



The Evocation of the African Classical Antiquities in Ayi Kwei Armah's Writing: I - Revisiting the Egyptian Mythology in *Osiris Rising*.

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Abstract: *Osiris Rising* by Armah is inspired from the Osiris-Seth myth and the conflict which prevailed between the two brothers. Armah refers to this myth from the African classical antiquities to denounce the opposition which exists between two (02) kinds of African élites: those who long for the African renaissance, and those who defend the imperial system. Unfortunately, the struggle is yet to be led, in so far as those who inspire hope are defeated, and as long as the “Beautiful Ones” are unborn.

Keywords: Negro-African classical antiquities, myth, mythology, plot, clash, similarity, crisis, denouement, ideology.

Résumé: *Osiris Rising* est une œuvre dont l'intrigue est inspirée du mythe d'Osiris et de son conflit avec son frère Seth. En effet, Armah se sert de ce mythe des antiquités classiques négro-africaines pour donner sa lecture de l'opposition larvée entre deux (02) types d'intellectuels africains, les réformateurs représentés par Asar, et les réactionnaires défenseurs de l'Establishment néo-colonial, dont Seth est l'archétype. Malheureusement, l'espoir qu'incarnait Asar est ruiné avec son assassinat par SSS, le brutal agent du système impérial. Dès lors, la lutte devient une quête permanente jusqu'à l'avènement des “Beautiful Ones”.

Mots-clés: Antiquités classiques négro-africaines, mythe, mythologie, intrigue, confrontation, similitude, crise, dénouement, idéologie.

Introduction

Ayi Kwei Armah is a very prolific writer whose commitment and richness of theme have nurtured many controversies, but have also inspired numerous subjects of research. Despite these reactions, each of his publications paves the way to newer frontiers and working tracks. In his last five (05) works [*Osiris Rising* (1998), *KMT: in the house of life* (2002), *The Eloquence of the Scribes* (2006), *Remembering The Dismembered Continent* (2010) and *The Revolutionaries* (2013)], the author constantly alludes to Ancient Egypt, which he henceforth inspires from in his attempt to revive Africans' collective consciousness, in order to prompt them to go back to their genuine cultural sources, the African classical antiquities of Kemet.

The author presents the backward movement to the origins as the sine qua non condition for an African renaissance. To achieve his objectives, he either writes narratives in which he recurses to an antique setting (time and space) and creates a characterization with personalities and patronymics referring to Ancient Egypt, or deals with themes expressing the same ideology.



Even the titles of some novels' chapters are written in Medw Netcherw, "the language of the Gods", the black-African written language of Ancient Egypt which the Greeks named "hieroglyphics", i.e., "the sacred writing".

In his intrigues, Armah displays scenes of antagonists whose conflicts allow him to reach a specific goal: arouse the readers' curiosity and eagerness to learn the history, the ways of life, the myths and legends of Kemet, Ancient Egypt. *Osiris Rising*¹, the corpus and material of our work, fits with these features and characteristics because the title of the novel evokes the famous legend of the legendary Osiris. As a matter of fact, the work enlightens a merciless fictitious battle between Asar, teacher at the "Teacher Training College" (p. 32) of Manda and hero of the novel, and Seth Spencer Soja, alias SSS, the "Deputy Director of Security" (p. 63), i.e., le Director of the national Security of Silver Range Colony. The conflict ends up with the assassination of Asar, and his dismembering into fourteen (14) pieces. The similarities between the fiction and the legend of Osiris which opposed in days of yore in Antique Egypt Osiris and his brother Set has inspired this subject about "the Egyptian Osiris mythology in *Osiris Rising*", precisely the mythic conflict consecutive to the jealousy of Set towards his senior brother Osiris as a pretext to highlight the evocation of the African classical antiquities in the novel, and try to express its manifold contextual meanings.

We call "negro-African classical antiquities" the cultural heritage derived from the black-African civilization of predynastic and pharaonic Egypt. As for the concepts of "myth" and "mythology", we will refer to *The Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English* for their denotations and connotations. The "myth" is defined as "an ancient story, especially one invented in order to explain natural or historical events", "mythology" being "a set of ancient myths". In our work, we will first of all recall the Osiris-Set myth of the Egyptian legend. Then, we will analyze the Asar-Set confrontation in *Osiris Rising*, before we eventually underline the similarities between the two crises and the ideology, i.e., the meaning, the interpretation and the message we can grasp from the evocation of this myth by Ayi Kwei Armah.

I- Revisiting the Osiris-Set Myth of the Egyptian Legend

The myth of Osiris includes many legends: his birth, his life and death, his relationships with his sisters-wives Isis (mother of Horus with whom he also had Imset, Hâpi, Douamoutef, Qébehsénouf) and Nephtys (mother of Anubis), his conflictual relationships with his enemy-brother Set, etc. In our work, his relationships with his brother Set will particularly draw our

¹ - Ayi Kwei Armah; *Osiris Rising*, Popenguine, Per Ankh Publishers, 1995, 305 pages.



attention, in so far as this aspect seems to have been fictionalized through the clash between Asar and Seth Spencer Soja. But beforehand, we will present a summary of the ancient myths related to Osiris and Set.

1- The Myth of Osiris

Son of the princess Nwt (the canopy of heaven) and the King Geb (the earth), his Immaculate Conception occurred when the spirit of Atum-Re “impregnated Nwt’s body with the semen of the spirit”² under the big sycamore tree of a magnificent garden where she used to meditate during the preparations of her wedding ceremony with King Geb. After this extraordinary birth, Geb married Nwt. They afterwards gave birth to Seth, Isis and Nephtys. Nwt acquainted Osiris with his double human and divine nature, and prepared him to rule the kingdom of his adoptive father Geb. Because of his cardinal qualities, King Geb abdicated and legated him the throne and all his possessions. Osiris’ reign was said to have been a “Golden Age”. He was supposed to have taught humans the cultivation of wheat and its milling to bake bread and the planting of grapevine to make wine. That is why Osiris was called “the Bread of Life” and “the Lord of Wine”. He not only taught the use of irrigation in agriculture and virtuousness, truth and justice with the enactment of the principles of Maât, but he also instructed humanity with the divine principles of the universe. Osiris was so appreciated by his compatriots that all the people of the Amentha³ (the “country of the truthful speech”) called him with many laudatory names: “place of the eye”, “the first of the Occidentals” (i.e., of the dead, since he presides the tribunal of the Am-dwat, the abode of the dead and the equivalent of the Greek “Hades” and the Jewish “Gehenna”), “the one who dries the tears”, “the eternally good”, “the splendid”⁴. Armah himself tells us that “The Beautiful One” or Wn Nefer (Wennefer) was a title given in ancient times to Osiris”⁵. And he defines the concept: “an extraordinary being with an admired spirit interested in the improvement of social life.”⁶

Unfortunately, he was assassinated by his brother Seth after two (02) unsuccessful attempts. Firstly, Set sent snakes which were supposed to bite him while he was sleeping in the magnificent garden where he had been conceived. But Osiris was saved by Sekbet the big cat,

²-Robert-Jacques Thibaud, *Dictionnaire de Mythologie et de Symbolique Egyptienne*, Paris, Editions Dervy, 1997, 376 pages, p. 243. The future references will be noted *DMSE* in the text.

³-Armah locates the **Amentha** in Sub-Saharan Africa, “**in the valley of Imentat below the desert, the greenness of life**”, and not in Atlantic Ocean as said by European Egyptologists. See *KMT: in the house of life*, Popenguine, Per Ankh Publishers, 2002, 350 pages, p. 223.

⁴-Robert-Jacques Thibaud, *DMSE*, p. 244.

⁵-Ayi Kwei Armah ; *Remembering The Dismembered Continent*, Popenguine, Per Ankh Publishers, 2010, p. 269.

⁶ - Op. Cit, p. 269.



which cut the head of the snake Apophis and put the other snakes to rout. His second attempt consisted in raising a rebellion of many troops in Amentha against Osiris. His rebels marching towards the loyalist zone destroyed many towns and slaughtered many innocent people. This tragedy was called “the Great Fight”. The sedition and the coup d’état aborted and Set got arrested and imprisoned. Osiris refused to follow the crowd which wanted him killed, and offered bulls and sheep to save his life. From prison, Seth bribed his guards who freed him and gave him weapons for his revenge against his brother. At the third attempt, Seth overcame the divine Osiris, killed him by removing his heart with a knife of flintstone under the big sycamore tree in the magnificent garden. According to some versions of the original myth which spread during the New Empire Era (from 1550 BC to 1070 BC), Seth dismembered Osiris into fourteen (14) or sixteen (16) parts and was crowned king of Amentha by his followers.

The legend adds that the day following the assassination of Osiris, during a solar eclipse, an earthquake occurred and the Atlantic Ocean swallowed up the Amentha. The survivors escaped in three (03) barks with the corpse of Osiris and reached the shores of Africa, where he was resurrected by his sisters Isis and Nephtys. Thence, they created the first Egyptian community. The legend also evokes the myth of Seth, the enemy of Osiris.

2- The Myth of Set

Set is the second son of Nwt and Geb. Biological son of King Geb, he is the opposite of Osiris the divine. His epithets are: “Great in Power”, “the killer of light”, “the assassin of Osiris”, and “the shredder”. He symbolizes darkness, and he is considered as an enemy of order and the union of the Two Egypts. Gifted with a great strength, he is represented with a red skin and very bright eyes. Set personifies all that is opposite to spiritual, divine and earthly light. He is both the desert and the animals living in it. He attacked Osiris three (03) times and eventually succeeded in killing him. Set also clashed with Horus, the son of Osiris. Horus succeeded in avenging his father by emasculating Set, thus preventing him from procreating. Set nevertheless collaborates with Horus, in order to help humans climb the stairs leading to Heaven. This cooperation which causes darkness and light to work together has a spiritual meaning: the two forces (good and evil) are complementary in spiritual and cosmic dimensions. But, why did Seth hate so fiercely his brother Osiris?

3- The Causes of the Crisis

The conflict opposing Osiris and Set derives from the particular birth of the former. Both were Nwt’s children. Set was very strong and as handsome as Osiris. But by virtue of Osiris’s divine



nature (son of Atum-Re and princess Nwt), he was born out of wedlock. He was therefore not Geb's biological son. Set hated Osiris for having usurped his "throne" and deprived him from his natural inheritance by ascending to the throne, because he was gifted with wisdom. As a matter of fact, Set, the elder biological and legitimate son, was supposed to be the heir of the throne.

His jealousy turned into hatred, because Set wanted "his" throne given back at all costs. He therefore allied to all the frustrated and desperate destitute, in order to evict King Osiris. The Osiris-Set conflict was thus sustained by political and ideological reasons: the conquest of political power, the primacy of wisdom over terrestrial laws, and the precariousness of order and good when faced with determined chaos. It becomes obvious that this ancient confrontation has been adapted by Armah to a contemporary setting in *Osiris Rising*.

II- The Asar-Seth Confrontation in *Osiris Rising*

In *Osiris Rising*, Armah depicts two (02) main characters, Asar and Seth Spencer Soja, who should normally be accomplices, but happen to be sworn enemies. The rhythm of the plot is paced by the episodes of their relationship. What are the causes of this enmity?

1- The Exposition of the Crisis

Asar the hero, Seth the antagonist and Ast, an adjuvant character were childhood friends. Netta Ka informs us that they even attended the same school: "That's no way to treat an old classmate" (p. 66), she said when Seth tried to rape Ast. She repeated that information when she talked about Asar to Ast: "We were classmates" (p. 70). During these school days, Asar was cleverer and more successful than Seth. But the latter did not forgive Asar for being more brilliant than him. Netta Ka also allows the reader to know that "Asar was a winner. Something SSS was dying to be, but couldn't be. He tried, but his best never got him past the middle of the heap." (p. 75). Seth developed a complex of inferiority towards Asar, because he was an outstanding student. Ast puts Seth's complex in these terms: "He struggles with the burden of having to persuade himself he's not inferior, knowing he is" (p. 115). And talking to Asar, she peremptorily concludes: "You're his antithesis", (p. 165).

After the Sylver Range Colony, the two (02) enemy-classmates continue their studies in the United States of America. There too, not only Asar was cleverer, but he also ravished Seth the pretty Ast, a young African-American he fell in love with. Seth had had enough. He therefore began having bad intentions against Asar. As Ast told Asar, "to SSS, you're not an external




threat. You're a threat in his mind. In his guts (...). He's always wished you didn't exist" (p. 164).

Henceforth, Seth will seek all the necessary means, including death penalty, to avenge himself of Asar for his own congenital weaknesses. To achieve his goal, Netta Ka says that Seth will integrate political and imperial circles: "Raw ambition. He found sponsors to pull him into positions he wanted, as close to the command center as he could get. He found the levers of neocolonial power" (pp. 75-76). Back home, he became le commander in chief of National Security services. He confessed that this position would allow him to have the necessary power for the expiation of his childhood frustrations: "Security is the fastest track. There is a mystique about it. Power. The ability to make things happen", (p. 28).

As for Asar, he decided to teach at the "Teachers' Training College" of Manda, after taking part in liberation warfare in many countries of austral Africa. At Manda, he tries to resurrect the ancient "Ankh Society" with a few friends. Their objective which was to find solutions to Africa's cultural and societal collapse brought about the climax of the intrigue.

2- The Manifestation of the Crisis

The crisis between Asar and Seth revived when articles using the "Ankh" icon () of Ancient Egypt which criticized African political regimes and proposed ways for the liberation of the continent from white supremacy, originated from Manda and spread throughout the country. As a matter of fact, his enemy Asar and his friends teach there, and they do write articles with the purpose of awaking Africans' consciousness in the long run, not for stirring up a revolt or fomenting a military coup. But Seth had here a pretext, for national security's sake, to carry out his long-planned vengeance against Asar. He therefore transformed Manda into a fallacious epicenter of a dangerous group by declaring that "Manda is the source, and there's a subversive nucleus there" (p. 35). Seth will even confess that this manipulation is scaffolded for his own profit: "I'm doing my public duty. I'm looking after my personal interests at the same time. When you can do both at once, you begin to really live" (p. 302), he uttered.

Seth's frustration revived when Ast resigned from her University American of Emerson (p. 15) and went to meet up with Asar in Sylver Range Colony. When Seth saw her, he vainly promised her comfort and fortune, in order to satisfy his frustrated love, libido and ego. He will even try twice to rape her (see pp. 62-66 and 206-207). But her resistance and determination made him exteriorize his evil intentions against Asar. By saying that "incorrigible challengers get



eliminated” (p. 31) and by referring to “the survival of the fittest, the most intelligent” (p. 298), he means Asar’s physical elimination with the powerful means of the State now at his disposal. He thus shows that he is now the most successful and the strongest, settling at last, his inferiority complex.

After the intimidations, Seth tries to implement his lugubrious project. To overcome Asar, he scaffolds a three-stepped plan. Firstly, he profiled Asar under the code name of 021-93 for subversive activities, with the following reasons: “There are subversives trying to overthrow the government” (p. 201); “Until arrival of 021-93, no fear of subversive potential becoming actualized” (p. 203); “With arrival of 021-93, old 021 profile changed” (p. 203). By making Asar become not only his own sworn enemy, but also a public enemy, and by making him blacklisted by the secret services, Seth could finally reach his objectives: “arrest, neutralization, elimination” (p. 204). Secondly, he tried to arrest him on the campus of Manda. Fortunately, his plan aborted owing to Ast who alerted their colleagues and students. The third step consisted in programming the «OSIRIS» operation which would result in the calumny of “attempt of military coup”. Seth sent Rodney Jones, alias Wossen the Ethiopian Prince turned into a spy, to put bags containing fake evidences in Asar’s apartment. The narrator describes Wossen’s luggage and its content: “a large, shiny metal suitcase and traveling bag” (p. 280) with:

Two large pairs of black binoculars. A half dozen hand grenades. Two AK 47s. Above them, to the right, magazines. Below, a dozen tape cassettes, a sheaf of printed papers stamped with an ankh, then a veritable encyclopedia of bank notes in a wild variety of colors and sizes”, (p.

Having made the necessary arrangements, Seth could then gradually phase in his plan. It started with an official communiqué of his alibi, the so-called abortive “military coup”:

Last night, at 22 hours 32 minutes, our Head of State, the beloved Father of the Nation, miraculously escaped unharmed from an assassination attempt mounted by a desperate gang of subversive elements (...).” (p. 284).

A curfew is decreed and Asar the guilty designate shall be tracked down. Knowingly, Seth had Asar’s apartment searched in the presence of many eyewitnesses and the press. Having proved Asar’s offence, Seth plans a night ambush on the lagoon, not to hand him over to the authorities as said in the communiqué (p. 284), but to assassinate him, bringing the plot to its denouement.

3- The Denouement of the Crisis

The story ends up tragically: Seth kills Asar, in order to make his prophecy come true: “he’s no longer among the living” (p. 299). This assassination also takes on an air of crime passionnel, because he told Ast after his misdeed: “If I had to pick one woman in the whole world whose respect, I mean love, could end this feeling that in some way nature has cheated me, that woman

would be you.” (p. 301). Seth used a boat of the maritime police for his night ambush, and waited until Asar’s was near enough for his cynical assault. Then he lighted projectors to floodlight the scene of his crime:

When the two [boats] were some two hundred meters apart there came a sudden, violent change that turned the night around Asar’s boat whiter than day. A battery of arc lamps lit up the little boat and the water around it. (p. 303)

Then the tragedy happened. At the Deputy Director of Security’s behest, a shower of bullets struck Asar. This is how the narrator reports the event:

Under relentless fire the perforated target bent over, then was literally torn apart by an explosion stronger than all the jets of bullets on fire (...). Then he exploded silently into fourteen starry fragments, and the pieces plunged into the peaceful water. (p. 305)

Asar is killed and his body “exploded into fourteen (14)” parts under the horrified eyes of his wife Ast bearing his semen in her womb. The narrator has alluded many times before to this pregnancy in many ways: “Months before any visible sign” (p. 278), “her biological transformations” (p. 282) and “the new life in her” (p. 283). Asar’s abandoned boat drifted on the water. Early in the morning, SSS went back to his headquarter of Manda with Ast, landing her with this laconic invitation: “When you’re ready, come” (p. 305). The account of the myth of Osiris and the presentation of the rivalry between the two (02) characters Asar and Seth allow us to point out so many similarities between the two (02) intrigues that we could refer to the narratologists and conclude that *Osiris Rising* is a fictionalization and a “hypertext” (imitating text) of the antique myth, the legend in Medw Netcherw being the hypotext (the imitated text)⁷.

III- The Similarities Between the Two Intrigues

Although the two (02) characters seem to be separated both by time and space and their patronymics, they share many identical features.

1- The Osiris-Asar Similarities

The first similarity is relative to the patronymics of two characters. Some etymologies of the referential Osiris’ name allow us to say that Armah named his hero according to a variation of the mythic Egyptian’s name. As a matter of fact, Jean Louis Bernard tells us that the Egyptian etymology of «Osiris» refers to «Ousir’rê». As for Maurice Guignard, he compares «Osiris» or «Ousir’rê» with the Nordic words «Aïsar» and «Aïsar’Ris», (“Aïs” = ice, “Ar” = ancestor,

⁷- Cf Gérard Genette, *Palimpsestes - La littérature au second degré*, Paris, Seuil, 1982, p. 7.



“Ris” = giant), which seems to mean the «**giant ancestor from the ice lands**».⁸ This etymological study of Osiris’ patronymic allows to find a possible homonymy between “Asar” and “Osiris”. Armah will certify this identity of patronymics by confirming that in the ancient myth, Osiris is also called Asar: “**the most beloved ancestral deities were Osiris and Isis, more accurately called Asar and Ast**”⁹.

Besides their patronymic identities, the characterization of Asar seems to have been built with the psychological qualities the referential Osiris was supposed to be gifted with. Osiris was a “Wennefer”, i.e., a very good man who was heedful of his people’s welfare. The author created a character behaving likewise: Asar was non-violent and always eager to bring happiness to his fellows. The narrator reports Ast’s testimony of his past deed proving his cardinal qualities: “She saw Asar off on the first humanizing journeys, carrying not weapons of destruction but ideas to support new life, images to feed love of universe.” (p. 8). He is therefore depicted as an affable figure, like his alter-ego Osiris. Furthermore, the legendary Osiris is said to have invented agriculture, irrigation, and the growing of wheat and vine. He also taught the bakery of bread and the making of wine. He can therefore be considered to be a teacher. Is it the reason why Netta Ka idealizes this occupation when she says: “Teacher. Midwives for a coming generation. Uniters. Liberators. The beautiful ones, born to bring Africa together” (p. 78)? Asar is granted the same portrayal. He is not only a teacher, but also, he initiates and coaches a cooperative; Asar supervises the fishermen’s cooperative of Bara which made possible the betterment of the living conditions of its members with the acquisition of ten (10) houses, two (02) boats, and many fishing materials (See *OR*, pp. 107-108). This is what the narrator foretold when he made Ast imagine him in a cooperative at her arrival in Sylver Range Colony: “Farming? She could imagine him in a cooperative farm group” (p. 17).

Osiris took over King Geb because of his intelligence. The same, Asar was a brilliant pupil and an outstanding student. Seth’s jealousy and anger derive from this particular genius. This is how their classmate Netta Ka pays homage to Asar: “He did so many things well. People were certain he was going to be a big shot fast” (p. 70); “There he was, winning prizes, playing for the school team, starting a study group.” (p. 71); “He read beyond the syllabus. He won prizes (...). Asar was a winner” (p. 75).

⁸ -Jean Louis Bernard ; *Les Archives de l’Insolite*, Paris, Editions Du Dauphin, 1971, 475 pages, p. 348.

⁹ -Ayi Kwei Armah ; *The Eloquence of the Scribes*, Popenguine, Per Ankh Publishers, 2006, p. 233.



Osiris was compassionate. He did not kill his brother Set, whereas the people claimed death penalty after his unsuccessful rebellion. Instead, he slaughtered animals and saved his life. So is Asar. He allowed Wossen to trap him with Seth's fake evidences by accepting his luggage in his apartment: "He's welcome to my place if he's just staying two weeks" (p. 280), he told Ast who disagreed with him. Is it because his alter-ego the mythic hero, was called "He-who-dries-out-the-tears" that the author made him act with such a carelessness? Moreover, Asar showed much compassion towards the members of the Bara fishing cooperative and brought them a "Golden Age" with the acquisition of ten (10) houses for the ten (10) family-members, and two (02) boats for the cooperative. By acting so, he freed them from the shady businessman who used to take 75 % of their production. Besides, Osiris taught righteousness to humans through the principles of truth and justice of Maât, and fought for the advent of freedom and horizontality in the community of Amentha. In *Osiris Rising*, Asar was also a freedom fighter. That's why he went to southern African colonies to take part in their liberation warfare. The narrator said that "He'd volunteered to work against white supremacy, some said in Angola. Mozambique. Zimbabwe. Then inside South Africa." (p. 76). And he adds that he "(...) decides the intelligent life is not the hunt for dollars and privilege but the struggle to liberate the continent from criminals" (p. 77). Does this episode of Asar's life not remind "the great Battle" Osiris waged against Set and his gang of brigands and assassins in Amentha?

A more symbolic likeness is relative to Asar's virility and the Osiris-Isis idyll. Indeed, Ast loves Asar, just as Isis and Nephtys loved their brother-husband Osiris. Each of them had a son with him: Isis had Horus and Nephtys had Anubis. Consequently, Asar is portrayed as a virile and a fertile character. Armah shows it through the description of numerous erotic scenes between Asar and Ast: "She raised herself up on her knees, shifted forward on top of him, and began to lower herself onto his erected penis" (p. 118), and Asar's fear: "I don't want to make you pregnant" (p. 119), alluding to his virility. This virility became more evident when the author used three (03) subtleties to tell the reader that Ast was pregnant: "Months before any visible sign" (p. 278), "her biological transformations" (p. 282) and "the new life in her" (p. 283). But the most important similarity is about Osiris' and Asar's deaths. Asar exploded into fourteen (14) parts, just as the legend says Osiris was dismembered into fourteen (14) parts by Set: "Then he exploded silently into fourteen starry fragments, and the pieces plunged into the peaceful water" (p. 305).

The last sameness between the two intrigues is shown by the conditions in which Asar and Osiris were assassinated. Asar is killed by night, with the scene lighted with projectors which "turned



the night around Asar's boat whiter than day. A battery of arc lamps lit up the little boat and the water around it." (p. 303). Osiris was also attacked by night. Robert-Jacques Thibaud gives the condition in which he died: «une nuit, alors qu'il se reposait sous le sycomore, baigné par la clarté lunaire qui le rendait plus beau et plus resplendissant...»¹⁰ (*DMSE*, p. 322). We now understand why the narrator said that Asar exploded into fourteen "starry fragments". Even in death, Asar was radiant like Osiris. Seth Spencer Soja too shares important negatively connoted similarities with the mythic Set.

2- Geb Set-Seth Spencer's Identical Portrayal

Seth's homonymy with Set is not allusive. The two characters are called «**Seth**»: Seth Spencer Soja and Geb Set. Both of them have also outstanding physical strength. "SSS" is depicted as a brute with a high-rated propensity to bully people. The narrator shows it when he describes his first rape attempt against Ast: "the DD brought both elbows down with tremendous force" (p. 63), "heavy thighs" (p. 64), "massive face, overdeveloped jaws, heavy muscles on his huge, short neck" (p. 27). He is even assimilated to an animal: "bullock", "beast" (p. 64). Obviously, his "tremendous force" confers him an unusual confidence in himself, which makes him become very violent. That is why he dares try to rape Ast, and even plan Asar's murder and dismemberment, for he told Ast: "You'll go to pieces with him" (p. 61). Consequently, the narrator says that he is a "trained killer" and "a man ready for murder" (p. 64).

Secondly, Set Geb was very violent too. He removed his brother Osiris' heart and dismembered him into pieces, after provoking a civil war in Amentha. The two of them have unrealistic ambitions and they are at the pursuit of power SSS calls "the ability to make things happen" (p. 28), i.e., the only magical means which could allow him to supersede the outstanding Asar. As for the mythical Set, his obsession was to kill Osiris and rule Amentha.

Thirdly, Set the god of the deserts, also represented the rocky mountains of Egypt. The author attributes these characteristics to Seth Spencer Soja when he settles him in a similar environment: "mountainous", because his office is located on a mountain. That is why the narrator alludes to "hilltop" (p. 21) and "mountain" (p. 43); "desert", because Seth built his Head Quarter in an artificial "desert of concrete pavement on razed earth", "emptiness", "pale concrete" (p. 21), "concrete wall" (p. 22), "granite wall" (p. 23). The author also sets Seth in a cold, sinister and metallic environment: "gleaming metal", "metallic gray gate" (p. 21),

¹⁰ -Translation: "One night, while having a rest under the sycamore tree, beamed by the moonlight which made him become more beautiful and more resplendent..."



“electric guillotine” (p. 22), with a “metal gray” (p. 58) BMW. Next, Seth is the opposite of Asar, the outstanding student: “Asar was a winner. Something SSS was trying to be, but couldn’t be. He tried, but his best never got him past the middle of the heap.” (p. 75), said the narrator. The mythic Set was also vexed for being less intelligent than Osiris.

Moreover, the DDS Seth was as impotent as Geb Set whom Horus is said to have castrated to avenge his father Osiris’ death. On behalf of the narrator, Armah gives us this intimate secret when he first tried to rape Ast: “Hot as the DDS acted, he had no erection” (p. 63). The description of his genitals points out this impotence: “(...) the penis was dangling, the scrotum loose and raggedy, one ball way lower than its brother” (p. 63). Worst, he had a rotten penis: “she saw liquid oozing from DD’s limp penis, a thick, yellow pus” (p. 64). The narrator alluded later to this “liquid” as “the DD’s sick fluid” (p. 67), instead of a seminal liquid. Last but not least, SSS is also marked with the same congenital red colour as Geb Set: “At the tip of the DD’s penis there was a birthmark, a reddish square” (p. 63). Spencer Soja has a red mark on his sex, while Geb Set’s reddish colour covers all his body, so that he is represented in the mythology with a red skin, (See *DMSE*, p. 320).

Let us recall the main similarities between the four (04) personae of the two (02) intrigues. Geb Set kills Osiris, just as Seth Spencer Soja kills Asar in *Osiris Rising*. Osiris is dismembered into (14) parts by Set. So did SSS who made Asar explode into fourteen (14) parts. The two “Seth”, the mythic and the fictitious are impotent, while their rivals, the fictitious Asar and his alter-ego and allusive homonym “the divine” Osiris are virile and fertile. Consequently in *Osiris Rising*, the author depicts a scene presenting on one hand the affable and fertile Asar, and on the other hand the violent but impotent and purulent Seth, the disciple of Isfet, the netcher of destruction. Osiris gets Isis pregnant with his semen, just as Asar did with Ast in *Osiris Rising*, allowing a cathartical hope for Osiris’ resurrection and revenge through another “Horus-the-avenger” who will rise from Ast’s gene-securing womb.

IV-The Ideology of the African Myth and Armah’s Novel.

Any African tale vehicles messages to the listeners. The same, the Osiris myth of the “Books of Kemet” and *Osiris Rising* by Armah are meant to teach the readers. We will try here to point out a few lessons from these narratives.



1- “Only a Cracked Wall Lets in Cockroaches”

The two narratives are allegories of a clash at play in Africa between two (02) interest groups: on one hand, the group striving for Africa’s liberation from oppressive and exploiting forces, and on the other hand the power-thirsty elite who collude with the imperial system for their selfish interests. This collusion is fictionalized through the characterization of two antagonist actants, Asar and SS Seth. As a matter of fact, owing to the former’s initiatives through the resurrection of the ancient “Ankh Society”, the writing of articles aimed at making Africans gain consciousness of the prevailing misgovernment, and the new “Golden Age” in Bara and the new curriculum on the way at the Teachers Training College of Manda which were due to bring a new start in Sylver Range Colony out of Manda. The reader begins dreaming of a future societal uprising, only to be faced with Asar’s assassination by Seth Spencer Soja, which happens to be a great loss that hinders all the chances of renaissance. This assassination also expresses the triumph of the agents of the imperial system, whose archetypal figure is SSS. They are portrayed as traitors to the national cause who prevent any chance of liberation from being implemented. That is why the author denigrates Seth Spencer Soja and his accomplices by granting them negative roles, in order to deprive them of the reader’s sympathy. These negative characters and antagonists are the swaggering and vile “Earl Johnson, alias Wossen the Ethiopian Prince” (p. 152) and “Sheldon Tubman alias, His Excellency Dr. Chief Sir Ras Jomo Cinque Equiano” (pp. 85 ; 181), and all the collaborators of SSS the DDS.

The first lessons we can draw from these narratives are about the need to implicate all the Africans in the quest for freedom, the primacy of union and mutual understanding during the fight, and the importance of union in the societal cohesion and development. In Amentha, the rivalries between Set and Osiris caused tremendous sufferings to the populations and ended up in the collapse of the nation. The same, Africans’ misunderstandings will turn one another into enemies and compromise their common interest and welfare. That is why by denouncing Seth’s misdeed, the author seems to suggest to Africans to stop fussing and fighting, because doing so causes the continent’s socio-economical setback. We share his mindset and we will comfort it with King Behanzin’s thought: “if everybody puts a finger on a puncture of a perforated pot, the leakage will stop”. Some other lessons are worth being drawn.

2- Light will Always Overcome Darkness.

In the mythology, Osiris died, but resurrected and had Horus who will perpetuate his genes through four (04) sons he also had with his mother Isis: Imset, Hâpi, Douamoutef, et



Qebhsenouf. Ast too bears the hope of a new birth of Asar, and the possibility of SSS's retribution for his crimes, just as Horus avenged his father Osiris' death.

3- The Unending Quest for “the Beautiful Ones”.

Asar's death leaves the reader so numb he cannot help asking Armah's intentions and motivations. We think that by “killing” Asar, he is still dealing with his thematic concern of the “Beautiful Ones” not yet being born. The author means here that the idealized Africans who will symbolically resurrect Asar/Osiris and bring back the continent's “Golden Age” are yet to come. For this to happen, Asar/Osiris and Seth/Set should be reconciled.

4- Does Africa's Future Depend on its Descendants in the Diaspora?

The African-American Ast will allow the exploded Asar to have descendants, because she was pregnant before Seth kills him. She therefore represents the chance of perpetuating his post-mortem genes. Does Armah here recommend the reconciliation between Africans and their kin from the Diaspora? Does he not confide them the chances of Africa's renaissance?

Conclusion

The two characters Seth and Asar were made to have many convergence points as far as their lives are concerned. They were friends from childhood, then classmates both in the Sylver Range Colony and in America where both of them fell in love with an African-American woman called Ast. Not only Asar was more successful at school, but he also ravished Seth the beautiful woman. Seth's jealousy stirs the plot which came to its denouement with Asar's assassination. This death hallows the victory of the antagonist whose “powerlust had deepened the destruction of the continent” (*OR*, p. 2). Seth Spencer Soja is presented by the narrator as the archetype of those negative actants. We used the narrative of the rivalry between Asar and Seth as a pretext to recall the ancient myths of Osiris and Seth of antique negro-African Egypt, Kemet, and point out the similarities between Armah's fiction and the legend, and the main characters of both narratives. Finally, we have tried to highlight a few messages which can derive from the ideology of the two intrigues (the myths of Osiris-Seth and the Asar-Seth conflict in *OR*). In so doing, we have expressed our view about Armah's allegories to Africans' unity of action if they want to emancipate their continent from imperial interests. We think that the author has written his novel to exhort the Africans to union in the defence of their own interest. Lastly, we evoked the role the author assigned to Ast, a representation of the African Diaspora, in the reconstruction of Africa.



The author made a few adaptations of the antique myth. Asar will not be remembered and resurrected in his version of the myth, for there are no new Isis and Nephtys available. Is it not the right moment to look for such characters who would be the midwives of “Beautiful Ones” and the Wenefers’ resurrection? By making Asar’s body explode in the water, Armah does not allow Seth to give him this time any chance of rememberment for resurrection. Nor are Osiris’ followers (Ast and the friends of Manda) allowed to take Asar’s corpse in their bark for a new start. Ast becomes SSS’s prisoner and he does not free her until Asar’s corpse disappears in the water. But Armah is not a pessimistic author. This is why he begins his novel with a hint of hope, in order to lessen the sad denouement of the novel: “The future stayed with alive possibilities, ready for the rise of power crossed with knowledge, compassion, balance: Hrw triumphant, steady between Jehwty and the Maet sisters” (p. 8). Is it not the premonition of the birth of Asar’s child, the other “Horus-the-avenger” that Ast is expecting, through whom Osiris would rise?

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