, the tones and representations express pessimism, and are underpinned by a polemical discourse. The three allegories developed by their respective authors present no prospect of a new age coming about, and the channels of communication between the protagonists and their people remain mostly closed. Also, the critical reception of such works shows little convergence, and reveals entrenched sympathies. For many scholars, Armah is allegedly in variance with society and with the world at large (cf. C.Nnolim, 1979; J. Booth,

In comparison, Awoonor’s writing is reputedly associated with an authorial re-immersion into society (cf. Obiechina, 1975; L. Nkosi, 1981; C. Achebe, 1988, etc.), and his novel is successful to the point that it “never falls into preciousness or superficialities” C. Achebe, 1988:122). And Ama Ata Aidoo, even if subjected to less critical attention than her male counterparts, is credited with sharp and persuasive prose, which for Adeola James shows a “deep love for her people that informs her writing” A. James, 1990:8, and which for Alice Walker “has reaffirmed (my) faith in the power of the written word to reach to teach to empower & encourage

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* The first two novels mentioned appeared first in 1969 and 1971, respectively. The copies used are those of the Heinemann edition (Londoni, African Writers’ Series collection. Aidoo’s novel as published in 1977 by Longman (Lonon). Thereafter they will be referred to as *Fragments*, *This Earth*, and *Our Sister.*

(A. Walker, 1985:248). Those are perhaps the very aspects which for another critic, Brenda Cooper, play a negative role and may reflect an authorial look which is more racially conscious than actually and progressively inspired (B. Cooper, 1992: 91-98).

It is true that authors, especially Armah and Aidoo, seem concerned with extolling the virtues of black nationalism but what mostly brings together the three writers is anguish, and at times disillusionment expressed in modernist, fragmented presentation of narratives and meditations, the better to point to the moral fracture that they observe in their historical trajectory, and which has resulted in a blurred perception of values by modern Ghanaian society. Prose and poetry are juxtaposed in their mode of writing, with shifts back and forth in chronology and location; Armah, in particular, adopts a “circular” form of narrative to interconnect past and present facts, and to assert, according to Akan worldview, that “all that goes returns” (Fragments, p. 1). The novels structure, with flashbacks referring to earlier parts of the protagonist’s life.

Fragments, This Earth My Brother… and Our Sister Killjoy, appearing in that chronological order, refer explicitly to Ghana after independence in 1957, as “the first African free state”, led by its charismatic president Kwame Nkrumah. They deplore that, for all the militant efforts this man contributed towards national liberation, thereafter behaved like an extravagant autocrat who plunged his country into a deep recession until he was deposed by the military in 1966. The three novels examine Ghana’s one-party system with a critical eye, and quite dramatically expose a betrayal of revolutionary ideals, as if those who opposed the injustice of colonialism are now reproducing in every way the former masters’ attitudes, and aggravating further the dislocation of a once stable and viable customary code of life.

The three works under study contain parts in ‘realistic prose, and parts are more meditative, approaching the parts composed in verse. This latter mode is particularly pronounced in Aidoo and Awoonor. But it seems that the realistic portions are more connected with the dramatic events of the present, and report on the callous attitude of the managers of independent Ghana. In Armah’s novel, the protagonist Baako is witness, and in many ways victim, of the practices of the new state. On his return from his studies in America, he realises that the system is based on payoffs and graft. No job application can be successful if the “right people” are not approached beforehand. When bribes are required, the request is made the allusive mode. The Ghanavision junior assistant uses it with Baako who has applied for a job as a script writer: “you can come and see me when you decide to
tell me to help you” (*Fragments*, p. 110). Moreover, when he takes his sister Araba to hospital for a child delivery, he has “no status” to declare for the preferential treatment; they are denied the V.I.P. treatment, and taken to the old and inadequate maternity ward for ordinary people. Juana, Baako’s Puerto Rican girl friend, expresses despondency at the cynical attitudes of hospital doctors, her colleagues, who accept the status quo: “they can’t even think of changing except to make special arrangements for senior officers, friends, what have you” (*Fragments*, pp. 191-192

A crescendo in drama is applied when Armah involves the couple as witness to a serious incident which illustrates the authorities’ contempt for the masses, and their practise of double standards. Skido, the lorry driver, dies as a result of the appalling management of a ferry crossing system, in a scramble to get his lorry on departing boat, and his lorry crashes into the river. The gravity of the incident is offset by the nonchalant approach of the engineer in charge, who will not accept responsibility, and instead offers a priority position to Baako and Juana to travel on the next ferry. The novel is imparted with a tone of mourning, as the protagonist sinks into the depression of those who are powerless to redress the wrongs.

Similarly, in the realistic parts of *This Earth*, we can observe a gradual process of demoralisation in the protagonist, Amamu, as he realise that the Ghanaian ruling class has no intention of taking on seriously the management of the country, and is in fact to blame for the numerous social tragedies occurring daily. Amamu’s houseboy, Yaro, acts as one of the silent sufferers of independent Ghana; no change in his family’s living conditions has occurred, despite the promise of Nkrumah’s socialist regime. Above all, we have the tragic side-story of Yaro’s brother, Ibrahim, who has turned to crime after mixing with rough “Northern boys” and is thereafter arrested and beaten to death by the police:

> He died an hour later of internal haemorrhage, due to severe injuries caused by a heavy, blunt instrument which had damaged his kidneys (*This Earth*, p.160).

The irony of Ibrahim’s situation is quite perceptible; the young man becomes a casualty of a government which intent on repressing crime, but refuses to deal with its root causes – poverty, squalor, neglect – as these are directly linked with the immoral dealings of top civil servants. In counterpart, Awoonor provides a gallery of grotesques portraits of members of the new leading class, meeting in their British style ‘National Club’. They are Alex, the Principal Secretary of the Ministry of agriculture, who despises academics, Bob, a physician who “ended up a banker” (*This
Row, a police officer whose career started in colonial times, and who now is “dutiful and ready to salute the agitators he had tracked down (This Earth, p. 22). The presentation of such characters is in line with the Ewe tradition of derision and deflation of inadequate behaviour. The technique of caricature is also applied to the members of the state bourgeoisie who are received by Amamu in his house to celebrate his snobbish wife’s return from a sojourn abroad. First they have pompous titles: Francis Addison is Director of Standardisation and Donald Ashittey is D.P.P. Then the army colonel Letsu is treated with contempt and derided by a former girl friend during a squabble.

Beyond derision, such people appear to us as parasitic exploiters, people towards whom Amamu develops a compulsive hate. We have details, also of their plush residential district in Kanda, “fenced away in respectable seclusion (…). Here, the politicians, members of parliament, directors of public corporations, party functionaries live” (This Earth, p. 153). Awoonor contrasts the luxury of these “respectable” houses with the shabbiness of the neighbouring district of Nima, “a vast area of rottenness and putrefaction, where disease and malnutrition plague people living in houses made of mud, zinc, dealboard, cardboard” (This Earth, p. 153).

For both Armah and Awoonor, top civil servants and politicians are ineffectual, and, if anything, unconcerned about the suffering masses. Occasionally, the head of state is directly the object of the writers’ attacks. Awoonor has this to say about Nkrumah, the father of the revolution:

Nkrumah, from all accounts, just continued the work of the British: Government by chicanery, tricks, new tricks will be worked out with devastating logic for a one-party state (This Earth, p. 92).

Talking a similar stand, Armah, through Baako, rejects the personality cult, in reaction to his superior’s request to him to prepare a documentary on Nkrumah: not only has the man failed to observe the principles of African communalism that he spells out in his writings, he also acts as a dictator who has alienated himself from the new generation of Ghanaian intellectuals. At all events, the protagonist is in total opposition to those, like the producer Gariba, who bows to authority and declares cynically “we have to follow the Head of State and try to get pretty picture of him and those around him; isn’t that difficult? We had a lecture before you came. A nation is built through glorifying its big shots” (Fragments, p. 190).

About executives placed in the medium and lower rungs of state hierarchy, Aidoo uses the term “nigger” (Our Sister, p. 6), to point to those who pretend to act in the collective interest, but
actually promote Western interests and expect payoffs in return. In vitriolic passages in verse, she
attacks stooges who make their country a moral and economic sellout:

Ministers and commissioners
Sign away
Mineral and timber
Concession, in exchange
For yellow wheat which
The people can’t eat
And at noon,
The wives drive Mercedes Benzes to
Hairdresser, making ready
For the evening’s occasion (Our Sister, p. 57).

This declaration, formulated in a discourse of postcoloniality, is coherent with Simon
Gikandi’s position about “the state of undecidability in which the culture of colonialism continues
to resonate in what was supposed to be its negation” (S. Gikandi, 1996: 14). The new authorities are
still reluctant to make resounding revelations on the colonial or pre-colonial eras. Baako in
Fragments is denied permission by Ghanavision to shoot a film on slavery, as if the authorities are
accepting de facto, to cover up former pre-colonial atrocities. Precisely, Awoonor’s hero reminisces
colonial exactions occurring in 1949 in Siasme, during the fierce repression against the villagers
who went ahead with their annual ceremony of “purification and worship”, despite a ban issued by
the colonials. The details of the evocation are impressionistic:

The police, pursuing their victory, burned down the village, took
Captive the women, rounded up stray goats and sheep, looted
Houses for money and gold trinkets and liquor, and returned
Triumphantly to the school compound (…) dragging along some
Of the women who could scarcely stand on their feet. (This Earth, p. 136)

Awoonor achieves an irony by contrasting such a scene with another one of the colonial period,
when the District Commissioner in a speech celebrates the achievements of the British
Commonwealth, and hails the democratic spirit of the “British people, endowed with the priceless
gift of freedom” (This Earth, p. 44).

Aidoo, for her part, pours scorn on neo-colonialism as it attempts to weaken further the
former colonies through subtler means, such as allocating scholarship and awards to their
educated elites:

Awards?
What
Dainty name to describe
This
Most merciless
Most formalised
Open
Thorough
Spy system of all times
For a few pennies now and a
Doctoral degree later,
Tell us about
Your people
Your history
Your mind
Tell us
Boy
How
We can make you weak
Weaker than you’ve already
Been

(Our sister, pp.86-87)

In her idiosyncratic, postmodernist approach, Aidoo deconstructs the Western concept of the “white man’s burden”, and debunks thus Europe’s good intentions towards Africa even after independence. Such parts in her novel disclose an intention not only to settle accounts with the former coloniser, but also to warn vigorously against its hegemonic policies.

Armah’s style is different, more restricted to the sensibility of the artist who observes and rebels against a hostile environment. He is a judge of his society, but he functions also as a visionary in search of a way towards its regeneration, a fact that makes Simon Gikandi go so far as to affirm: “in Fragments, we are struck by the way society, as a real and historical entity, is minimised, sometimes negated entirely” (S. Gikandi, 1987:87). However, one can argue that the dramatic incidents he relates about state oppression is deictic proof of concern. Armah’s preferred vantage point for his perceptions and remarks is his protagonist Baako, that is the persona conveying the author’s distress about the moral and spiritual bankruptcy of his country. In particular, the writer laments over the process through which traditional values are emptied of their original significance, as their communal functions are now assimilated to such passions as greed and acquisitiveness. As Ode Ogede observes, Foli, Baako’s uncle and Korankye, the fake traditional priest, are “the causes as well as the symptoms of the diseases of graft, hypocrisy and greed engendered by Western individualism” (O. Ogede, 1991:533).  

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The disease indeed takes its roots in the deep structures of society, in which practices go according to hard and fast rituals. The blind but clairvoyant grandmother Naana foresees disaster and laments as the perfunctory and insincere way in which her family carries out duties towards the departed ones. The libations poured on the floor by the avaricious uncle Foli are insufficient to satisfy the ancestors’ spirit during the ceremonies of Baako’s departure abroad and the outdoing of Arabia’s child. Worst of all, this latter ceremony is organised too soon, before the end of the mandatory week of indoor confinement for the child. Baako’s mother, Efua, has seen to it that the event coincides with payday, to obtain more lavish gifts from relatives. For Naana, then, the tradition is being flouted, and the cosmic forces can retaliate accordingly:

“Great friend, they have taken to forgetting the ancestors themselves. They do not look to those gone before, and they do not see the child. Where are their eyes, then?”

Given Naana’s prophetic warnings, the ensuing death of Araba’s child is an expected outcome. In relation to the organic link that is maintained between the living and the dead, Edward Sackey insists:

The cycle must not be broken. If it is broken it means the disruption Of a natural process. The preservation of the cyclic continuity of Time is important to the survival of the community as a whole. The Premature outdoing of Araba’s child is a case in point; the child’s Entry into the material world is disrupted, and so it suffers death as A result (E. Sackey, 1991:395).

The protagonist’s suffering from nausea, together with his fits of acute depression, parallels thus in metaphoric guise the trickery of imperfectly performed rituals for him and for his nephew.

Awoonor’s Amamu follows a similar itinerary, with violent headaches, and a gradual sinking into madness. This suffering of the souls allegorises the victimisation, the politicians’ abuse of power and squandering of the country’s resources. These signify, for the artist-cum-visionary, a breach in the covenant between traditional society and the spiritual forces that regulate it.

In chapter 1a, Awoonor insists that the equilibrium between the gods and the living must at all times be maintained. His dream evocation features a group of worshippers who have fled to the forest following an offence committed against the cult of Yewe. The appearance of the god Sakpanna inspires terror, and signals a contamination of the land. According to Edward Sackey, it is believed that among the Ewe–Amlos people, “when Sakpanna appears in town, disaster in
the form of smallpox strikes as a punishment for a social crime committed (E. Sackey, 1991:404).

One can note that both in *Fragments* and *This Earth*, the breaches in traditional conduct lead each time to disastrous consequences. And from a wider frame of interpretation, these two cases allegorise the tragedy of Ghana as a whole, since society at large seems to have turned against its own principles of being.

Armah, in particular, focuses attention on the cargo cult, a practice resulting from the frantic desire to consume goods imported by travellers returning from industrialised countries. Studying this aspect in a research work on Armah, B. Riche interprets the phenomenon as a reflection of the Africans’ tendency to remain dependent on the Western means and modes of production (B. Riche, 1998: 105-118). Unwilling to fit into this new pattern of order, Baako is seen as a freak by the rest of society. The up-and-going Brempong is in fact a model of success. He has brought enough consumer goods for himself and his people to be met by a pompous ceremony when he arrives at the airport. In contrast, Baako gets home unnoticed, having brought with him only “a suitcase, a portable typewriter and a guitar” (*Fragments*, p. 55). No goods, no gifts are brought to be lavished on his snobbish mother Efua, - only a university degree in creative writing.

Armah uses irony as a structural device to indicate the gap between this individual and his group. As in his first novel *The Beautiful Ones are Not yet Born* (Armah, 1967), where he makes his protagonist, the Man, guilty of not sharing in the national game of corruption, he makes Baako a remorseful man: he has failed to bring honour and distinction to his family by refusing to abide by the new standards of materialistic ostentation. In his insanity provoked by group pressure, Baako is brought to believe that his has been an attitude of arrogance: “arrogance. It’s all arrogance without the others, isn’t it?” (*Fragments*: 221).

In contrast, Ama Ata Aidoo avoids the devices of structural irony to render an authorial feeling of despair in relation to public responsibility. Her protagonist Sissy acts consistently as a lucid young girl, an eye opener who cautions that “an enemy has thrown a huge bolder across the path. We have been scattered and we wander too far. We are in danger of getting completely lost” (*Our Sister*, p. 111). With a quaint mixture of moralising figurative language and blunt accusations, Aidoo points at Africans who fail to act in the rational interest and blindly admire and serve the former masters. The young Sammy, whom she meets at a reception at the embassy where she receives a grant to visit Europe, is a sycophantic admirer of the white continent:
His voice, as he spoke of that far-off world, was wet with Longings.
Perhaps he had been invited to the dinner just to sing of the Wonders of Europe? *Our Sister*, p. 9)

Unequivocally, Aidoo’s discourse is polemical and reveals a rigid set of convictions. She lashes at “whitened” black Africans and recommends a social and cultural loyalty. With the motif of Sissie visiting Europe, she broaches the issue of voluntary exile. At a meeting of Ghanaian intellectuals in London, she presents the opposed views of her nationalist heroine and an expatriate working as bank executive, and exposes as false the man’s willingness to work at home if given adequate means. The man’s pleading tone tinged with hypocrisy:

“I decided I’ll give it all up and just take one third of my present gross, since it is clear that my country cannot afford my services. After all, what else can I do?” Pause. I was going to tell him to go to hell, naturally (*Our Sisters*, p. 122).

In particular, the renowned doctor who boasts about his achievements abroad and refuses to return to Ghana to work for his own country is “the symbol of everything that was distasteful about the folks who have decided to stay overseas permanently” (*Our Sisters*, p. 126). Both Aidoo and her heroine join voices to declare in a sententious way that “for the slave, there is nothing at the centre but worse slavery” (*Our Sister*, p. 88). The principle raised here is simply that of human dignity and recognition of personal duties towards the nation. Aidoo’s position here is concurrent with the Fanonian stance recommending recognition of one’s identity, and somewhat a rejection of the European ethos. Frantz Fanon writes:

*Quittons cette Europe qui n’en finit pas de parler de l’homme tout en le massacrant partout où elle le rencontre, à tous les coins de ses propres rues, à tous les coins du monde.* (F.Fanon, 1961, p. 239).

Aidoo echoes with the following: “come home, my brother. Come to our people. They are the only ones who need to know how much we are worth” (*Our Sister*, p. 130). Despite the challenge of discomfort and scarcity of resources, Aidoo privileges the dignity of serving and representing the nation. Sissie’s happiness in returning to Ghana is expressed through the following simile as her plane is nearing its destination: “that felt like fresh honey on the tongue: a mixture of complete sweetness and smoky roughage. Below was home with its unavoidable warmth, and, even after these thousands of years, its uncertainties” (*Our Sister*, p. 133).
Actually, the moral implication of the intellectual people’s participation in the nation building is a sensitive issue, and which has, over the years, generated much rivalry and resentment among writers. Armah’s early novels reflect an implicit condemnation of one-part state authority. In *Fragments*, his wholesale rejection of the system is notably illustrated by an unsympathetic portrait of Asante Smith, the Managing Director of the state-controlled Ghanavision broadcasting house. Smith is presented as an obedient and pliable man of the authoritative regime, who lectures Baako on “the need to take pictures of your elders who freed the nation” (*Fragments*, p. 214). This portrait is meant to caricature Kofi Awoonor, who once was a manager of the Ghana film corporation, and hence implicitly accused of ganging with the corrupt old guard that freed the nation only to advance its own interests. In retaliation, Awoonor produces a counter-portrait of Armah in his next novel, *Comes the Voyager at Last* (1992), which the disapproving Gerald Moore – more justifiable – considers as a “fairly crude attack” (G. Moore, 1980∗). It seems indeed that in his description, Awoonor lacks creative control and yields to the basic instinct of abuse and polemics. The journalist and novelist he pictures, and who accompanies a black American visiting Africa, is attracted to black nationalist theories, and his search for the revolution is sham and nebulous. The onslaught is particularly severe when Awoonor refers to pseudo-intellectuals in the league of Armah in the following satirical invective:

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Aren’t they supposed to hate everybody and everything? Aren’t they
Supposed to write things which no one understands? Everybody and
Everyone at his newspaper was wrong (...) Above all Kwame Nkrumah
And everybody connected with the government was corrupt, evil-
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In his thinly-disguised evocation of the malignant accusation of corruption levelled against him, Awoonor makes fiction collide with reality when he feels compelled to produce autobiographical details about his own sacking from a government position:

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The reason why I was dismissed I believe was that I was appointed to my job by the
previous government, I mean the civilian one under Nkrumah, the man who was
driven out by soldiers (K. Awoonor, 1992:69).
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Armah has reportedly avoided government appointments, and has kept to his artistic and academic field, while Awoonor has been Ghanaian ambassador to several countries and to the

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∗ Moore refers to an extract of the novel, published earlier in *Okike*, 7, April 1975, pp. 31-57
United Nations (J. Wilkinson, 1992:18), Aidoo has held the position of Minister of education. Both writers claim that such occupations are consistent with their nationalist commitments, as well as congruent with their academic activities.

But in their novels, this advocacy is hardly discernible, and the commitment is more visionary than factual. Even if Aidoo’s anti-colonialism and nationalism is plainly conveyed by her headstrong Sissie, curative or heroic narrative is out of her scope: her male characters inspire contempt, and never function as steadfast figures spearheading national renewal. Her woman protagonist explores parts of Europe, discovers in it the remains of paternalism which underpins the on-going Western logic of hegemony, then returns to Africa, her “crazy old continent” (Our Sister, p. 133) without a clear idea of what militant role she would play in it. The perennial belief of Aidoo is simply that women like her should serve their country, and “should take part in the struggle against underdevelopment” (A. James, 1992:22).

In This Earth, Amamu is the persona through whom Awoonor attempts to rebuild an image of restored order of justice in his country; his traditional mythical construct is the sea lady, a symbol of ideal love for Amamu, embodied successively in Dede, the childhood sweetheart, and Addisa, the mistress who replaces an abhorred snobbish and uncaring wife. Through her spiritual contact, the hero seeks to atone for the guilt of having been a lawyer, a figure of power much hated by the common people, and actually unable to help in alleviating the misfortunes of his underprivileged compatriots. As he sinks gradually into madness, the hero becomes the companion of the sea maiden, surrealistically evoked in the prologue as follows:

A mermaid was sitting on my lap. Dripping water. Her feet were fins spread-eagled in fans. Sitting on my lap. Her eyes were rolling in circles of little fires, her breasts balls of flames; she was breathing pollen gold and cinnamon down my neck; her teeth rows of sapphire and corals. She was shedding tears of moondust (This Earth, p. 13).

In the ‘realistic’ parts, her first embodiment in Dede reflects a short and tender love felt by Amamu for this girl who dies as a child. Addisa, believed to be her next embodiment, can provide the protagonist with temporary happiness, but nonetheless cannot soothe his terrible guilt of having left Ibrahim die at the hands of the police. It is through his fusion with the sea lady- thus his self-sacrifice - that Amau conceives of redemption, and a communion with the offended land, so that the desired regeneration can take place. The “quixotic smile on his face” (This Earth, p. 180) on the
beach, before his death in the asylum, symbolises this desire to help even through the gift of his own self. About the function of the sea spirit, Awoonor comments in an interview:

“That self (i.e. the sea-lady), which is the African self in that personality, fragmented in all those experiences, has achieved a reconciliation with that reality by what is almost like a kind of self-sacrifice” (J. Wilkinson, 1992:28)

In a sense, Armah’s Baako’s growing insanity can also be ascribed to an allegory of sacrifice. Even if not patterned on the notion of sin and redemptive death for communal salvation, it is to be connected to the notion of purification implied by the sea, and by Juana, whose passion for the ocean makes her a material representation of the mythical Mame Water. Like Amamu, Baako foresees, although in a faint way, a reparation and a redemption for the community, and Juana plays a part in this vision. His hope is reinforced by the traditional allegory of the Mame Water and the musician who falls in love with her. Baako thus narrates the myth to his mistress:

She leaves him to go back to the sea, and they meet at long, fixed intervals only. It takes courage. The goddess is powerful, and the Musician is filled with so much love he can’t bear the separation. But then it is this separation which makes him sing as he never sang before (Fragments, p. 171).

This suggest that the Mme Water functions as a muse for creativity, and Juana, her embodiment, through her capacity for “adjustment” and “survival” (Fragments, p; 46), possesses the regenerative resources to make Baako’s predicament temporary, and pregnant with creativity for the future.

Thus for the three novels approached here, one can note a profound preoccupation of Armah, Awoonor and Aidoo about the social evils of their new West African state. There are different, at times antagonistic perceptions of the issues. The dialogism that can be observed in the respective texts verges on rivalry and polemics; it corroborates Frederic Jameson’s theory that “the normal form of the dialogical is essentially an antagonistic one” (F. Jameson, 1981: 84), which may indeed indicate different ideological interests. On the purely creative plane, the three authors have a common approach, which is to present an intellectual protagonist. He or she acts as a living consciousness sifting the events and identifying the colonial and postcolonial factors that have had such a devastating impact on social structures. The writers thus denounce an unrelenting oppression of the grassroots, coupled with an irrepressible desire of the national leading class to “harvest where they have not sown”, and a quire undeserved wealth.

But the “unsaid” in their novels is that the protagonists fail in their attempts to grapple with the serious ethical problems faced by their societies; their retrospective and meditative dealings
with the elements they consider as impediments to progress generate no genuine and active militancy; their moral position remains uncertain, even if the allegorical medium that they use is intended to express their individual revolts and appeal to the necessity to recapture the lost “golden age”. The differing individualities of these writers, and their discrete ideological views account for their latent rivalries. But whether polemical, idealistic or feminist, their modernist visions of search for African progress are convergent, and imply a revision of the traditional ethos in the formulation of a coherent project. In this perspective, the writers, though much concerned with the group’s fate, express an individuality which, through the didactic medium, express critical view of progress.

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