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Excremental Vision: A Comparative Study of Armah's *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born* and Soyinka's *The Interpreters*

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Abstract

To read Armah's *The Beatyful Ones Are Not Yet Born* and Soyinka's *The Interpreters* is to decode the meaning of excremental vision Armah and Soyinka exploit by using excremental language, especially images of shit and feces, not only to reverse past colonial representations but also to express postcolonial disillusionment and to satirize the failures of colonial development and the corruptions of neocolonial politics. In Armah's excremental vision, shit and its corporeal familiars like phlegm, drool, vomit, sweat, piss, and blood emerge as an index of moral and political outrage in a new Ghana bedeviled by greed and bureaucratic corruption. Similarly, in *The Interpreters*, a story of intellectuals in decolonized Nigeria, Soyinka uses excremental language to present political and corporate misdeeds in terms of unhealthy digestion. His characters like Sekoni and Sogoe are disillusioned because of their project killed by the forces of corruption.

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I. Introduction

A.K. Armah's *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born* and Wole Soyinka's *The Interpreters* exploit excremental language as a powerful discursive resource within the new symbolic order afforded by postcolonial studies for questioning political and aesthetic standards that were legacy not only of British colonialism but of heroic national struggle against British colonialism.

A. K. Armah and Soyinka have altered, inflected and redirected the symbolic associations of excrement inherited from colonial discourse, turning scatology to the task of representing postcolonial disillusionment. On the one hand, Armah and Soyinka employ shit to redress a history of debasement by displaying the failure of colonial developments and the corruption of neocolonial politics, on the other hand, they use it as a governing trope for disrupting inherited association of excrements with colonized or Non-western populations.

This research aims at analyzing excremental language employed not only to reverse past colonial representations but also to express postcolonial disillusionment and satirize corruption of neocolonial politics. Besides, it takes note of excremental language and examines critically how Armah and Soyinka have treated it comprehensively in the new symbolic order to complicate the colonizer/colonized binaries that have so often dominated the field.

Armah and Soyinka have occupied a remarkable space in the discursive realm of postcolonial writing. A great deal of similarities can be drawn between these two writers who belong to the era of disillusionment that was very much characteristic of postindependent Africa. Otherwise put, they responded to the harsh realities of independent society bedeviled by corruption with disillusionment and weary. The literature of disillusionment grew out of a feeling, experienced by many intellectuals,

that they were becoming more and more "socially marginalized as the drama of post colonialism unfolded"(Lazarus 52). They felt isolated and ineffectual, stranded between the masses of the population on their left and the political elites on their right. In nearly all of the works of these writers an emphasis is laid on the "parasitism of the African political elite in attempting to account for the stagnation of postcolonial society" (53).

Born in 1939 to a Fante-speaking parent in the port city of Sekondi-Takoradi, Ghana, Aye Kwei Armah has always been a "controversial figure in African literature" (quoted in Marx 128). He has proved himself to be a tireless experimenter who has a genius for finding new medium for messages. His obsessive vision of an Africa whose only "hope for the future lies in breaking the paralyzing grip of western influence" is embodied in his novels (Wright185). His novels are described as a "diagnosis [and] treatment of [. . .] social ill health" undertaken through the "ultimate role of the [artist as] visionary re-creator (quoted in Marx 228).

His works typically explore postcolonial Africa and focus on human alienation. Though Armah's vision is one of a unified Africa, he writes vehemently of the psychological effects of colonialism on the people of contemporary Ghana and Africa. His first three novels are often grouped together in critical commentary. They each are heavily symbolic representation of life in contemporary Africa. The first, *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born* tells the story of a simple railway clerk during the regime of Kwame Nkruma. Armah dramatizes the conflict between hope for change and the betrayal of that hope by the nation's leaders and serves as a stinging indictment of Nkrumah regime. In work after work we find the elite exposed in all its ruthlessness and vulgarity: there is its ethic of conspicuous consumption, its corruption, its greed and crass materialism, and above all there is its atrocious lack of

vision. Here, for example, is his description, in his novel *Fragments*, of an afternoon gathering of some of Ghana's elites:

> This was a rich crowd of guest, too, sitting at first like a picture already taken, Woolen suits, flashing shoes, important crossed legs, bright rings showing of intertwined fingers held in front of restful bellies, an authentic cold-climate overcoat from Europe or America held traveler-fashion over an arm ,five or six waistcoats ,silken ties and silver clasps, [...], quick – shining wrist watches , a great rich splendor stifling all these people in the warmth of a beautiful day–but that was only an addition to the wonder : sweat called forth new white handkerchiefs brought out with a happy flourish , spreading perfume underneath the mango trees. (260)

The theme of return and disillusionment continues in *Why Are We So Best?* but somewhat with wider scope. The novel portrays disillusioned Modin Dofu who is torn between independence and western values. The return to Africa proves disastrous when the conflict between his rejection of western values and his involvement with Ainee eventually destroys him. In *Two Thousand Seasons*, Armah attempts nothing less than a "remythologization of African history" (Lazarus 61). Though this exercise in myth-making is no more grounded in better reflection on the betrayal of socialism in Africa after independence, it is not less politically committed than Armah's earlier works. It is aimed at restoring to Africans the right to construct their own truths in accordance with their own needs. *The Healer* dramatizes the struggle for African unity. The colonial invaders attempt to manipulate Africa's divisiveness while the healers in the novel attempt to strengthen Africa through inspiration and unity.

Taken together Armah's novels offer a scathing critique of the irresponsibility of the postcolonial leadership in Africa. They are all directed against the philistinism and ideological bankruptcy of the postcolonial elites. All portray living not only beyond their own means but beyond the means of their societies as a whole. They show as the elite whose continuing wealth and power imply the continuing poverty and powerlessness of the peasants, proletarians and marginal toiling below them. However, he is also concerned in his work to look beyond the elite at the "wider social implication of its existence" (Lazarus 55).

Recipient of the 1984 Nobel Prize for Literature, Soyinka is often referred to as one of Africa's finest living writers. Most of his works offered a critique of pre-colonial history while diminishing cultural significance of the colonial period. His characters become the victims of the so called independent government where malfunctioning prevails as the legacy of colonial administration. He not only criticizes the postcolonial Nigerian government but also satirizes pre-colonial African regimes.

His novels, plays, and poetry blend elements of traditional Yoruban folk drama and European dramatic form to create both spectacle and penetrating satire. His narrative technique is based on the Africans cultural tradition where the artist functions as the recorder of the mores and experiences of his society. Soyinka's work reflects this philosophy, serving as a record of twentieth century Africa's political turmoil and the continent's struggle to reconcile with modernization.

He wrote of modern West Africa in a satirical style and with a tragic sense of the obstacles to human progress. Upon his return to Nigeria from England taking a degree from the University of Leeds, he wrote his first important play *A Dance of the Forests* satirizing the fledgling nation by stripping it of romantic legends and showing that the present is no more a golden age than was the past. In plays of lighter vein he

made fun of pompous, westernized school teacher as in *The Lion and the Jewel*, and he mocked the clever preachers of upstart churches who grew fat on the credulity of their parishioners, as in *The Trials of Brother Tiro* and *Jero Metamorphosis*. But his more serious plays, such as *The Strong Breed*, *King's Harves*, and *From Zia, with Love* reveal his disillusionment with African authoritarian leadership and with Nigerian society as a whole.

Both Armah's *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born* and Soyinka's *The Interpreters* have received an undivided attention of a large number of critics. They are especially popular for dramatizing individual isolation, failures of political and economic development, lost opportunities, political betrayal, corrupt leadership, cultural dislocation and materialism, etc in newly independent African nations against the backcloth of centuries of colonial rule.

Psychoanalytic interpretation of *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born* by Stewart Crehan argues that Armah's novel is one of the most "Freudian" of modern African texts:

> [. . .] psychoanalytic interpretation can shed some lights on these "mesmeric complexes" notably the three primary metaphors of darkness, waste, and the journey. Although there is much that is obsessive and even "totalitarian" in the novel's metaphors and narrative technique, its totalizing vision is more apparent than real. […]. Yet he sees "out there" exists within himself and what this self manifests is not a unified subject, integrated moral awareness, but a profoundly divided consciousness. (Crehan 105)

What Crehan has focused on are layers of meaning that have arisen from unconscious sources, and how their meanings have been repressed by a text that is at the same time

unable to prevent their expressions. This reading is not intended as a rounded interpretation; for it omits what many readers, particularly African readers, find most relevant in the novel its critique of corruption. He has deliberately bracketed this social and political critique, not because he has tried to doge the most prominent aspect of the book, but because this critique has been ably analyzed so many times already. Regarding the symbolic dimension of the novel *The Interpreters* Kathleen Morrison comments:

> One of the most illuminating of the many intricately related symbols in Wole Soyinka's novel *The Interpreters* is the god Ogun, a key figure in the pantheon of Yoruba gods that Kola is painting and for which his friends act as model. By implication, Ogun is a touchstone by which the lives of the protagonists may be evaluated, for each represents one or more facets of this god of multiple meanings. (Morrison 60)

Here, Morrison's attempt to associate five protagonists with Ogun is intended to highlight both their faults and their political strengths, for the Yoruba gods, unlike those of many religious, are a mixture of strengths and weakness and thus are very human. By seeing their lives resemble and differ from the conduct of Ogun, he expects readers to comprehend the challenge that Soyinka's novel poses to his compatriots. Armah's *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born* and Soyinka's *The Interpreters* have also drawn somewhat different mode of criticism. As per Emmanuel Obiechina:

> The style of Armah's and Soyinka's writing is also crucial in telling their stories. Symbolism is rife in the works of both. Armah fixates on notions of rebirth, imagery of which is scattered throughout *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born*. The very centre of the novel is based

> of a desire for regeneration of Ghanian society, for future generations, the beautiful ones of the novel's title. However, rebirth also something Armah mocks, witnessed in the passage describing Koomsoon struggling to escape headfirst and naked down a drop-toilet. (Obeichina 126)

In this extract the primary thrust of Obeichina is to analyze the symbolism and imagery used in both the novels.

With respect to all these above-mentioned criticisms selected from different sources, it has become explicitly clear that a few discussions of *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born* and *The Interpreters* have made use of excremental theory despite the fact that these novels can be read by examining the peculiarly rich life of scatology in texts that are already identifiable – by their immediate contexts and concerns – as postcolonial. Otherwise put, critics of Armah and Soyinka have, of course, taken note of excremental imagery but have not treated it comprehensively in the light of the frame-work afforded by postcolonial studies. Therefore, this research aims at bringing into light how these writers have complicated the colonizer/colonized binaries and at analyzing excremental language used not only to express disillusionment but also to reverse past colonial representations.

As the methodology of this research for detecting how Armah and Soyinka have exploited excremental language as a powerful discursive resource in the new symbolic order the excremental theory and its importance in the postcolonial context will be adopted. This theory will be developed and applied to analyze the texts at the backcloth of postcolonial theory.

Drawing on Foucauldian notion of discourse, power and truth, the excremental theory sheds some lights on the way in which faecal and modes of power are related.

It will be used to explore the ways in which human waste products can figure as such potent emblems of racial, class, and other forms of inferiority. Cognizant of the fact that scatological language has long been woven into a racist logic that links nonwhites to sexualized and debased matter, including excrements; it offers the multiple ways in which shit imagery is employed to reassign the function of “excremental dumping ground” from blacks to whites (quoted in Esty 29). An attempt is made to “reverse the apparent assignments of clear and dirty, revealing the perversion of a system in which the ethically besmirched comprador enjoys a perfumed existence while the long suffering masses wallow in shit” (33).

Summing up, in the post independence era, a multilayered perception has replaced the hitherto existing mode of perception. African writers like Armah and Soyinka who have shown “insensitiveness to the significance of Negritude” considering it “a wooden attempt to perpetuate Western assumptions and stereotypes in reverse”, have also rejected patronizing classifications that favors writings that reproduce colonial myth about the backwardness of blacks and their culture (Ogede 792). They have moved away from unilateral way of thinking and developed modes of writings which surpass the familiar categories of representations. This research focuses on excremental language as a major characteristic of postcolonial writing. Examples from *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born* and *The Interpreters* illustrate the subversive quality of excremental tropes that aim at putting accepted categories of thoughts into question. These novels undermine and challenge discourses of African identity which have not only become outdated and obsolete but extremely dangerous as they are used by black elites to justify their autocratic rule.

II. Excremental Theory

Excremental Language: Reversed Representation and Resistance

Excremental theory, though lately developed, occupies a significant space in postcolonial discursive practice. Faecal rhetoric, exploited by writers, has become an important mode of expressing and reproducing symbolic and material relation of group inferiority and superiority, whether the differentiation being made is based on racial, class, or other group membership. The meaning attributed to faecal products varies as the circumstances alter in which the super-ordinate groups deal with their own faecal wastes. The toiletry ideas and their toiletry habitus underpin the fashions in which multidimensional modal allows us to think about the interrelation between material and symbolic factor, between corporeal entities and modes of rhetoric.

The medical discourse made of faecal wastes was used as a mode of differentiating whites and early twentieth century South Africa. Here, wastes are used as both marker and justification of social segregation, because it was held to be deeply unhealthy to have the detrituses of whites and blacks kept in the same storage areas, symbolic representation of the desirability of keeping separate the bodies of the groups that produced such wastes. The perception of wastes is considered changeable. Socio-cultural variation as to levels of tolerance and tolerance for the smell of faeces indicates that there is wide variance in how different groups of people actually smell waste products, both their own and those of the other people, both in-group and out-group. The characteristic levels of tolerance and intolerance for faecal smells are therefore relative to the groups in question, rather than being ahistorical and universal modes of human sense perception. How a person responds to both the sight and smell of faeces is therefore a result of the group mentality and the modes of perception should be seen as social-cultural creations rather than genetically programmed

inevitabilities. It is on the basis of these sensory modes that defecatory practices characteristic of the group are generated.

Relatively little attention has been paid on the realm of excrements in spite of its great value. The reasons for such relative neglect are because of the "indubitable fact of human life that individual excretes" and because "faecal matters are always inherently political in character "(Inglis 207). But as the Foucauldian notion of power made inroads into the realm of critical theory, the critics have understood the role of human body materially and symbolically. Their focus is orientated on the issues like how powerful groups maintain their upper hand over the bodies of less powerful through symbolic or material means or how such issues are observed through the lenses of politics.

It will be unwise not to make a reference to the role of language which primarily provides a platform to discourse in the critical discussion about the excremental language and its power. The effect that language creates depends on the way discourse is created. Sometimes, it can be used as the source to differentiate super and sub-ordination. So, we need to think about the nature of faecal language, which words and phrases are related to defeacatory capacities, and what roles do they play in the given modes of power. Basically powerful groups use excremental language while they are in search of their material and symbolic superiority. The symbolism of faecal inferiority takes two main forms:

> In the first case, the groups under verbal assault one described in terms of their allegedly 'filthy' natures, labeled as being thoroughly 'excremental' in nature. In particular, their bodies are represented as being wholly faecally filthy in character [. . .]. In the second case, the alleged racial, national or class characteristics of a particular group can

> be represented as being neatly symbolized by their toiletry practices. Here, the subordinate can be depicted as more faecally uncontrolled and excrementally libidinous than their apparent superiors. (208)

In this context, the inferior group's toiletry habits are taken as being dirtier than those of the superior groups. Contemporary British racist discourse claims the toilets of Indian and Pakistanis are filthy "revolting dense of dirt" (209). Generally the toiletry practices of groups occupying subordinate positions within social and cultural space are particularly ripe source of denigration by groups occupying superior positions. In doing so there is a politics to knowledge production, but that ways of knowing are themselves mechanism of power, and implicitly that the work of exposing their function as such, constitutes an act of opposition to that power.

The rhetoric of empire, as David Spur has noted, "includes an arsenal of debasement tropes that describe colonized population as dirty bodies, linking them to filth, shit, and disorder" (76-91). Warwick Anderson, too, points out that "tropical colonial possession came to represent the lower strata both geographically and psychologically that tended to reinforce the idea of unclean, base native" (652). Such habits and thoughts were integrated to the colonizer's rationalization and abstraction of native excrement. The toilet, for Anderson is a powerful symbol of technological and developmental superiority and that has the "corollary effect of intensifying via a newly potent scientific language, the negative valence of shit" (29). He suggests that American health officials in the Philippines were "themselves victims of the objects" given by a fascination with shit, waste and pollution.

The colonial setting witnesses the intersection of different excremental tropes, with both native and colonizer subject to debasement. Shit circulates as a crucial sign in this field because it is, as Mary Douglas's formulation would have it, a kind of dirt

or “matter out of place” (36). On the one hand, excremental language seeks to debase a rejected population, but on the other hand, what is rejected can also confound. If, shit often functions as sign of the actively denigrated native in the colonial era, it also comes to function in the decolonization era as a sign of actively repudiated ex-colonizer. If shit according to infantile logic, is a form of property or money, they reveal money and property as a form of shit.

The essential formula of toiletry insult is that they are “faecally filthy while we are excrementally cleanly” (214). This analysis shows the specific ways in which we claim to be clean, on the basis of our toiletry habitus, and how their toiletry habitus is attributed to lack just such qualities. Many toiletry terminologies are employed by super-ordinate grouping nor subordinates ones and they are related to the historical development of attitudes towards the defecatory capacities of the human body that developed in the west over the long period of time, culminating the attitudes towards such matter characteristics of the bourgeoisie of the nineteenth century . There was the trend about abusing one’s enemies in ways that drew upon faecal imagery, as this was a common mode of rhetoric in the medieval and Renaissance literature is full of unexpurgated examples of this kind of talk but the creation of a novel symbolic and practical toiletry nexus, part of what we have dubbed the bourgeois toiletry habitus, meant that from about the eighteenth century, new forms of defecatory abuse became possible. Medieval enemies could berate each other’s faecal filthiness but neither could assert their own defecatory superiority on the basis of having superior means of hiding faeces from view and clearing them away. If we observe the past “in medieval society from lord to peasant was basically subject to the same forms of faecal disposal” (215). But from the eighteenth century onwards, certain group had precisely that resource and they could claim that:

> Their defecatory practice was superior – more cleanly, less filthy than that of other groups. The source of this superiority that (a) their bodies were cleanly (in contradistinction to the filthiness of other's body), and (b) their life style was cleanly because it involved defecation occurring in private spaces, in contradistinction to practices of public defecation that hitherto had been accepted for all, but which were now disdained by elites. (215)

By the middle of nineteenth century, the living condition of the proletariat and thus by extension the proletariat itself, had from the point of view "the bourgeoisie toiletry habitus, become dysfunctioally filthy, in both moral and hygienic terms" (214). In the hygienic sense, the proletariat was filthy in that it was seen to be disorderly, and failing to correspond to the condition of a disciplined workforce.

Its unordered nature truly made it matter out of place, in the contemporary middleclass imaginary. This led to increasing calls for proletarian areas and by extension proletarian bodies too-to be rendered cleanly. In defecatory terms, this meant the provision of water closet and sewerage facilities in proletarian area. In pursuit of the long term interests of the bourgeois, the state instigated processes which led to the relinquishing of bourgeois faecal superiority over the laboring classes. The result of this was that in bourgeois eyes the proletarian body and the dwelling had to be "acknowledged as equally salubrious as their bourgeois counterpart" (218). Therefore, bourgeois rhetoric of condemnation of the life style of the working classes by the twentieth century increasing could have little or no recourse to excremental imagery. The great faecal divide between bourgeoisie and proletariat was abolished and excremental abuse could no longer figure as an essential mode of bourgeois superiority. However, the exercise of class distinction found rhetorical tropes.

Historically, these factors in the west have been the toiletry habitus of the nineteen century bourgeois which has been at the center of unfolding forms of rhetorical abuse of groups defined as others. In the twentieth century, this habitus was conditions of thought and practice, therefore, provides racist groups within that community with ideological communities in their derogation of non-white groups.

In postcolonial writing, to resist is not to reject but to write back the colonialists from the position of the margin in the same language the colonizer used while creating the colonial discourse of domination and discriminations. The writings that have been produced from the beginning of colonialism resisting and subverting the colonial discourse, ideologies, derogatory identities and tropes of the so-called marginalized people represent an art of resistance literature.

Colonial stereotypical representation of colonized people as barbaric, irrational, feminine, passionate, dirty, etc through the means of language, for different writers and critics is not digestible. They are always aware about the relation inherited between language and domination and are critical not to the English language or French language, so called standard language but “what the oppressor do with it, how they shape it to become a territory that limits and defines, how they can make it a weapon that can shape, humiliate, colonize” (hooks 72). In this location, hooks opines to use the oppressor’s language and turn it against itself. She argues, “We make our words counter-hegemonic speech, liberty ourselves in language” (77).

Colonialism, nearly for centuries long political as well as cultural enterprise of Europe at its best crippled the cultural and political sovereignty of people and presented the derogatory picture of colonized people. The colonization was an epidemic and its effects on humanity were cancerous. Therefore, to adverse hitherto existing tropes of colonized period, especially their representation of colonized as

dirty creatures, brought up amidst excrement; critics have taken help of excrements "to examine the peculiarly rich life of scatology in texts that are already identifiable-- by their immediate contexts and concerns – as postcolonial" (25).

Even within particular societies, the nature of discourse of dirt, faecal matters and toiletry practices are relative over time. The ideas about how they should be managed change historically, and are not fixed immutably for ever. "The rhetoric of more powerful groups rest in the faecal denigration of the less powerful--dirty verses clean, regulated verses unregulated and a series of other binaries" (209). As Nikolas Rose argues, " We should see particular forms of discourse not as free floating entites untied to any social mooring but as both generated by and rooted in complete network of social relations" (55). Such relations are both expressive and constitutive of particular group and "institutional configurations, as these are embodied in both symbolic and material terms" (220). Thus, in the case of specifically faecal issues, it is the differing toiletry routine of the dominant grouping--how they regard their own wastes, what type of toiletry receptacles they use, and how they dispose of their excreta that underpin the fashion in which faecal rhetoric is utilized against the subordinate. If this is the case, it follows that scatological symbolism should not be regarded as an unchanging and ahistorical resource for ascription of superiority of one group over another, rather the meaning attached to faecal products vary as the circumstances alter in which the super ordinate group deal with their own faecal wastes. Therefore, the changing rhetoric of filth of master group must be systematically related to alterations in their symbolic and material life, in terms of the latter especially as regards the development of toiletry techniques among such subordinate groupings.

Warwick Anderson in his article “Excremental Colonialism” has emphasized the crucial role played by clean bodies. He describes “the methods by which US colonizers produced an image of Filipino natives as unsanitary and excremental” (25). His history of this rhetorical and epidemiological debasement provides a good point of departure for the study of excrements in postcolonial era, when shit begins to work counter discursively. What Anderson’s essay addresses is that shit functions not so much as a material object but as a powerful discursive resource within a new symbolic order. Even Bakhtinian theory has proposed that obscene language bubbles up from below to challenge official or state discourse. Vulgar images, including the excremental are “developed by the state as part of its official display of power” (quoted in Esty 30).

Representation of Postcolonial Disillusionment

The emergence of political scatology in African fiction of the1960s and 70s reflects the profound shock administered by the lost promises of independence. Writers of this era have repudiated the symbolic association of excrement inherited from colonial discourse, turning scatology to the new task of representing postcolonial disillusionment. Their post–colonial project presents post-independent countries like Ghana and Nigeria of 1960s same as white colonial administration since malfunctioning prevails as the legacy of colonial administration.

In general, writers use excremental language to indicate failures of colonial development, corruption of neo-colonial politics, and the residual quality of postcolonial nationalism. African writers exploit excremental rhetoric on their own textual practice to represent the postcolonial disillusionment. Postcolonial scatology gives full literary expression to the predicament of the writer to new nation. Excremental writing expresses partial misconception of postcolonial nationalism.

The novels of disillusionment represent a wave of literature that began to question nationalist movements amongst a dampening of political and social optimism in the mid-1960s. Gone are narrations reveling in the idyllic nature of communal African societies, or the might of hero who fought for independence. The setting of such novelists is urban Africa, oppressive and filled with flawed human beings. Novelists take pains to lay bare the neocolonial and historical dimensions of post independent situations; indeed, they use excremental language throughout to describe uneven development as a particular combination of surplus and shortfall produced by the legacies of European imperialism.

The awakening and awareness intensified by 1950s and 60s in the colonies against the politics of exploitation and expansionism culminated in the political independence of most of the then colonial countries but the colonial hangover kept on dazzling the people. The nature of independence was so nebulous that, instead of healing the agony and confusion, bewilderment and political instability was nurtured by corruption and various malfunctioning. The aura of independence was too ephemeral to bring out significant changes considering the historical circumstances, it appears merely to be the transformation of power with which Britain dominated the world history, shifted to America and consequently new ideologies were formulated to hegemonize the world.

The world politics after the World War Second opened up a new path for America to establish hegemonic control over the economy, bureaucracy, and cultures of the entire world. For this reason, “all postcolonial societies are still subject in one way or the other overt or subtle forms of neocolonial political domination and independence has not solved this problem”(Bill Ashcraft et. el., 2).

Excremental Satire

Excremental satire lacks the utopian content that is ascribed to conventional satire. This literary strategy grows out of the absence of the analytical perspective needed to see beyond current moral and political systems. What would have been a more traditional satirical mode –wielded against the corruption—is displaced by an excremental mode that not only decisively rejects false signs of social regeneration but also radically suspects the terms of its own symbolic action. Where the liberal satirist believes in reforms and the utopian-radical satirist believes in revolution, the excremental satirist bears witness to the conversion of his society's political energies—and his own aesthetic efforts—into shit.

Scatology has generally been discussed within the context of the two related aesthetic categories: the comic and the grotesque. Otherwise put, students of excremental tropes have focused primarily on its power to arouse laughter and its capacity to shock, repulse, and alienate. These two distinct approaches to scatology correspond to prevailing normative attitudes toward bodily elimination and excremental held in the Western world since the Renaissance. They used scatological images in a satiric mode as a "means to deliver political and social critique or moral lessons of various kinds" (Chu 41). Later on it was used to offer the opportunity to shock the public by confronting it, with an aspect of human life that in Western culture has long been and continuous to be taboo.

The use of excremental tropes can be observed in the works of celebrated scatologists James Joyce and Samuel Beckett who came into prominence as the writer of "second-wave" which runs roughly from the Ester Rising 1916 to the Irish Republic or during an era divided between anti-colonial national revival and postcolonial national disillusionment. Esty writes, "They came after the Celtic

revivalists and looked askance at increasingly rigid and cloying forms of cultural nationalism” and they “satirize the tired convention of the Irish Renaissance (24). African scatologists like Armah and Soyinka question political and aesthetic standards.

Shit has long been read as per psychoanalytic and mythic models. Such reading traditionally focuses on experience of childhood sexuality but literary reading of postcolonial texts tend to interpret tropes like shit in terms of specific historical and political events. The classic source of the excremental vision in Anglophone literature was Jonathan Swift who turned scatology to his immediate purposes as an economic patriot when he tries to account for “an immense number of human excrements at the doors and steeps of Dublin. Some observers have identified these excrements as of British not Irish-issue planted on Dublin streets as evidence of local digestion in order to disprove the Irish clamor of Poverty” (28).

He has used digestive and excremental terms to expose economic misrule in Ireland. He not only has criticized neglectful British but also has attacked the Irish for their backwardness. Since he has become successful to link scatology with failed development he stands “as a precursor to the excremental writer of postcolonial Africa and Ireland” (28).

Excremental writing, from Swift to Beckett to Armah, seems to be motivated and shaped by its practioners’ political failure. Psychoanalys codified but did not invent this reading: “Shit,the first extension of the self, is also the first instancing to the other” (quoted in Esty 34). It makes sense in this light that shit figures “complicate moral and political binaries by diffusing guilt and shame” (36). The self-implicating dimension of excremental literature has been visible of the ethical plan at least since swift. What the new currency of scatology in postcolonial culture suggests

is that excremental writing is also an index of national or collective self-implication in folly or excess. Such a hypothesis begins, at least, to explain the close correlation between excremental writing and antinationalist critique in Africa and Irish literature.

The writers have deployed excrementalism as a literary mode of self-reproach on different levels; through a complication of binarisitic anticolonial politics: good native and bad imperialist, by recognition that local form of exploitation and “excess have emerged and “through the complication of a simplistic anti-comprador position” by the recognition that intellectuals are themselves implicated in neocolonial failure (34). The literature of disillusionment brings with their “symbolic disturbance of inside/outside models” to bear on African societies as they move from era of decolonization to the “realities of stalled revolution” (35) Excremental language is invoked by novelists in order to diffuse guilt and shame. At the level both of national politics and of individual ethics, excremental writing tends toward complex models of systematic guilt, rather than toward the sharp absolution and resolutions that attend moral or political binaries.

To Soyinka, for instance, scatological writing attaches shame to previously immune classes including detached artists who are by apparent inaction, is “to blame for the execrable state of affairs in the post colony” (207).

Thus Armah and Soyinka, while slinging mud at the new commercial and bureaucratic elites of Nigeria and their neo-colonial sponsors take pains to scrutinize those who would exempt themselves form the public site of corruption. Emmanuel Obeichina has shrewdly observed that “Soyinka used flexible third-person narration to direct satiric commentary at their own protagonist” (122). Excremental language casts doubt reflexively onto Soyinka’s callow interpreters.

Scatological excess in both African and postcolonial fictions seems to direct itself not only against the transcendent clean body but against the canons of decorum and economy in the English language novel. Whether in comic or satiric mode, writer like Soyinka, Armah, Beckett and Joyce display the vulgar body of the ex-“native” in a way that sends up both colonial discourse and literary convention. Insofar as these texts tend to yoke graphic treatment of Bakhtin’s lower bodily strata to excessive, digestive, stylistically adventurous forms of narrative, they constitute an implicit challenge to the standards of modern fiction.

Textual or literary surplus becomes not just a vulgar fetish but a masterful device in he hands of writers like Armah or Soyinka, and reminds us that excremental excess in both a discursive and scatological excess, then together, for what Bhakhtin would describe as radical literary energy--an energy sharpened by the contrast between shit’s signification of, on the hand, “symbolic excess” and on the other, “material under privilege” (55).

III. Excremental Vision in Armah's *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born* and Soyinka's *The Interpreters*

Armah and Soyinka in their novels *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* and *The Interpreters* have altered, inflected and redirected the symbolic associations of excrement inherited from colonial discourse, turning scatology to the new task of representing postcolonial disillusionment about the lost promises of African independence, and treating shit's function not just as a naturalistic detail but as a governing trope in postcolonial literature.

The application of filth to European objects and imitations is an attempt to reverse past colonial representations: terms once used to describe native populations are now given to Africans who mimic their former masters. Post-colonial politics are characterized by images of vulgarity, where defecation, copulation, pomp and sumptuousness are used to create, sustain or challenge power relations. For example, the State uses vulgar images to display their power, but the general population can manipulate these same displays to show disrespect. The displays of grandeur by the elite always entail an aspect of the vulgar. While they will try to cover this up, ordinary people will eventually bring it to their attention either intentionally or unwittingly.

This can easily be read in these two novels. In *The Interpreters*, the Oguzor family fill their home with hanging bunches of plastic fruit. This display of status is dashed, however, when Sagoe's party tricks involve throwing the artificial fruit out of the window to feed the dog. Armah also demonstrates his recognition of the vulgarity of displays of power by African elite, seen in the following lines: "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 disgusted laughter" (82).

Tropes once used to code natives as filthy are now reassigned to Africans who mimic the ex-colonizers: the “matter out place” is no longer the native but the Europeanized comprador. During the colonial period, the colonized were termed as dirty, barbaric, filthy creatures but in postcolonial era writers use the same terminologies to satirize the destabilization, prevailing political corruption and the behavior of the ruling elites.

To put another way, Armah uses excremental language to perform an extended Freudian unmasking or desublimation: he converts money into shit and forces readers to see wealth as polished wastes. He reduces the comprador’s foreign cars, fancy hotels, and luxury goods to excremental status-denouncing them as the cruelest form of excess. In a system entirely out of economic balance, shit flows through the novel like an alternative currency, a cruel displacement of productive capital. The shit and the gleam are figurative expressions of underdevelopment and over consumption, of failed modernization in streets and hyper modernization in the luxury estates.

“The man” in *The Beautyful Ones* is a symbol of urban poverty and social obscurity, a single individual in conflict with the values of his society. “The man’s” only hope is in the guidance of his friend the Teacher, but through the course of the novel, he comes to realize that the Teacher too has no answer, and that he must face problems alone. The young Nigerians of Soyinka’s *The Interpreters* are internationally trained and respected by their peers, in contrast to “the man”. However, they too are isolated by their values, having a desire to understand what goes on around them. Just as “the man’s” morals place him at odds with contemporaries, the interpreters too have their hopes dashed by the old establishment who stand in their way. Both novels therefore explore the difficultly in following an

individual path in post-colonial societies, which no doubt applies to the novelists themselves.

Armah's *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born* quickly identifies itself as a sad chronicle of independent Ghana, documenting the replacement of European power with local elites who are unwillingly or unable to follow through on the high promises of freedom, equality, stability and prosperity. The Teacher, one of Armah's most profoundly disillusioned characters, recalls the fall in scatological terms: "We were ready here for big and beautiful things, but what we had was our own black man hugging new paunches scrambling to ask the white man to welcome them onto our backs […]" (82).Similarly, in Soyinka's satirical *The Interpreters*, the young, educated protagonists view with revulsion their comprador elders who are marked by fat bellies and the stench of bad indigestion.

The prevalence of excremental language in these satires is perhaps unsurprising. After all, satire is an ancient form of mudslinging. It is traditionally associated with filth, and the satirist is described as throwing turds and urine on those whom he ridicules. The particular satirical exposure performed by excremental images in *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born* and *The Interpreters* often turns on the unmasking of corrupt economics. If shit, according to infantile logic, is a form of property or money, then writers like Armah and Soyinka reveal money and property as a form of shit. In these novels, neocolonial capitalism appears in its uncloaked form.

The pointed relevance that scatology gives in Armah and Soyinka is their satiric application to an elite that is, after all, a residue of colonialism-a lingering efflux of the despised and depraved European body politics. In *The Interpreters* we see the corrupt comprador Sir Derinola turned into a coffined "turd" sticking out of "a

nineteen forty five Vauxhall" (Wole Soyinka 111). Comprador's respectability often means pathetic imitations of white or British institutions and manners. Such moments of inauthenticity among the neocolonial elites fall squarely into Armah's sights:

> He was trying to speak like a white man, and the sound that came out of his mouth reminded the listener of a constipated man, straining in his first minute on top of the lavatory seat. The white man grimaced and made a reply in steward boy English: 'Ha, too good eh?' The black men both laughed out loud and the one who had spoken put both hands to his punch. (125)

Excrement is not just a device borrowed from classical satire, nor simply a neo-Freudian depth charge; it is also an element of local oral traditions and ordinary part of material conditions in urban Africa. Shit fills the street of Lagos and Ibadan in Soyinka's *The Interpreters*. Sogoe, a journalist works adjacent to a "stagnant clogged" lagoon where "huge turds floated in decomposing rings" (72). Even when understood according to the representational codes of realism, however, shit has a political vocation: it draws attention to the failures of development, to the unkept promises not only of colonial modernizing regimes but of post- independence economic policy.

In *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, the prevailing excremental metaphor operates in tandem with a figurative opposite, "the gleam," which signifies the allure of consumption, the luxurious sheen cast around Ghana's sheltered elite (10). Armah's symbolic axis runs from dirty(excremental) to clean(gleaming), with the protagonist, a railway clerk simply introduced as the man, suffering grotesque life of the impoverished masses and his antagonist, the prosperously corrupt minister Koomson, enjoying the "clean life"(44). Armah's fundamental satiric maneuver is to

reverse the apparent assignment of clean and dirty , revealing the perversion of a system in which the ethically besmirched comprador enjoys a perfumed existence while the long suffering mass wallow in shit.

Political disillusionment is clearly a theme in Armah's novel, and it is aimed squarely at political corruption and failed development. It includes, too, the residual effects of colonization or a post independent society and the continuance of a cycle of exclusion both socially and economically. African society is sick to the very core, rotten with he congealed decay of centuries of domination, capitulation and betrayal. The society limps into tomorrow: bereft, corrupt, dependent, its citizen engaged in a ceaseless, debased, and dehumanizing "national game" (55). From the first sentences of *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, a composite picture of Ghana as a postcolonial African state begins to be sketched. In the world of the novel the aspect of postcolonialim is disturbingly reminiscent of that of colonialism proper. The new seems to have taken after the old so thoroughly that it is as though the old had never gone away at all. This motif is introduced at a very early point in the novel, as Armah describes his principal character's walk to work:

> He passed by the U. T. C., the G.N.T.C., the U.A.C., and the French C.F.A.O. The shops had seen there all the time, as far back as he could remember. The G.N.T.C, of course, was regarded as a new thing, but only the name had really changed with Independence. The shop had always been there, and in the old days in had belonged to a rich Greek and was known by his name, A.G. LWENTIS. So in a way the thing was new. Yet the stories that were sometimes heard about it were not stories of something young and vigorous, but the same old stories of

> money changing hands and throats getting moistened and palms getting greased. (9-10)

The elites are described as contributing directly to the squalor and deprivation of the community at large. It is not only that the bankruptcy and exocentrism of the society's economy has resulted in a situation in which, as a taxi driver in the novel puts it, "It seems everybody is making things except us. We Africans only buy things" (140). It is rather that the elites are living on the backs of their fellow countrymen. Their wealth is built upon their countrymen's poverty; their ease is the product, and the enduring cause, of the degradation the surrounds but does not touch them.

Armah returns again and again to this point. He insists that for every bottle of White Horse, Black and White, Seagrams, or Gilbeys that is imported to cater to the elite's ethic of conspicuous consumption, ten, or twenty, or a hundred individuals like "the man" are deprived of the wherewithal to purchase even the most basic of foodstuffs. The novel's contrasts in this vein, overt or implicit, are telling. The elites emerge as merely the new wielders of old corrupt power. Independence has given Africa not its freedom but only "a change of embezzlers" (162). The new leaders are the direct heirs of the chiefs of the past, concerned always with privilege and the consolidation of their power rather than with progressive leadership and public accountability.

Teacher, the most disillusioned character of Armah, feels that "the man's" acquaintance Koomson, who once seemed to be fired with revolutionary zeal, has latterly become indistinguishable from the preindependence elite, who never bore about them the stamp of sincerity in the first place. Koomson, the representative of the "new" Ghana, has assumed a life style identical to the life-styles of generation of powerful men: "He lives in a way that is far more painful to see than the way the

white men have always lived here […].There is not difference then. No difference at all between the white men and their apes, the lawyers and the merchants, and now the apes of the apes, our party men" (89). Armah vividly depicts the filth, rot and corruption of the "man's" surroundings, where "the public lavatory becomes the show-room of a people's sins" (33). Most of Armah's satire is directed at Koomson, an embodiment of political leadership, but corrupt practices are shown throughout the rest of a Ghanian society. A similar trait can also be found in Nigerian society in *The Interpreters*. Soyinka depicts the chase of a thief by community members who are also dishonest in their own way. Sagoe shouts at the farce: "Run you little thief or the bigger thieves will pass a law against your existence as a menace to society" (89).

The modern hopes of Soyinka's interpreters are stymied by the cynical and corrupt old guard. Sekoni, an engineer spends his boat ride home to Nigeria dreaming of the grand bridges he will build upon his return. When he prepared to test the plant in his own country Nigeria, after returning back his study, he was mocked and laughed at. Soyinka's Sekoni says, "'I…I…have come back […] I-er…I come to t-t-test the plant' " (28). His project was not only thwarted by a bureaucrat making money off his project but also denounced and scolded only because of the progressive plan of him. As he heard the indigestible answer from the Head, he wound up having a mental breakdown: "Sekoni became incoherent, a throbbing vein cut on his forehead and his neck-muscles working with self destructive strength. D-d-don't believe it. D-d-d-don't believe it. If they only allowed me to test [. . .] (29)". Moreover, he was ordered to uproot the plant and move away from there. The Head even bribed foreign "expert" to decree Sekoni's project unsafe. He says:

> 'If you want to test it, my friend, just uproot your funny thing and carry it with you. Go and test in the bush, or in your hometown.

> Electricity is government thing, we all know that. The white men know about it, and one came here and told us. They know what they are talking about'. (29)

In *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, the hopelessness of the nation is highlighted when the man feels burdened with the knowledge that their future is forfeit, their birthright bartered in advance to the occupants of the "white men's gleaming bungalows" (47). "The man" wonders about his children whether "one of them would grow up and soar upward with so much power that there would be enough left over to pull the others also up" (58). For the moment, however, there is nothing but dirt and human excrement that Armah uses to paint "the man's" surroundings:

> The man leaps up on the cleanest he can find, near the far end of the long latrine, passing his eyes over the row of cans encrusted with old shit. When he chooses the one he will use he is careful, in letting down his trousers, not to let the cuffs fall into the urine grooves in it. (105)

In Armah and Soyinka scatological satire attaches shame to previously immune classes-including detached artists- who are, by apparent inaction, also to blame for the execrable state of affairs in the post colony. Shit- as wielded by these writers- is a perfectly precise instrument for recording a tragically imprecise kind of predicament. Most important to comparing *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born* and *The Interpreters* is the role both authors have in their own narrations through the use of excremental language. They clearly satirize their own implication in post independence failure as isolated commentators. To put it simply, excremental language casts doubt reflexively onto both Armah's unnamed "man" and Soyinka's callow interpreters.

In *The Interpreters*, whenever our attention becomes focused on corrupt, powerful men such as sir Derinola, the narrative beam swings back to Sagoe, or another young intellectual, stuck in the position of cynical outsider. The novel's real interest lies not so much in Soyinka's satire of the venal comprador but in his clear-eyed questioning of *The Interpreters* themselves--cultural mediators with no real power. Stymied by his lack of social power, Sagoe, for instance, resorts to mock-philosophical disquisitions on shit. By the same token, in *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born,* the protagonist seems to voice Armah's own doubts about the self-exempting intellectual in a disintegrating and corrupt society: "And the man wondered what kind of sound the cry of the chichidodo bird could be, the bird longing for its maggot but fleeing the feces which gave them birth" (49).

This line of self-interrogation by African novelists consists what we might call the auto critical function of excremental postcolonialism- the shared tendency of these texts to question the status of aesthetic discourse itself in the new nation. Scatology reveals the problems of uneven development and neocolonial corruption in the public sphere while underscoring the artist's own representational predicament. In particular, both Armah and Soyinda drive their stories toward a reckoning with the limitations of the realist and existential novels, a form conventionally dedicated to the fate of individuals. Shit, operating as the preeminent figure of self-alienation, becomes a symbolic medium for questioning the place of the autonomous individuals in new postcolonial societies.

Soyinka and Armah both describe individuals surrounded and preoccupied by shit, though the excremental schemes of the two novels initially seem quite different. From the start, Soyinka's hyperarticualate Sogoe manages to absorb excrement into his own urbane, absurdist philosophy. Armah's unnamed man, by contrast, can not

find any form of escape from the grotesque and disorientating social ordure that prevails in his city: “It was covered over thickly with the juice of every imaginable kind of waste matters” (7). He suffers through a darkly picturesque pilgrimage, seeking his refuge from the public world of excremental corruption while nursing his own “clean” moral status. His search for sanitized existence takes the ironic form of a quest to defecate with dignity. Shit thus structures both the relentless public incursions on the man’s selfhood and his attempt at private self-possession. When he encounters a sewage collector who is dead drunk, Armah’s protagonist reflects, “Surely that is the only way for a man to survive, carrying other people’s excrement; the only way must be to kill the self while the unavoidable is being done” (103). With unflinching consistency, Armah presents the social accumulation of excrement as a threat to frail selfhood.

At the start of Soyinka’s novel, by contrast, Sagoe masters societal excrement through the elaborate language and erudite mockery of Voidancy, his “philosophy of shit”. Voidancy, Sagoe explains, is entirely idiosyncratic:

> If I am personal; it is because in giving the history of myself. I do neither more Nor less than uncover the mystery of my philosophical development, for this is one Ritualism for which I am indebted to no predecessor but the entire world of humanity, this is one vision for which I acknowledge no Cause but the immutable laws of Nature. If I am personal, it is because this must rank as the most inward philosophy in human existence. Functional, spiritual, creative or ritualistic, Voidancy remains the one true philosophy of the true Egoist. (71)

Furthermore, he explains that, “Voidancy is not a movement of protest, but it protests: it is non-revolutionary, but it revolts. Voidancy [. . .] is the unknown quantity. Voidancy is the last uncharted mine of creative energies [. . .] in release is birth” (70).

In the rituals of Voidancy, shitting is an utterly private act of self-consolidation. Sagoe expresses his wry cynicism by promulgating the Voidante’s existential and antecolliective doctrine; he also cultivates the habits of a cosmopolitan individual—a hygienically modernized subject in Warwick Anderson’s sense. For Sagoe, in short, the importance of voiding is that it is the most “individual function of man” (97).

When Sagoe’s Voidante privacy is violated by the uneven plumbing in postindependence Nigeria, he becomes frustrated. In a scene that no doubt inspired Armah, Sagoe walks the city at night encountering filth and excrement of every variety:

> God is spring-cleaning in heaven, washing out his bloody lavatory. The sights that rode in the wash of flood were indeed of that nature. There was a film of oil, palm oil on a brown lake which had swamped a food-seller’s stock, but Sagoe said, Castor oil of course…Next to death, he decided, shit is the most vernacular atmosphere of our beloved country. (107-108)

As a vernacular, shit presents an immediate democratic challenge to Sagoe’s high cultural discourse of the peristaltic egoist; indeed Sagoe sees the night-soil men as profaners of “true Voidancy.” Soyinka satirizes intellectual fastidiousness by narrating the moment that shit, no longer the object of mock-aesthetic connoisseurship, becomes a collective and unavoidable fact.

In both novels, then, excrement marks the intersection of individual and collective demands. In Armah, shit represent social from the outset but also comes to be associated with the vain quest for private refuge. And in Soyinka where shit initially serves as the medium of Sagoe’s polished solipsism, it also comes to be associated with social horror. When Armah’s man and Soyinka’s Sagoe recoil from the urban market-place, they become perfect representatives for novels split between disgust at the public cesspool and recognition that recoil, or retreat is unacceptable. This political dilemma, fueling the tension between private disengagement and public engagement in the two novels, constitutes the crux of excremental postcolonialism.

In *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, such a private public tensions drive the narration of the protagonist’s crumbling integrity, his eroding ethical frame of reference. The protagonist is trapped inside a corrupt system without any access to external. Facing the shit pile of corruption, the man thinks, “Unnatural, I would have said, had I not stopped myself with asking, unnatural according to what kind of nature?” (62). “The man” ponders whether the accumulated excrement of social environment is an ordinary or an extraordinary development; whether it is part of a natural cycle wherein excremental excess will give way to regeneration in the new Ghana. The pressure they exert on the protagonist forces him to ask, in turn, whether it is existential vanity for him to reject the excremental rot that pervades his society. His self-doubt on this score increases when his wife accuses him of nursing a futile ethical finickiness, equating him with chichidodo that hates excrements but feeds on shit-bred maggots: “ ‘Ah, you know, the chichidodo is a bird. The chichidodo hates excrement with all its soul. But the chichidodo only feeds on maggots, and you know the maggots grow best inside the lavatory. This is the chichidodo’ ” (45). As the novel wears on, the protagonist seems to relent, almost persuading himself to abandon

his private rules and "play the national game" (55). In the end, however, a presidential coup reverses the novel's roles, forcing the corrupt comprador Koomson (now a fugitive) to beg shelter from the protagonist. In the last act, Koomson (guided by the protagonist) makes a nightmarish escape through the city sewers to the sea:

> The two men walked in the direction of the fishing harbor to the east. They kept to the little lanes between the walls around people's houses, going past the many latrine holes and their little gutters running with the dark liquid of piss and shit. They were walking along the latrine man's circuit through life. (170)

At the end of the novel, then, in the wake of Koomson's humiliation, Armah seems finally to endorse the protagonist's stubborn resistance to the excremental current. The coup's immediate aftermath reconsolidates "the man's" ethical selfhood and restores his domestic harmony:

> She was looking as if something tremendous were disturbing her, but at the same time the man could see in her eyes something he could only think of as a deep kind of love, a great respect. He continued his forward movement until he had pushed his wife back very gently against the wall to the side of the door. Though the movement and the sudden tenderness in himself surprised him, the knew it was true, and he put all his gingers deep into her hair, and held her head, pressing against her head letting her feet his desire for her. She raised her eyes in a motion to soft unbelief, and she looked like a young girl afraid she may be doing something wrong. (160)

The protagonist's primary victory lies in his managing to transform Oyo's accusation that he resembles the "chichidodo" bird from an insult into a statement of positive

value. Oyo makes that accusation in the course of reproaching her husband for being too self-defeatingly fastidious in his rejection of crooked means to arrive at the gleam. The "chichidodo" is a bird that loves maggots but despises excrement, and "the man" resembles it in the woman's eyes, presumably, because he appreciates the good things of life but scorns all of the effective means of acquiring them. In the context of the novel as a whole, however, "the man's" dogged refusal to abandon either his principles or his dream of a better society emerges as potent source of value.

In the last scene, he glimpses a bus bearing the slogan "THE BEAUTYFUL ONES ARE NOT YET BORN" and a painted flower that is "solitary, unexplainable, and very beautiful" (183). Many readers have seized on the slogan and flower as symbols of political hope—an interpretation made all the more attractive in that it would seem to transcode excrement from the residue of colonial debasement into the fertilizer of a beautiful postcolonial future. Armah, however, is not so sanguine. The protagonist's fleeting glimpse of beauty is almost immediately displaced by the sight of latrine, triggering a final "aching emptiness of thwarted desire (183). Despite personal and domestic reconciliation his own life, the protagonist is left in despair. The latest coup (like independence itself) promises only an exchange of one overfed exploiter for another; in real collective terms, nothing has changed.

The Interpreters seems to mark Soyinka's discovery of a problematic relation between private and public destines in the postcolonial novel. This text does not suggest that prevailing social conditions ore bound for improvement, much less redemption. Nor—more importantly—does Soyinka imply that those outer conditions are at all affected by the moral, libidinal, and aesthetic preoccupations of his protagonists. The absurd conversation that ends the novel leaves the interpreters immured in their semi-thwarted individual existences. Even more to the point,

Soyinka represents the limitations of the autonomous subject in distinctly excremental terms. Sagoe's philosophy of shit provides the clearest instance of escape from cruel social reality into the ultimately cold comforts of ethical self-satisfaction and aesthetic self-indulgence. His posture of metaphysical retreat, while verbally charming, smacks of political despair. By the end of the novel an enervated Sagoe feels the pressure to translate his private ritual into some wider, socially effective gesture. He directly engages his excrementally imperfect society:

> It is disgraceful that at this stage, night-soil men are still lugging shitpails around the capital. And in any case, why should not the stuff be utilized? Look at the avid wastes of the North [. . .].You should rail the stuff to the North and fertilise the Sardauna's territory. (240)

It is tempting to take this scheme as Sagoe's attempt to convert shit into the national fertilizer. Such a reading, however, would, overlook the strong tonal ironies of the scene. Sagoe turns quickly from the public to private satisfactions of the sewage project: the picturesque vision of shit caravan tracking north and the metaphysical appeal of "bringing the wheel full circle" (241). In a political system less thoroughly corrupted, Sagoe and the other interpreters might be able to take national regeneration seriously, but here it becomes the occasion for a sophisticated jest. The irony of the scene underscores once again a fundamental nonalignment of private vision and public works.

At the level of content, Soyinka's protagonists can not find a meaningful way to contribute because the public arena has been claimed and polluted by neocolonialism. It is perhaps unsurprising that the interpreters do not serve as allegorical vehicles for the national destiny, given that their dilemmas are those of an educated but disempowered minority.

Sagoe describes his own "retreat into lavatory as not so much a physiological necessity as a psychological and religious urge," when he veers from the public arena (71). Likewise, "the man" in *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born* finds "periodic visit to lavatory" a result of habit not of necessity. Such writing-with its playfully erudite tone and its charming embrace of solipsistic withdrawal resembles nothing so much as a line from Beckett, another penchant for scatological dismissals of the nationalist imperative.

In *The Interpreters*, at the beginning of the novel, the five main interpreters are shown at "club Cambana," a setting that serves as a symbol for the drama of their lives and the existing scenario of Independent Nigerian (5). A club is a melting pot of all sorts, a source of panacea, a center of socialization; it is also a meeting point of solitudes, a refuse for alcoholics and pariah, and a home for Ibadan. The friends get together soon becomes a systematic exorcism of social demons as well as a gradual decent into a personal hell, with Egbo's final "choice of drawing" standing out as the symbol of their tragedy (251).

Similarly, *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born*'s opening emphasizing dimness, darkness, oppressive weariness, confusion and uncertainty along with the protagonist's confrontation with the bus conductor, serves as a paradigm for the whole novel. The protagonist is on his way to work, moving in an all too real bus:

> The light from the bus moved uncertainly down the road until finally two vague circles caught some indistinct object on the side of the road where it curved out in front. The bus had come to a stop. Its confused rattle had given place to an endless spastic shudder, as f its pieces were held together by too much rust over to fall completely apart. (1)

In a few short paragraphs Armah has developed a very suggestive, though straightforward metaphor for the colonial and postcolonial political situation in Africa. The political allegory suggested by this opening can be worked out in a fine detail. The “two vague circles” are enfeebled ideology of a state no longer able to project into the future. The system is held together by corruption, it is rattling to halt, and it has already been abandoned by its leader (the driver). Its citizens (the passengers) are cheated and exploited by those work for this corrupt system (the conductor). The bus is the modern, yet corrupt machinery of a new African state. The conductor is a politician whose power is contingent on his ability to victimize the masses. The return of the bus, painted green, at the end of the novel is thus a futile renewal, another attempt to cover decay with shiny surfaces.

Each of the five interpreters, in *The Interpreters*, is socio-politically conscious. However, not only do they fail to fulfill any promise arising from their image, they often reveal a certain obsession with personal problems: “[. . .] you young men are always criticizing. You only criticize destructively, why don’t you put up some concrete proposal, some scheme for improving the country, [. . .]” (240).

They are doomed to live out the dilemma and the defeat; even Kola’s finished work The Pantheon lacks conviction. When Sagoe tries earlier to make Sekoni’s plight public by writing an article, his editor-in-chief rejects it. He says, “ ‘I know you think you owe some loyalty to your friend; believe me, you don’t. In the end you will find it’s every man for himself’” (96).

Soyinka spends much of his narrative illustrating the rottenness and hypocrisy of the Nigerian elite. The professor Oguazor, the leader of the elite pack, has a daughter by his maid, hidden away at a private school. However, he denounces the

"meral turpitude" of the younger generation, including the pregnancy of a young girl at the university (143).

Both the novels direct harsh words towards the vapid materialism of their society. In *The Interpreters*, Soyinka uses Western objects to represent a void of true meaning in Nigerian society. Likewise in *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born* those surrounding "the man" pursue the gleam of European luxuries as if the end of life was the getting of these comfortable things:

> It was only because of the admiring glances of people in the shops, for whom the man's value could only be as high as the cost of the things he could buy […] How was it possible for a man to control himself, when the admiration of the world, the pride of his family and his own secret happiness at least for the moment, all demanded that he lose control of himself and behave like someone he was not and would never be? Money. Power. (114-15)

There is no way of evading the gleam. Those who choose not to struggle in its wake find themselves harassed by it all the long days of their lives.

The cleanliness of luxury foreign objects owned by a few are contrasted to the filth that most Ghanians are forced to live with. Armah uses this juxtaposition to highlight the coexistence of underdevelopment and hyper-modernization in modern Ghana. Much of Armah's narrative is spent examining the likes of Koomson, as they abuse the resource of the state in striving to emulate their former European master: accumulating their possessions, imitating their accents and anglicizing their names Koomson, for example, names his daughter "Princess" the name embodying the twin dimensions of Anglophile and governance. It comes as no surprise to discover that the

little girl ha about her “the fearless direct look of a white child” and that she refers to her father as “Daddy” (144).

The satire through excremental term in both *The Interpreters* and *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born* is noticeable. Shit is used as a very literal device: in reality the streets of Lagos and Takoradi are filled with it. For example, Sagoe in *The Interpreters* works opposite a lake filled with floating feces, whilst “the man” in *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born* dreads using the overflowing latrine: “The man looked silently down at the wooden box seat of the latrine. The shithole in the box was, as usual, encrusted with old caked excrement” (166). However, excremental language is also used politically to represent postcolonial disillusionment with both failures of development and the behavior of ruling elite. In *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born* images of excrement accumulate, and motion petrifies into an accreted stillness and solidity. After the coup the pace quickens, the bowels of narrator are in motion and the catharsis comes when Koomson, who epitomizes fecal decay, is evacuated through a “shit hole” (166) and “compacted mud” (170) into sea that “looked thick and viscous, almost solid” (176).

Thwarted by a corrupt political system and unwilling to besmirch themselves by participation in it, the interpreters become “apostates” from their true purposes. They abandon the attempt to translate their desire for change into practical action and retreat into private, self-gratifying quests and preoccupation: Egbo into and esoteric religious mysticism, Kola into art, Sagoe into the cynical scatological ruptures of “ Voidancy” through which he seeks to exorcize revulsion at the moral filth of public corruption by raising excrement to the level of philosophy to explain political and corporate misdeeds in Nigeria.

Thus here is no clear resolution in either novel, and the outlook of both can be perceived as bleak. Both Armah and Soyinka mock with great vehemence and excremental language all that is rotten in the world of hypocritical people, lost opportunities and the enormous gap between the few with all the money and power, and the masses without anything at all. They depict the depressing surroundings of filth and corruption.

IV. Conclusion

The texts analyzed here deal with the impact of British colonization in Ghana and Nigeria by using excremental language not only to satirize the misruling of British colonizers but also to look at the post independent government not different from white colonial administration.

This comparative account discusses the historical similarities between Ghanian and Nigerian context in its attempt to compare the satirist. Both novels were published in the late 1960s, and are set only year apart. Many comparisons can be made between the themes, and their settings. Ghana and Nigeria share relatively similar historical circumstances: both were under British rule, and both had nationalist movements, and gained independence within a few years of one another (1957 and 1960) respectively. Both novels use satire and excremental language to portray post independent African societies and their leaders. They are filled with images of filth and decay, representing both theft on the streets and major embezzlement by the state leadership.

The patterns of scatological discourse appear in African novels written under historical circumstances that Armah and Soyinka connect to the potent presence of a new nationalism where interpreters have become the victims of colonial government even in independent country because there prevails malfunctioning as the legacy of colonial administration. The project of youths for making the country developed is thwarted by the forces of corruption which were prevailed in Nigeria even after independence. Similarly, the hope of "the man" and the Teacher in *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born* is dashed by the characters like Koomson who is wealthy, powerful, engaged in corrupt practices, looks at the world through Western-tinted eyeshades representing Eurocentric Africans in a neocolony. They take on the role of

manager for Western enterprise setting up their countries as the brothel of Europe. It shows that both the texts discuss the anarchy created by British colony in two similar historical circumstances.

Just as “the man’s” morals place him at odds with his contemporaries, the interpreters too have their hope dashed by the old establishments who stand in their way. In Soyinka’s novel *The Interpreters*, young, energetic, enthusiastic patriots return to their newly independent country Nigeria by collecting optimism of progressive plans intending to make their country developed. Contrary to their expectations, all of their projects are thwarted by the existing forces of corrupt. Still, people like ‘The Head,’ Sir Derinola, and the Editor-in-chief are advocating for white people, the colonizers and supporting to the status-quo of their motherland by avoiding any developmental activities. Sekoni’s interest to test the plant is made unsuccessful by ‘The Head’ since he bribes the expert to decree Sekoni’s plan unsafe. Sagoe’s trial to make Sekoni’s plight public by writing an article is rejected by editor-in-chief.

Sagoe’s ‘philosophy of Voidancy’ is also an outcome of his frustration created by the uneven plumbing of post-independent Nigeria. So, he describes the scene of excrements that he sees while walking to the city at night as the common atmosphere of Nigeria: “Shit is the most vernacular of our beloved country” (108). These excremental images suggest colonial rule analogous to excrements themselves.

To sum up, Armah and Soyinka exploited excremental vision to satirize the misdeeds and malpractices which have created anarchy in Ghana and Nigeria, and to expose the corruption of neocolonial politics and malfunctioning in the same countries. Both the novelists are comparable as satirist in their excremental vision whose contexts are post-colonial background of Ghana and Nigeria. Both the

excremental satirists remain sympathetic to the general Ghanian and Nigerian public suffering at the hands of elites in post-colonial Ghana and Nigeria, and bear witness to the conversion of their societies' political energies--and their own aesthetic efforts--into shit.

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