

gether a wider range of sources of information in the African studies including annotated listings of the major reference tools, current bibliographies and continuing sources, journals and magazines (in whatever form published - printed, audio/video and other electronic format including the internet). The compilation also lists major libraries, publishers with African studies lists, dealers and distributors of African studies materials, the major regional and international organisations and it also identifies donor agencies and foundations active in Africa and or supporting research on Africa. In other sections of this valuable compilation are a listing of African Studies associations and societies, academic and literary awards in African studies, African literature fields and the final section is a listing of the most commonly used abbreviations and acronyms in African studies.

It is however the determination of the scope of the work that yielded a lot of resources based in Europe and America. According to the compilers, although the scope has been widened slightly for this new edition, the majority of listings identify general and current sources of information and for the most part of those in English. This would mean that resources mainly of a multidisciplinary nature and focusing on the whole or a substantial part of the African continent are featured. However, resources of specialist nature and focusing on a whole or part of an African country are featured in several of other sources - most of which are also produced by Hans Zell Publishers listed in the relevant sections of the Companion.

Apart from Europe and America-based Africanist workers who will find this compilation more useful as most of the resources listed are located with or are easily accessed by them, their colleagues based in Africa should also find the Companion valuable. For one reason a lot of the resources listed in the compilation can be made available to African libraries and information centres through library cooperation and networking arrangement. It is also an open-secret that the most up-to-date comprehensive and well organised managed information resources on any aspect of African Studies are based in Europe and America, this compilation would enable the Africa-based researcher to know what and where the resources are in his effort to exploit them.

And if Africa-based information community decides that the best thing is to develop local information resources, as no one can feature what does not exist, even here the compilation has come handy. It has done this in many ways, one of which is by invariably showing the areas of efficiency and deficiency in information service delivery for Africa that information professionals can exploit. Since the local market is always low on local information services and products produced in Africa, the companion has exposed a lot of ready markets in hard currency and in fact organisations and agencies that will not only support research but I want to believe also supports information service development in Africa.

A library scientist, Osunfowora is of Abadina Media Resource Centre, University of Ibadan

Texts on regeneration

Segun Adekoya

OSIRIS RISING, Ayi Kwei Armah's sixth novel, breaks a silence of seventeen years and thematises an African-American's search for her African roots. The quest motif takes the form of the eternal love triangle and is drawn against the background of the Egyptian fertility myth of Iris and Osiris. Ast, the quester and the orthocentre of the love triangle represents Iris, a matriarch figure, the Egyptian goddess of agriculture, love, and the sea. Asar, the creative revolutionary killed by his compatriot and jealous rival, represents Osiris, the Egyptian royal mortuary and vegetation god whose death and resurrection are believed to bring salvation to his worshippers. Seth, the murderer, represents Set who in the Iris-Osiris myth symbolises night and evil. The novel

Abubakar Gimba, **GOLDEN APPLES**, Vantage Press, New York, 1997, 290pp.

Ayi Kwei Armah, **OSIRIS RISING**, Per Ankh Publishers, Popenguine, Senegal, 1995, 305pp.

dramatises the struggle between Good (Asar) and Evil (Seth) for the heart of Love (Ast).

The principle of alterity governs its characterisation, development of plot and themes. Founded on the day-night dialectics, the Iris-Osiris myth lends itself to the use of

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binary opposition. Born of Seb (Earth) and Nut (Heaven), Osiris was the Sun while Set was Night. Iris (Dawn) restored Osiris after his annihilation at the hands of Night by producing Horus (the Son of the Sun) who took vengeance on Set (Night) and won back his father's glory, light and throne. Thus Osiris Rising translates into the Sun Rising.

A thoroughly researched anthropological-historical novel, it is set in a mythical African country called Hapa which has geographical features and monuments that invoke Egypt, Ghana, Senegal and Tanzania. Hapa is a microscopic representation of Africa.

After his education at Emerson College where he first met Ast, his lover, in the United States, Asar returns to Africa to participate in the wars of liberation going on in Southern Africa. The independence struggle over, he takes up a teaching appointment at the Manda Teacher Training College in Hapa, where he joins other progressive lecturers to form an organisation that not only makes a strong case for the total transformation of the education system in Africa but actually designs new syllabi for African Studies, History and Literature. Africa constitutes the core of the new school curricula, and Egypt is restored to Africa. The joint position paper on redesigning education produced by the Manda Collective should have been published as a separate document. It weakens the structure of the novel. Professor Wright Woolley, the leader of the conservative faculty, a security adviser to government, writes an incriminating intelligence report on Asar which leads to the latter's being framed as a

coup-plotter and his subsequent assassination organised by Seth. The complicity of the intelligentsia in the mindless destruction of Africa is revealed.

Having been taught to read the hieroglyphics and hinted about the ankh symbolism by Nwt her grandmother and having completed her doctoral thesis on the philosophy of Kemt (ancient Egypt), Ast feels alienated from the American society and travels to Hapa to contribute to the work of rebuilding Africa. On arrival, she is taken to the Deputy Director of Security, Spencer Sojourner Seth, because of the unsigned article 'Who We Are and Why', bearing the ankh logo and found on her at the airport. She rejects the offer of a plum sinecure made by Seth who had vainly competed with Asar for her love way back in their college days at Emerson. In desperation Seth makes futile attempts to rape her in her hotel room. In choosing to press her intellectual powers into the service of Africa's liberation, Ast lives up to the meaning of her name as the most intelligent divinity, a doer and maker who has the power of healing.

Ankh, the logo of the Ankh society, is an ancient Egyptian word for life and Regeneration. A symbolic reinscribing of all Armah's previous novels, *Osiris Rising* is a vision of resurrection, a dream of an ideal society 'without established hierarchies, privileges, handicaps. Skill the criterion.' (131). An affirmation of the autochthonous and a demonstration of Armah's rejection of transnational publishers, the novel was published by Per Ankh. Ama Tete, a historian, serves as a consultant to Ast and Cinque on the history of the Ankh. From her we get to know that Africans had and used the magic of formal education, counting and writing

but lost the arts and sciences through the foolishness of rulers and the callousness of foreign pillagers' (255).

Deriding the craving for grandiloquent titles by Black artists and the wretched of the earth generally, Armah throws a satirical jab at Chief Commander Ebenezer Obey, a popular Nigerian musician. He recognises the delusion of grandeur that lies behind the craze of titlemania.

Separating historical truth from literary truth in *Osiris Rising* presents a herculean task. The novel displaces fiction with fact as if it was not itself a fiction.

Armah uses the story of Esi Mansa, an African slave who made several attempts to return to Africa and was eventually killed to prevent his escape bid, to expose distortions of African-American history by descendants of slave-masters, of course, with the active connivance of some descendants of slaves. The author of *Journey to the Source*, a descendant of Esi Mansa who recounts his ancestor's story, exchanges his racial integrity for filthy lucre. He functions as a foil to Armah. An alter-text, *Osiris Rising* interrogates *Journey to the Source* and corrects its misprisions. History and myth, fact and fiction, and reality and illusion blend into, and war against, each other in the novel. It explores further the idea foregrounded in *Why Are We So Blest?* That love is impossible between a Black man and a White woman. It raises a crucial question: is revolutionary work compatible with family life? Asar's death after Ast, his wife, has got pregnant for him and the subsequent distress and loneliness provide a negative answer: 'If you're planning to work for the

overthrow of the existing system', Asar thinks, 'it doesn't make sense to start a family' (241). His logic is unassailable, but what would the revolution amount to without emphasis on marriage and family values? The fourteen parts into which his body is broken by assassins' bullets refer to 'the fourteen pieces which were assumed to be broken or bitten off from the moon during its period of waning' (21). They also signify the tearing to minuscule parts of the African continent and the fragmentation of her cultures by the colonial powers. Going by the title of the novel, the small states will one day come together, as European nations are currently struggling to do, and Africa will be reconstructed and revived.

Armah revisits in *Osiris Rising* the dream of Pan-Africanists. Ast's pregnancy symbolises rebirth, the return of beauty, freedom, light, power and progress to Africa. But, like the second coming of Christ, the time of Africa's renaissance is not revealed.

Abubakar Gimba's *Golden Apples* depicts a woman's struggle to be free from male domination. It reexamines the great themes of feminism, concentrates on the roles of women as childbearers and childrearers, and suggests spiritual regeneration as the most effective strategy of revolutionising the feminist movement. Set in Songhai, a pseudonym for Nigeria, the story combines a plot of intrigues with a detective (whodunit) plot.

A university-educated woman, Zahrah loses her first husband, Yazid, to a calculating promiscuous younger woman. Nousah, her second husband, is poi-

soned by a lecherous marabout who wants to marry Aalimah, her cowife. Zahrah grows in feminist consciousness, becomes the deputy chairperson of a woman's organisation, leaves the organisation in angry protest against a scathing criticism of the laxity and opportunism of the leadership of women's societies and accepts life, not on man's but on Allah's terms.

Gimba uses a third-person omniscient narrator. Although omniscient, the non-participant narrator is decentred. The reader sees the novelist's vision more clearly through the eye of Shareef, Zahrah's brother, who functions as the author's mouthpiece. A commingling of the traditional and the modern, the novel is influenced more by the African-Black, Existentialist, Gynocritic, Liberal and Psychoanalytic than by the Lesbian, Marxist and Poststructuralist schools of feminism.

Dedicated to the novelist's mother and all women who respect their womanhood, it portrays most of its female characters in a positive light. They are caring and loving mothers. Gimba questions the traditional belief that men are brave and valiant and women chicken-hearted and weak, and inverts the gender-based attributes. He comes across as a male feminist whose intention is to interrogate extremisms of radical feminists and correct distortions and misinterpretations of Islamic injunctions that lead insidiously to oppression of women. Shareef justifies the way of Allah to Zahrah. Her swift transformation at the end of the novel from a thoroughgoing liberal feminist to a born-again, veil-wearing Muslim woman is a measure of the success of his subversive interpreter role.

He functions as a father-figure to Zahrah. Ultimately, the novel is a reproduction of male psychology.

Seeing a thick, dark cloud of smoke envelop the car in which all her three children are locked up, Zahrah concludes that the colleagues of the irate protesters leading her away have indeed carried out their threat to burn her children to death, and passes out. What she takes as reality is a mere illusion. The children have been rescued by a childless couple on the wife's initiative before the rioters set the car ablaze. When she learns from Shareef's letter that her three children are still alive she just cannot believe it. She says: 'No... this is ghost story. It cannot be!' (28). Truth, the novelist seems to say, is stranger than fiction and appearances are sometimes deceptive. Gimba depicts the play of illusion and reality. Like Armah, he explores the 'seeming' of art.

A career woman, Zahrah recognises the danger in leaving her children's upbringing to a foster-mother and feels guilty about it. She considers raising of children 'the most superior of vocations' (71).

Mothering, she opines, is a full-time engagement that should be salaried. Man's responsibility, according to Allah's plan, is to provide the material wherewithal for his family. If Islam places men a degree above women, Shareef argues, the degree is not of superiority but of responsibility. Marriage is portrayed as a sacred institution ordained by God to serve as an emblem of the ideal society and to teach humans to build it. The rioters protesting against high rent and the rising cost of living who are perceived contemptuously by bourgeois

Zahrah as hooligans and madmen may be victims of broken homes and improper upbringing. Children who are denied parental care and love may grow up to become callous and cold. The smallest political unit, the family, is Zahrah's barometer for measuring the well-being of a polity. Marxist-Feminists who overvalue the economic base would take her idea as a reification of marriage, while Deconstructionists who argue that nothing - not even God - can serve as the originary centre of human discourse and institutions would consider her gauge inadequate. Zahrah would not want women to claim equality with men or strive to outdo them in the diverse professions. Rather, women should assert their biological difference and role as mothers.

Though forgiving, long-suffering and patient, Zahrah is nevertheless in-temperate when her honour or moral integrity is pooh-poohed and her professional competence is questioned or condemned because she is female. She slaps Zaki Midioka's face twice, for insinuating that Nousah, her boss, gives her double promotion in return for sexual gratification. Truth often lies between two extremes. Nourah later marries her!

Zahrah's idea that there is no sense of possession among egrets is a partial truth. So is her claim that the bee-world is organised around the queen-bee. The same law of survival operates in animal and human worlds, and the same paradoxical principles of pain and pleasure rules them. The lazy drone, for example, dies after mating with the queen-bee. Her wish that the bee-world be adopted as a model for human society is

plain sexual politics. It portrays her as a feminist who perceives motherhood as a mark of superiority. Ironically, she rejects, as lesbians do, the image of woman as a 'baby factory'. Her interpretation of the politics of reproduction is ambiguous.

Golden Apples emphasises the significant value of friendship and sisterhood represented by Mariam whose conversations, jokes and repartees on the telephone never fail to cheer up Zahrah anytime she is in the doldrums. But for her prompt initiative Zahrah's children would have been roasted.

Having learnt to share Nousah, her husband, with Salma and Aalimah, her cowives, Zahrah begins to understand what her grandmother calls the social essence of polygamy, a marriage system that initially appeared odious and oppressive to her. She sees it as 'a miniature community, a good tutorial ground for life in the larger society' (102).

The idea that polygamy has some positive values would appear obnoxious to radical feminists. The system gives Zahrah the blues, causes disaffection, envy, jealousy, endless quarrels, leads to the use of charms to finish off real and imaginary enemies, and breeds intrigues and suspicion. Zahrah almost dies after eating poisoned apples. Her husband is not so lucky. The Shareef, the devil's advocate, it is men who bastardise the system by not obeying the divine laws that govern it. The problem is a little more complex than he presents it. It is humanly impossible for a man to share his substance and love equally among his wives. That, simply put, is the heart of the matter. Graham Greene would bear witness to the fact.

Gimba deploys such mod-

ernist narrative techniques as dream, interior monologue, stream-of-consciousness, story-within-story, and suspense. The story of Zahrah's great-grandmother, Hussaina, whose husband sacrificed their only son because he wanted to be rich, like Esi Mansa's, functions as a parabasis. For long the reader is kept in the dark about the true identity of the recidivist Al-Aswad, who would have raped Zahrah if she had not lied that she had AIDS and would not want him infected. Dangerous thoughts on feminism come to Zahrah in a reverie, for example, the idea that 'Marriage is an infringement on freedom, the freedom of women' which puts her in the radical feminist camp (230). Each time such a 'liberating' thought invades her subconscious realm one of her children would make an interjection and break the reverie. Her brood exercises a controlling influence on her feminism. Although the novel is cast in the realist mode, it contains nightmarish experiences and startling occurrences that are arcane and defy logic.

Adams, Miriam's husband, a military intelligence officer, records with the aid of his special assignment camera with a powerful zoom the riot scene, especially close-ups of the faces of protesters dragging Zahrah away. The use of the cinematic technique enhances objectivity, for the camera eye does not lie. To capture reality in a country like Nigeria that teems with criminals, deceivers, and liars, where truth is elusive, the camera is an indispensable part of a sleuth's toolkit.

Golden Apples begins with the ghoulish image of a hooting owl which expresses the idea of uncertainty of

life and marriage in Songhai and casts a spectral shadow on the narrative. The metaphorisation of marriage as a garden into which the hungry go to have their fill of golden apples is quite ingenious. The noun phrase 'golden apples' is a euphemism for sex (the Life Force).

Much as Gimba tries to decapitate the logo and make his style gender-neutral - a popular feminist practice that holds no attraction for Zahrah -, his diction still appears phallogocentric or sexist. He uses the lexical item 'male' for both sexes. A moralist, he eschews eroticism and a florid style and

thus denies the reader the pleasure of linguistic orgasm. The novel's title is instructive in this respect. Its symbolic code is highly poetic but repressed. Unlike Armah, Gimba shies away from calling things pertaining to sexual intercourse by their true names. Consider the only instance of the sexual act in the novel. Having sent Aalimah his client into a deep slumber with a barbiturate, An-Najmu the randy marabout 'went into commerce with her' (206). No doubt, the novelist's banking profession has impacted his style. Clean, nonindulgent and nonprurient, it is the

style of the puritan and is worthy of note in a licentious age. But it is marred by a few grammatical and typographical errors.

Golden Apple fits perfectly into the phase of African literature in English expression, which essentially is national in scope, in contrast with the literature of the second phase which is continental and racial in orientation and to which *Osiris Rising*, an example *par excellence* of Negritude writing, belongs.

Adekoya, a poet, teaches literature at Obafemi Awolowo University, Ife-Ife.

Girl who would be king

Yaw Boadu-Ayeboafah

Ama Ata Aidoo, THE GIRL WHO CAN AND OTHER STORIES, Sub-Saharan Publishers, Legon, Accra, 1997, 146pp.

THE literary prowess of Ama Ata Aidoo is well known. For students of literature, the depth of her works, especially the derivation of English from the roots of Akan is very stimulating. She makes form and substance, intricate structures for otherwise ordinary commonplace events.

Among her works are *Dilemma of a Ghost*, *Anowa*, *Changes*, *Our Sister Killjoy*, *No Sweetness Here*, *Someone Talking to Sometime*, *An Angry Letter in January* and other *Poems as well as Birds and Other Poems* and *The Eagle and Chickens and Other Stories* for children. The versatility of her works cuts across the genre of literature, novel, drama and poetry, as well as short stories.

The pieces in *The Girl Who Can and Other Stories* have appeared in different publications at different times. They have been put together under one cover by Sub-Saharan publishers, based at Legon, Accra. It is good that the book is published locally which means that it can be available to Ghanaians.

Through the stories, the author takes the reader through the whole social fabric. She provides new insights into some of the issues that confront us. Among them is the feeling of depression among women and the need to fight back in the face of cultural practices that do not encourage women to assert themselves. Equally, the author uses the stories to make political statements and push for women's rights.

'She-Who-Would-Be-King', which opens the book is a pro-feminist activist's assertion that whatever social inhibitions, there is hope for women to occupy political leadership. Thus in the story, the young girl emerges not just a president, but the president of the Confederation of African States (CAS) where men in the individual countries are still reluctant to accept that a woman is as capable as a man and are thus unwilling even to discuss the fact that a woman is the president - confirming traditional notions, that women must not lead.

In *The Girl Who Can*, which gives the collection its title, the author tries to look at tradition and the elements which see nothing wrong about the fact that the child must be seen but never heard. The child's duty then is only to listen and do what she/he is told. There is also the issue about the pioneer women pilots in the Ghana Air Force. Thus 'Heavy Movements' tries to capture the frustrations women go through to survive. This is seen all over the place. At the cadet training, the ladies are not only derided but scorned.

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