

The healers essay



Theodore Roosevelt once stated that “ In any moment of decision, the best thing you can do is the right thing. The worst thing you can do is nothing.” Often, illusions of comfort blockade the mind and sway an individual’s ability to clearly see the moral path that should be taken. In the novel *The Healers*, Ayi Kwei Armah presents readers with a moral dilemma that will either unite or destroy the Asante empire. Densu, the protagonist throughout the story, is forced to choose between two worlds. One world will potentially exterminate the Asante empire because of greed and power, and the other world will slowly heal the empire with patience and inspiration. Densu is faced against these two driving forces; Ababio, his evil and manipulative guardian, and his inclination to live simply as a Healer. Throughout this novel, Armah accentuates how traditions, values, and life cannot be conceded or mediated through his continuous examples of how greed, fraud, and deceit can destroy and divide a community.

Armah provides us with an animated tale with a simple, yet complex plot about manipulation versus inspiration, imagination versus destruction, and unity versus disunity. Critical changes occurred during this time period due to the colonization of Britain in Ghana and the regular fighting between the Asante, the Fanti and the Assen empire. Armah consistently hints throughout the story that the destruction of the 19th century African community lies within their inability to be able to recognize the whites invading force for what it was; greed and deceitfulness. Densu’s guardian, Ababio, is a driving force behind the manipulation and the destruction within the Asante society. Ababio, who desires for material goods rather than the overall wellness of his community, seeks to destroy Densu after he declined to follow the courts

manipulative rule over the Asante empire. Ababio states, “ We shall be on the side of the whites. That is where the power lies. We have chosen power because we find impotence disgusting.” Densu, who is a young, reflective leader in the Asante empire, must choose between two straightforward paths; fall to his guardian’s evil ploys or join a reflective group called “ The Healers.” Preferring the work of the ascetic Healers rather than the manipulative world of the Royalty, Densu must overcome Ababio and the Royalty in order to unify his community. Armah uses Ababio to portray good versus evil throughout the novel. Densu continuously chooses to pursue the the path of inspiration and healing because they promote the unity of the body, of the mind, and of the society. Armah demonstrates the power of enlightenment through Densu to accentuate the influence of inspiration over manipulation.

Armah demonstrates throughout the novel the importance of unity and life within a community by giving countless examples of how disunity and death have divided the Asante empire. Although Densu has the opportunity to become the next elected crowned king, he compassionately chooses to continue his life as a Healer. Densu understands the importance of life when he affectionately chose not to kill the tethered bird in the final contest of the festival season games. By choosing to not kill the bird, Densu displayed how these games are a representation of division and disunity within his community because of the strong emphasis that the games have on individual competition. Because of Densu’s actions, Armah displays that unity cannot be achieved by using force and manipulation. Instead, Armah expresses the society’s need for the reflective community called the Healers.

The Healers great goal is to unify not only their community, but black people as a whole. Armah persistently reaches out to the African community and emphasizes that good things take time. Armah constantly calls the African community to take action and to voice their concerns when greed and division arise. Armah provides the audience with the reflective community called the Healers in order to inspire the people of African descent to defend what is truly important to themselves and within their society: unity and patience.

Densu's mentor, Damfo, is the leader of the reflective community that calls themselves the Healers. Damfo is a positive driving force for Densu and because of this, Densu is able to discern which path is morally right. Damfo explains to Densu that it is possible to view the world and its experiences through understanding rather than greed and deceitfulness. Damfo assists people in seeing, hearing, and knowing themselves so that the individual may understand and act truly. Armah continuously reminds his audience the importance of tradition, values, and life by giving his audience a character like Damfo, who strives for unity and wholeness within his community.

Damfo and his community of the Healers are against the colonization of Britain because many of the traditions and values that the Asante Empire believes to be true are constantly being compromised and invaded by new religious beliefs and ideologies. Because of these new religious beliefs and ideologies, Armah believes that the African community is dividing and is fragmented. Armah argues that the African community is fragmented and segregated because the disunity between the Healers and the royalty has prevailed because of the colonization of the British. Armah demonstrates his

beliefs by giving examples of how the British are the sole reason for the initial division in Africa. Armah continuously demonstrates that the overall recovery in Africa to unity, patience, and health will test the limits of time if people continue to allow greed, self-interest, and corrupt ideologies and people to rule Africa that continually promote separation and division. Slavery, which is an idea often related to the cause and kickoff of a segregated world, encouraged the disrespect to human life. Because of the impact slavery had on the Asante empire, it negatively influenced the people of Asante by encouraging an environment that glorified death and violence. Ababio, who encouraged the whites to invade and enslave the people of their tribe, states “ If you didn’t know it before know it now. Every royal family is also a slave family. The two go together. You don’t get kings without slaves. You don’t get slaves without kings.” Armah persistently demonstrates how the disrespect of human life has a direct correlation to the division of Africa. Because of this division, Armah calls for a society without kings and slaves. Through the Healers, he hopes to inspire and unify Africa once again through a society founded on respect between Africa’s people.

Armah accentuates the severity of life by using Asamoa Nkwanta, who is apart of the royal family, as a special challenge for Damfo. Because of fragmentation and disunity in his community, Damfo, who believes the royals are corrupt exploiters, is skeptical about his decision to heal Asamoa Nkwanta because of his association with the royal family. Damfo’s ability to help Asamoa Nkwanta understand and question the corrupt practices of the society allows for Damfo to come closer in helping achieve the goals of the Healers. Damfo explains the Healers goals by stating, “ This is seed time, far

from harvest time. Healing is work, not gambling [...] If we healers are here to do the work of helping to bring our people together again, we need to know such work is the work of the community.” Once Asomoa Nkwanta was healed in his mind and his attitude, he recognized flaws throughout the Asante society; the holding of slaves and the sacrificial slaying of slaves are Asante practices which are disrespectful of human life. Because of Asomoa Nkwanta’s choice to follow the healers and recognize the faults in the Asante society, the royal family betrays him. Armah demonstrates how the rulers in Asante society, for whom the welfare of the society should be dominant, become lost and destructive in their greed for power. Armah continuously gives examples of how this greed and desire for power are the key provoking problems that are leading to the division of the Asante empire.

In this novel, evil and greed can often prevail in the short term and hold the Asante society hostage. In hopes to free the Asante society of evil and greed, the healers main method of healing is inspiration and patience. By using the healers as a method of inspiration to his audience, Armah ultimately calls the community and people of African decent to lead persistently and diligently while aiming to have a healthy and successful society. Armah continuously prompts his audience to remember the importance of traditions, values, and human life through an animated tale about a divided community.

Ayi Kwei Armah eloquently weaves together not only a story of division, but also a lesson of patience and respect. Using beautiful, yet simplistic language, Armah captures the conflict between individuals and large-scale groups by providing examples of people who are scattered in the mind and geographically. Ayi Kwei Armah exposes the cause of division in Africa: self-

importance, greed for power, and deceit. It was through these causes that allowed Armah to communicate the importance of life, traditions, values, and patience.

Work Cited Armah, Ayi Kwei. *Healers, The*. Nairobi: East African House, 1978. Print.