

## **Ayi Kwei Armah's Vulgar Language in the Beautiful Ones are not Yet Born, a Therapeutic Tool**

Alexander Dakubo Kakraba

University of Mines and Technology, Tarkwa, P.O. Box 237, Ghana

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**Abstract:** In this discourse I will contend that Ayi Kwei Armah's language in his first novel, *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* is deliberately crafted to sound very vulgar for a purpose. The coarse language is used as an electroconvulsive tool to deliberately shock the reader to draw his attention to the decadence and corrupt behaviours Armah exposes and condemns in the novel. In other words, it is for a therapeutic purpose. Consequently, I will posit that Armah uses form to complement content in this novel.

**Key words:** Decadence, language, pervasive, therapeutic, vulgar

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### **INTRODUCTION**

*The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* is the novel that catapulted Ayi Kwei Armah into the limelight. The novel is generally a satirical attack on the Ghanaian society during Kwame Nkrumah's regime and the period immediately after independence in the 1960s. In this narrative, Armah demonstrates his eloquence and establishes his trademark as a profound moral writer as stated by Ode Ogede in his study, *Ayi Kwei Armah Radical Iconoclast Pitting Imaginary World against Actual*, "In *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, Armah makes his stand against corruption pointedly clear. He thus asserts a moral power never before seen in African fiction". Most satires heavily depend on humour as a tool to criticize, but *The Beautiful Ones* is different. Although in this novel Armah's language is sometimes humorous, it is very often unimaginably vulgar. The Collins Cobuild Advanced Learner's English Dictionary (2004:1629) states "If you describes something as vulgar, you think it is in bad taste or of poor artistic quality" and continues "If you describe pictures, gestures, or remarks as vulgar, you dislike them because they refer to sex or parts of the body in a rude way that you find unpleasant". In the light of Cobuild definition, there is doubt that Armah's language in *The Beautiful Ones* is very vulgar because he very often refers to sex or parts of the body in a rude way that one will find distasteful. However, the irony is that Armah's vulgarity rather adds to the artistic and aesthetic quality of the novel. The Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary (2006:1648) also defines vulgar as "not having or showing a good taste; not polite, elegant or well behaved". Armah's unconventional language in his first novel is a novelty in regular African Literature and

the African society at large, and marks a complete departure from his predecessors like Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka and a host of other African writers. It is what makes the novel unique. For example, Achebe as a satirist, equally exposes and attacks the follies of the Nigerian society after political independence in *No Longer at Ease* and *Man of People*, but in a more subtle and conventional way. Perhaps it is Armah's deliberate transgression of the conventional norms of regular literature that made Chinua Achebe to describe *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, "but it is a sick book" (Morell, 1975). However, Chinua Achebe completely misses the point in his criticism of Armah and *The Beautiful Ones*. Achebe, in his unrealistic criticism, failed to see the artistic and therapeutic effect of the vulgar language in *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*. The language is artistically and deliberately crafted this way to serve as an electroconvulsive tool. In other words, it is intended to shock the reader to calculatingly draw his or her consideration to the dreadfully shocking and repulsive things and behaviors like corruption, materialism, moral degeneration, filth and the pervasive moral, spiritual and physical decadence in the society so as to effect a change. In this novel, there is no fabula sjuzet dichotomy. Armah harmonizes form and content in *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*. The vulgar language, therefore, reflects the vulgar behavior of the characters in the novel. It serves a particular artistic occupation and helps in the interpretation of the histoire. The form and content harmony in this narrative is what Geoffrey (1981) call "monism". The focus of this study to examine how Ayi Kwei Armah uses the inelegant language to expose the ills of the society.

## DISCUSSION

Although the narrator is not the first in the novel to start with vulgarism, yet he is often very earthy when he takes over the narration from the characters. For example, the narrator informs the reader that in the lavatory at the man's working place someone has scribbled on the wall the expression 'VAGINA SWEET!' The reference to the female genital this way is rude and impolite. Although it is common to sometimes hear people mention vagina, it is a taboo to do so openly in most African communities and what is a taboo can sometimes be vulgar. This is why Africans have so many euphemisms to describe especially the genital part of a woman. What is worse is for narrator to enter the lavatory (a private place) where the expression 'VAGINA SWEET' is written and make it public. Through these Armah portrays a society whose moral fiber is completely eroded and moral decadence is pervasive and consuming. The novelist sometimes deliberately uses vulgar language to offend the reader's sense of decency, thereby drawing his attention to the very thing he satirically and strongly condemns in the society. The result is that, the reader is given no room at all to think for himself but to condemn these obnoxious acts. A good example is when the narrator talks about the banister neglected by the Railway Administrators which belies the lack of maintenance culture in the country:

Apart from the wood itself there were, of course, people themselves, just so many hands and fingers bringing help to the wood in its course toward putrefaction. Left-hand fingers in their careless journey from a hasty anus sliding all the way up the banisters as their owners made their trip from the lavatory downstairs to the offices above. Right-hand fingers still dripping with the after-piss and stale sweat from fart crotches.

The above extract is one of the strongest therapeutic shocks that Armah administers to the reader which also violates his sense of decency, for, the language is not only vulgar, but the image it creates is also nauseating and repulsive. Armah's deliberate use of the vulgar words and phrases 'putrefaction', 'fat', 'crotches', 'hasty anus', 'after-piss', helps in creating this offensive image. Again, it portrays Armah's defying disrespect for the private parts of the human body and how he continuously and deliberately losses the African's tendency to be euphemistic on the numerous occasions he abuses the human parts. In *The Beautiful Ones*, Armah is bent on shocking his readers and in so doing awaken them to the rottenness in the society, which occurs as a result of the

lack of culture of maintenance. On such occasions Armah strong tone of disgust and disapproval pervades the extract. This repulsive picture or imagery is a recurring thing in the novel. A similar image is portrayed when the narrator talks of the boxes that are placed at strategic points all over the city to serve not only as containers for waste matter, but as symbols of cleanliness:

In the end not many of the boxes were put out, though there was a lot said about the large amount of money paid for them. The few provided, however, had not been ignored. People used them well, so that it took no time at all for them to get full. People still used them, and they overflowed with banana peels and mango seeds and thoroughly sucked-out oranges and the chaff of sugarcane and most of the thick brown wrapping from a hundred balls of kenkey. People did not have to go up to the boxes any more. From a distance they aimed their rubbish at the growing heap, and a good amount of juicy offal hit the face and sides of the box before finding a final resting place upon the heap. As yet the box was still visible above it all, though the writing upon it could no longer be read.

In the above extract, the punctilious narrator's disgust and condemnation of the people's bad habit in the society is seen in the use of the strong sarcastic expression "a good amount offal." Armah's deliberate vulgarity, his anger and desire to offend the reader to correct is further seen in this attack on Koomson, the minister:

His mouth had the rich stench of a rotten menstrual blood. The man held his breath until the new smell had gone down in the mixture with liquid atmosphere of the Party man's farts filling the room. At the same time Koomson's insides gave a growl longer than usual, an inner fart of personal, corrupt thunder which in its fullness sounded as if it had rolled down all the way from the eating throat thundering through the belly and the guts, to end in further silent pollution of the air already thick with flatulent fear. Oyo had remained silent all this time, standing close to the door. But now, with choking sound, she retreated into the hall.

This is a unique passage, a specimen of the deliberately crafted inelegant language in the narrative. The expressions "rotten menstrual blood," "Party man's farts," "an inner fart of personal," "silent pollution of the air" and "air thick with flatulent fear" are inelegant or indecorous expressions. They are, therefore, very

offensive. Jones (1969) in his review of the novel in 1969 in *African Literature Today* prior to its publication by Heinemann extracts the above passage and comments “This is a specimen of the deliberately coarse language that Armah has chosen to express the coarse corruption the novel treats. Some how it is unpleasantly apt.” In other words, Jones underscores the language or form and content relationship in the narrative. The vulgarity, no doubt, shows Armah’s outrage at Koomson’s corrupt attitude and moral degeneration, attitudes that have far reaching impact on the nation. The indelicate expressions portray Armah’s unique novelistic style and his prowess in manipulating language to complement content in this narrative. Throughout the narrative Armah paints such repulsive images, for example, the wall of the lavatory, which is “...thickly streaked with an organic brown,...shit” 105, “...dust and perpetual mud covered over with crushed tomatoes and rotten vegetables” 40, “Past the big public lavatory the stench claws inward to the throat” Ibid, and “Here there is only the stale soapsuds merging in grainy rotten dirt from everybody’s scum, a reminder of armpit full of yellowed hair...”. Perhaps, in this novel Armah applies Plutarch’s concept of imitation. That is, he appropriately paints the evil, ugliness and decadence that characterized Nkrumah’s Ghana so beautifully. As a result, Armah cannot be condemned as a writer, as purported by Achebe (Morell, 1975), for the kind of craftsmanship he demonstrates in his transgression and manipulation of language to reflect or capture the ugliness in the society. To confirm the therapeutic value of Armah’s vulgar language Ogede (2000) rightly and strongly contends:

The tone of disgust in the passage conveys Armah’s outrage at the erosion of the values he cherishes; contrary to the views of critics like Aidoo (1971), Achebe, Awoonor, and Obumsele, this is not the aesthetic discomfort of a foreign tourist, but the anger of a nationalist at his country’s degeneration. Indignant at the mismanagement of the Railway Administration in particular, the narrator desires to expose and curb the inefficiency and unproductivity that typify the public service in general. Thus, he sanctions the cleaner who hardly performs his duty as well as the other workers who seldom on duty; we see that, with such dereliction and absenteeism, it is not surprising the nation is hardly making much progress.

Armah’s language in *The Beautiful Ones* is so vulgar and sometimes very abusive that it consciously draws the attention of the reader. Fraser (1980) also opines that

“There is a marked therapeutic value to much of Armah’s study. We can see that he is concerned fundamentally with the ethical quality of a nation’s life, a potential for exuberant health he sees as having been strangled by an infection of foreign origin”. And Ogede (2000) again buttresses this, “*The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* deals with an issue that is realistic enough. For, in it, Armah definitely brings out clear images which depict the excruciating dilemma of imprisonment. He not only focuses on the anguish of appropriate human figures, but also provides a clear picture of the polluted environment in which the characters are forced to live, his disgust with the squalor finding pungent expression”. Ogede’s observation that Armah “deals with an issue realistic enough” and “focuses on the anguish of appropriate human figures” is obviously in reaction to Achebe’s (1972a) criticism of Armah in his essay “Africa and Her Writers”. In this essay, Achebe regards Armah’s blatant identification of Ghana in this novel as a creative faux pas. He opines that if in the novel “the hero is nameless, so should everything else be” and further maintains that rather than naming a specific country, Armah should have created some “modern, existentialist no-man land” *ibid*. It is this criticism Ogede cleverly rebuffs without referring to Achebe’s study.

There is no doubt that it is power of Armah’s unconventional language, verbal vituperations and the vulgarity of his words that imbue this novel with its strong therapeutic effect. There are occasions that the narrator and the voice of the author (Armah) personally intrude with plain abusive and shocking words. On these occasions the narrator is quick to strongly abuse or insult the obnoxious characters. Wikipedia, the Free Encyclopedia (2008) defines insult as “an expression, statement (or sometimes behavior) which is considered degrading and offensive.” It continues, “Insults may be intentional or accidental.” WordIQ.com (2009) also defines it as “a statement or action which affronts or demeans someone.” Significantly, it states that although insults are prohibited in certain societies by law, “But insults offered as satire in an artistic venue are usually regarded as protected speech.” Armah’s narrator takes advantage of the poetic license (insults) offered him as a satirist in this artistic venue (*The Beautiful Ones* as a satiric novel). For example, during the dialogue between the man and the overtime clerk, the narrator intrudes to show his indignation about the clerk’s ridiculous and irritating effort to imitate the speech of some Englishman by calling him (the Clerk) “the blind fool” and later describing him in the following words “idiot’s face a mask of puzzlement”. The overtime clerk is not the only culprit who suffers this shocking abuse from the narrator,

Amankwa, the timber contractor suffers the same fate. The narrator describes Amankwa's mouth as 'wolf shape' and even when he (Amankwa) makes an attempt to smile, the narrator quickly intrudes, "His wolf mouth was agape in a gesture that must have been meant for a smile, a thing that was totally unnecessary and irritating". The expression "..., a thing that was totally unnecessary and irritating" marks the intrusion of the narrator to make his opinion known and to take swipe at the corrupt Amankwa, which shows that Armah is engaged in the act of communicating his burning disgust and consequently to encode the reader about his animosity for the character. Through these verbal vituperations, the narrator, in the notion of Wayne C. Booth (:155), distances himself from these obnoxious characters on the axis of moral (virtue), "In any reading experience there is an implied dialogue among author, narrator, the other characters, and the readers. Each of the four can range, in relation to each of the others, from identification to complete opposition, on any axis of value, moral, intellectual, aesthetic, and even physical". The narrator in *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* occasionally interrupts to show his complete opposition and to distance himself from the corrupt, obnoxious and degenerated characters as demonstrated above. In Armah's novels, the narrator and consequently the voice of the author sometimes sounds abusive about the obnoxious characters. For example, the third person narrator in *The Healer* is equally quick in taking a swipe at the fool and easy-to-manipulate Buntui when the narrator focalizes, "The song was something Densu had heard before, just that morning. It was the song of the new army recruits-monotonous, irresistibly stupid" and he ends with a strong sarcastic statement, "Only, Buntui had had the brains to change the words, so that the song was now about him alone". The narrator encodes the reader and makes his opinion about the song known with the expression "irresistibly stupid" and consequently the impact of the sarcasm comes to fore.

The WordIQ.com (2009) further argues that:

Profanity is frequently used as part of insults to strengthen their emotional impact. Some body parts, although useful, may be of low esteem; the word asshole is used to imply disapproval for the behavior or morals of another,...

Sometimes Armah deliberately effaces the narrator and leaves the indelicate language in the hands of some of the major characters. But on such occasion there is no difference, because the voice of these characters is completely inseparable from the narrator's, and consequently the author's. Here, Armah's use of insults

belies his resentment and what can be described as his arrogant contempt for black politicians trying to shamefully imitate the way of life of the white exploiters immediately they took over power from them. Armah's anger for these people is so consuming that he generously endows even the soft-spoken and ever-counseling Teacher, the "I narrator", with some of these shocking expressions, for, Teacher discussing these black politicians with the man says, "How were these leaders to know that while they were climbing up to shit in their people's faces, their people had seen their arseholes and drawn away in disgust laughter?". This is a fearless castigation and vilification of the corrupt politicians who took over power immediately after independence. Robert Frazer (1980) describes these vituperations and harsh satiric tones as Armah's "wholesale disgust at the antics of African politicians" which portrays "a much larger pattern of betrayal". Armah's use of the words "shit" and "arseholes" makes what begins as a plain insult to degenerate into profanity and consequently sounds vulgar. They are consciously used to shock the reader and consequently draw his attention to the wrong doings of these black African leaders, who after using the people to gain political power, turn against them and exploit them (the people) like the whites did. Armah's use of the word "disgust" is meant to show the silent animosity of the people.

Teacher's foul expressions continue when he attacks the civil servants and the poet who all wait to serve power to get their stomachs filled and he passes judgment on them, "He will no doubt jump to go and fit his tongue into new arses when new men spring up to shit on us" 89. The outrage builds up to a crescendo when teacher verbally assaults lawyers, merchants and the party men, "No difference at all between the white and their apes, the lawyers and merchants and now the apes of the apes, our party men" Ibid.

In the above extract, Armah's vulgar words shift from the abuse of the carnal parts to pure insults. The narrator, no doubt, shows his superiority through his high standards moral disparagement. What is shocking is Armah's uncompromising position as a crusader, his angry defiance and his preparedness to challenge and abuse certain institutions which hitherto, were seen as infallible and untouchable in the society. The shocking attacks on these institutions are to demystify the powers that surrounded them during the colonial era and the period immediately after independence. The attacks are to awaken the ordinary people from their stupor and to show how vulnerable these institutions are under close scrutiny. It is this defiance and commitment that make Armah a unique African novelist and clearly distinguishes him

from other African writers. He blames the African people, especially their leaders for Africa's problems after independence. It is this commitment that his compatriot and fellow Ghanaian writer, Aidoo (1971) lauds, "Today one can talk safely of only a few committed African writers. Of these, only three come easily to mind. Ewande of Cameroun, Ouologuem of Mali and Ayi Kwei Armah of Ghana. And what they all have in common is that people invariably say their works: "This very good, one agrees, but the author has exposed us to our enemies (the whites?) by talking of our weakness, (our greed, cruelty to one another, the unhealthy physical conditions in which the majority of our people live, the fact that our own rulers differ from the colonizers only by skin colour) and other unsavoury facts of our present and our past". This, of course, is an apt description of Armah and his work, *The Beautiful Ones*. As far as Armah is concerned Aidoo (1971) is absolutely right and her significant observation rebuffs critics (Frederiksen, 1987; Wright, 1989) who take issues with his (Armah's) radicalism and argues that he portrays a very simplistic dichotomy of evil and good his works, where everything evil emanates from the white race, and the way of the black people are pure and good. To buttress Aidoo's conception of Lazarus (1990) contends:

The cumulative effect of this "network" of details and symbols in *The Beautiful Ones* is to present the reader with a harrowing and relentless vision of Ghana as a neocolony. The novel's "Ghana" is a society that is bent on self-destruction. Crippled, both materially and psychologically by its recent and not-so-recent history, it is perversely engaged in the process of entrenching the divisions and the systematic brutalities wrought by this history. As though primed by some monstrous and self-maintaining logic, it continues to maim itself in futile effort to satisfy an insatiable, alien master. It is sick to the very core, rotten with the congealed decay of centuries of domination, capitulation, and betrayal. The society limps into tomorrow, riven, bereft, dependent, its citizens engaged in ceaseless, debased, and dehumanizing struggle simply to eke out their lives from day to day, from Passion Week to Passion Week.

It is the corrupt machinations of the Koomsons, Amankwas and the Overtime Clerks (Africans) in their own society that Lazarus refers to as the betrayal and self-maiming. It is this sickness that Armah seeks to cure with his vulgar language as a therapeutic tool. Lazarus (1990) on the same page of his work mentioned explains the

purpose of the Armah therapy (Armah's vulgarity) in *The Beautiful Ones* when he states that "There is nothing gratuitous about Armah's presentation in all this. His portrait needs to be as graphic, as comprehensive as it is, in order to disclose roots and causes; in order, ultimately, to be productive of the type of knowledge that must accompany decisive social action". Therefore, in this narrative Armah narrator is unique; it is unique in the sense that he is a puritan and moralist, "a perfectionist", a crusader, an iconoclast who is prepared to take on a nation in which, according to Ogede (2000), "its people accept corruption as a cultural norm". The narrator of *The Beautiful Ones* speaks the truth. He criticizes with passion and is very assertive. He assumes the position of the biblical prophet Amos in this novel. The narrator plays a very useful role in the novel and consequently in social life as a reformer, a prosecutor or a purifier of conscience, and a propagator of important innovations. He aims at purging the Ghanaian society from the traumatic effects of corruption and decadence. From this perspective, *Beautiful Ones* can be described as a consequential religious novel.

In the novel, Armah assumes the karma of a fearless crusader and with his vehement righteous indignation and vulgar language as a weapon aims at exposing the weaknesses of nation wreckers like His Excellency, Joseph Koomson, Minister Plenipotentiary, whose vapid materialism, Fraser (1980) argues, "acts as an intense focus of the cravings of a nation obsessively bent on the pillage of its newly acquired spoils". Fraser's observation about Koomson is in a way an endorsement of Armah's harsh treatment of him (Koomson). The insult and abuse of certain characters in this novel are numerous. For example, when The Man recalls how Koomson was dull in school but has risen to his high ministerial position, The Man remarks "shit, he was actually stupid" and when Teacher teasingly reminds him (The Man) that perhaps Koomson has got a new brain, the man retorts and shows his irritation, "New brain my foot". These are pure insults that express the author's indignation for Koomson who represents corrupt politicians in the novel.

The verbal vituperation is sometimes very overwhelming that they underscore Armah's aim so clearly. In such circumstances he deliberately loses the African inclination to use euphemism. The climax of such verbal vituperations is when Teacher laments so painfully about how black women are so exploited. Here, Teacher uses sexually explicit, vulgar or obscene language to show how disdainful the practice is:

Women, so horribly young, fucked and changed like pants, asking only for blouses and perfumes from

diplomatic bags and wigs of human hair scraped from which decayed white woman's corpse?

The above description of how black woman are still exploited as a result of poverty and desperation is not only shocking to the reader, but Armah makes it sound so disdainful when he makes the reader see that what the women gain at the end of the exploitation of their bodies is a worthless human hair scraped from a decayed white corpse. The use of the word "fucked" is slang and sounds very obscene and inelegant. Such foul words are often used in the ghettos.

Armah is blunt and brutal in his use of such sexually explicit and obscene language when Teacher again describes Koomson's new life spent at the hotel Atlantic-Caprice:

Young juicy vaginas waiting for him in some hired place paid by the government

Although it appears like Armah is portraying his blatant disrespect for the carnal parts of the human body, but this is not the case. It is rather to expose and severely criticize not only the politician's wanton sexual abuse and corrupting of young girls but his disregard for women. The consequence of this raw, inelegant and shocking language is, therefore, actually to expose the pervasive and heightened moral decadence in the political corridors and the entire fabric of the country.

*The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* is so choked with vulgar and foul words like "shit", "fucked", "vagina" and "arsehole". The number of times Armah uses especially the two words "shit" and "fucked" is countless. Armah demonstrates the strength of these words as a vulgarity and to express his antipathy towards certain characters in the novel. For example, in the following internal focalization, Teacher expresses his indignation and disgust at the way judges treat those who take to "wee" smoking to escape the harsh economic reality, betrayal and disappointments by the politician, "It used to amaze me afterwards that there was so much lying shit flying around about wee" and he (Teacher) later turns the heat on the judges who dress like their colonial masters, "It used to amaze me until I grew old enough to see that it is all very natural that judges willing to sit through hot afternoons sweating under foolish wigs should feel truly indignant when some poor bastard gets knocked into court for trying to see beyond the pain of the moment, smoking wee," and finally ends the vilifications with the use of shit, "Those among the judges who happen to be able read know that all the holy anger is dog shit, pure and simple, anyway". Yankson (1971) in his article, "The

Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born, An Anatomy of 'Shit'" states that "...the author of *The beautiful Ones...* sees the very fabric of Ghanaian society as a shit." Armah's use of the belligerent, offensive and highly profane words "shits" and especially "fuck" is a novelty in African Literature. Why does Armah freely use these words? Does it stem from his stay in America where the word "fuck" is used loosely in the informal and domestic situation? Wikipedia, the Free Encyclopedia states:

Fuck is an English word that is generally considered profane, that in its most literal meaning refers to the act of sexual intercourse. However, by extension it may be used to negatively characterize anything that can be dismissed, disdained, defiled, or destroyed...

It can be argued, from the Wikipedia point of view, that Armah uses these words to show his disdain and to dismiss the bad situations and behaviours that he satirizes in the novel. He uses these words to express his extreme anger, outrage and hostility towards the pervasive moral, spiritual and physical decadence in the Ghanaian society.

The conductor of the rickety bus at the beginning of the novel introduces the vulgar language when he finally realizes that the man he thinks is a watcher is just a sleeper. He grows uncontrollably furious and angry, as the narrator will put it, "in the special way the upright have of being angry with the perverse" (31) and addresses the man, "You bloody fucking son of a bitch!". Not satisfied because of the tense moment the so-called watcher (the man) gave him, he taunts sarcastically when the man is leaving the bus, "Or were you waiting to shit in the bus" *Ibid*. The words "bloody fucking" "son of a bitch" and "shit" are very vulgar words. These words are American slang and very offensive and they mark the beginning of the numerous shock therapies that Armah administers to the readers of this novel. What is significant to note here is the indignation and explosion with which the conductor utters these words. With this, Armah forces the reader to see how unjustified the conductor is and consequently to show the fear and anxiety wrong doers go through. Ogede (2000) elucidates "...the increasing contempt with which the conductor treats the man (when he finally realizes the man is no spy after all but only an ordinary passenger sleeping in the bus) also register in unmistakable terms the anger any criminal will feel at his own vulnerability". In other words, his verbal vituperations are not a sign of vindication but vulnerability and culpability, a self-betrayal. The significance and seriousness of this self-betrayal is seen when one realizes that the bus symbolically represents the nation Ghana and conductor the leadership of the nation.

The driver of the shiny taxi picks up the vulgar language. As a result of the scare the man gives him when he crosses the road so carelessly with his eyes fixed on the tar in front him, the first of the driver's verbal invectives is "Uncircumcised baboon". And when the man attempts to apologize, it rather infuriates the driver. As he starts his engine and the car begins to move, he finally explodes "your mother's rotten cunt".

Although this very foul expression is quite characteristic of drivers in the Ghanaian society, yet Armah's aim over here is not only just to capture reality but to continue the shock treatment he administers to his readers. The blatant disrespect for the female genital part does not end here, but continues throughout the novel.

Primarily, Armah's use of extreme vulgar or offensive language is a therapeutic tool meant to shock and awaken a very decadent and dying society. For the society was so decadent that only those who did the wrong things were admired and the upright treated with contempt. For example, Oyo and her mother strongly admire the corrupt Koomson and hang on every single word from him, but abhor the man so much that Oyo herself calls him "Chichidodo" and the corrupt Amankwa has gut to shouts at him (the man), "You. You are a very wicked man. You will never prosper. Da," because the man refuses to take the bribe from him (Amankwa). For a society which is so full of walking corpses, bodies walking in their sleep, for, a society in which people are so much disillusioned and the only response they have is, "Aaah, contrey broke oo, contry no broke oo, we dey inside" really needs a shock therapy to revive it. Armah himself confirms this, when he was interviewed by Professor Anyidoho:

Some years ago when I was younger and had energy I said the beautiful ones were not yet born and I was in some places attacked for daring to suggest that things were not so good in Africa. Those were days of celebration and I was saying, hei, hei, cool this celebration, let's have some cerebation. Let's use our minds. (African Heritage series, fifth Du Bois Padmore Nkrumah Lectures)

### CONCLUSION

To conclude, Armah's language in this satire is deliberately crafted to be extremely vulgar, provoking and shocking for a purpose. For a society which was in a major depression as result of the pervading decadence and could not respond to any other treatment, Armah's vulgar language, an electroconvulsive tool becomes the perfect weapon to induce the seizures for the best therapeutic

effect to cure the society of the disorder, "a society totally conditioned to despair (Fraser, 1980). As Ogede (2000) contends, "In *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, Armah makes his stand against corruption pointedly clear. He thus asserts a moral power never before seen in African fiction". Armah's vulgar language is also to show his animosity and overwhelming indignation towards the repugnant behaviors of the people in the society he wrote about. It is a kind of strong protest against the vulgar behaviors in the society. *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born's* strength as a satire is not in the use of humour as demonstrated in many satiric works, but its use of extreme vulgar language, which serves as a therapeutic tool. According to Lazarus (1990), *The Beautiful Ones* "is formulated upon the premise that it is only by knowing one's world, by seeing it for what it is, that one can ever genuinely aspire to bring about its revolutionary transformation". There is no doubt that Armah's iconoclastic stand and his use of vulgar language in the novel is aimed at revolutionarily transforming a society which is so decadent. There is equally no doubt Armah's therapeutic method in *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* is a revolutionary approach in African Literature. It is this fiery attack on society in an extreme vulgar language that marks him as one of the controversial African writers even today, it is also the trademark that has given him recognition worldwide and shows his originality as a writer. Achebe (2007b), the father of African literature, talking about the role of the African novelist in his article "*The Novelist as Teacher*" contends, "He must remain free to disagree with society and go into rebellion against it if need be". In his first novel, Ayi Kwei Armah deems it necessary to rebels against his society. He starts the war against his society and this continues in his subsequent novels. He chastises the leaders and the people for the evil and decadence in the society in very unpalatable language. He uses form (the language) to complement content. It is this which makes the novel *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Born* unique and even more relevant to our contemporary societies. Achebe (2007c) in his study, "The truth of Fiction" argues, "But if art may dispense with the constraining exactitude of literal truth, it does acquire in return incalculable powers of persuasion in the imagination". The basic aim of Armah's novel under discussion is to achieve this power of persuasion in the imaginations of readers globally and to create a change in attitude. Aidoo (1971) confirms this when she concludes her presentation on committed African writers in the following words, "Indeed it seems as if these committed writers have all come to the conclusion that in order to be strong enough to face our more excruciating realities, we have to expose some of

our more unnecessary weaknesses in the hope that we can get rid of them. Of course, it sounds dangerous. But then, it takes a very special type of courage to do auto-surgery". Armah has demonstrated this special courage by carrying out this self-examination on behalf of his country men and Africans in general. In the opinion of Jones (1969), "Armah has taken the predicament of Africa in general, Ghana in particular, and distilled its despair and its hopelessness in a very powerful, harsh, deliberately *unbeautiful* novel". Jones emphasis of *unbeautiful* is especially on the language (the oil) with which Armah paints "the coarse corruption". His *unbeautiful* language may appear vulgar and harsh to some critics but the purpose will not be lost on them as Ama points out. For so long as African cities like Accra and Lagos are swallowed by filth, crime, prostitution, moral decadence and the African politician continuous to be corrupt, Armah's prophetic harsh voice will continue to echo in his readers' ears. It is, therefore, clearly observed that the author uses the vulgar language to criticize the corruption, decadence and the lack of the culture of maintenance that crop up in Ghana and other African countries immediately they attained independence.

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