

Narrative Modes As Aesthetic Paradigm In The Modern African Novels

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Abstract: *This paper is interested in points of view as narrative modes in AyiKwei Armah's seven published novels. From these seven novels alone, nonetheless, it appears that his core merits as a novelist are subtlety, refinement and control; and on the quintessence of narrative modes Armah is exemplar on the African continent. Armah by his writerly decision chooses various narrative perspectives that form the structure of each of his novels. This work reveals that through a close study of Armah's points of view in his seven novels, a pattern is traceable. The paper contends that Armah, perhaps more than any other contemporary African novelist uses narrative viewpoints to brilliant effect as the primary means by which he controls and shapes his aesthetic vision to reflect his understanding of the African time, universe, motion and destiny; for a unified African continent devoid of corrupting influences.*

Keywords: *AyiKwei Armah, Narrative Modes, Paradigm, Social Criticism.*

I. Introduction

There seems little doubt, however, that the perception of point of view has undergone enormous variations ever since Henry James brought it to our notice in his "critical prefaces". Perhaps so, but in raising this seemingly old-fashioned issue of points of view; the central intelligences that are telling the novels' stories, it might be argued that anything goes when it comes to point of view in the modern novel. This is necessarily so, as Philip Stevick records, "not only because of modern experimentations in narration but because of modern preoccupation with the perceiving mind" (86). For one thing, no two persons can perceive the same experience in exactly the same way.

It is now common critical knowledge to perceive narrative mode as the set of methods a creative writer employs to convey his story to the audience. It is necessary to draw attention to the fact that narrative mode encompasses a number of interrelated areas, especially narrative point of view, which governs the perspective through which the story is viewed. For literary purposes, the narrative mode includes not only who tells the story, but also how the story is described or expressed. In this connection then, it comprises narrative techniques such as stream of consciousness, interior monologues and multiple narrators; reliable and unreliable narrators and so on.

Of any novel, the degree to which it stimulates emotional, imaginative and intellectual responses in the reader is determined by the point of view. Any story may be told from different perspectives. But the way it gets narrated ultimately hinges on the writer's personal vision of reality. If we recall correctly E.M Forster's famous phrase, the writer needs only "bounce the reader into accepting what he says" (78 – 79). For the reader no doubt will experience a work differently, depending on the perspective from which it gets told. We insist upon this changing perception of the readers' overall experiences because it is only in identifying the narrative perspective that we can judge the worth of the novel. There is another realm in which point of view might be expected to yield particular benefit: it shapes the reader's understanding and appreciation of the story.

In this discussion, we might keep in mind that point of view is peculiar to works of fiction and that critics have tended to overstress it (Forster 79 – 80). For there is scarcely any novelist who can be said to have escaped the influence of point of view; with the consciousness that forms human motivations and even more, all find the novelist's point of view the best vehicle for a franker and more revealing impression of characters' involvements, subjectively or objectively.

Quite simply, the point of view of a literary work is the perspective from which the story is told. It is the vantage position from which the writer presents his narrative and it is one that is often a valuable first access into a story. Lubbock, discussing point of view announces: "the whole question of method in the craft of fiction, I take to be governed by the question of the point of view – the question of the relation in which the narrator stands in the story" (251).

In this respect, the author can present his story through the eye of an individual character, who narrates the story in the form of "I", the first person. Here, the narrator tells the story as he experienced, saw, heard and understood it. Authors who are inclined to adopt the first person narration are simply fascinated with the possibilities of affording the readers a chance into the unfolding "mystery" of fiction. The fascination lies in the

author devising a narrative in which the reader has to skilfully infer certain unstated facts of the situation from the events that are made explicitly available and thus arrives at his or her own conception of what the essence of the story is from the author's point of view.

The events of a story can be seen from the omniscient point of view (the all-knowing narrator outside the story itself). Here, the narrator knows what goes on in the mind of all the characters, and describes what each character does and thinks. Writers who endorse this perspective assert that stories with omniscient narrators can be delightful, sophisticated and challenging because the writer refrains from personally intervening in the story's plot. As such, the reader is thus afforded an "inside view" of the experience of particular characters. This clearly is something we are not able to do in "actual life", where each of us is directly aware only of our own personal feelings, reflections, perceptions and is therefore constrained to intuit or infer what others must be experiencing.

A story can also be told from a character's observations; we refer to this as the third person point of view, ("he" or "she"). Like the first person narrator, the third person point of view allows the reader access to the thoughts of the major character. Here, like the first person point of view, the narrator can only relay one character's perspective to the reader. For writers who find themselves embracing the third person narration, a similar stance holds as for the first person narration. Here too, as in the first person point of view, the writer allows readers the chance to personally infer unstated facts of a narrative, thereby allowing readers the opportunity to participate in the "mystery" of fiction.

The implication here is that point of view conditions the treatment of the materials of fiction. For beyond serving as a means of "dramatic delimitation", point of view, Schorer maintains, is a means of "thematic definition" (qtd in Friedman 117). Schorer adds that, it is through the controlling device of point of view, that the author is able to uncover his artistic definition of the values which the created world of the novel embodies (117). Meaning, then, is established in varying degrees but inevitably within the narrating voice, drawing from the relationship between what is said and the nature of the telling.

There are other variations and combinations of points of view, but the aforementioned can be said in essence to sum up the possibilities of the points of view in fiction. But whatever the alterations or combinations of points of view, the fact remains that whatever point of view a writer adopts he is behind the story he narrates. For "the novelist is the god of his fictional universe, observing and controlling his characters from above" (Shroder 24).

In this connection, Wayne Booth very convincingly says that: "the author is present in every speech given by any character who has had conferred upon him in whatever manner the badge of reliability" (18). Despite the fact that the author can to some extent choose his disguise, Booth further adds, he can never really choose to disappear (20).

From this point then, one can safely say that Armah's hands are skilfully behind the scenes, drawing our attention to particular details he wants us to know at every point in time, throughout the stories he creates. In reflecting his understanding of the African milieu, Armah adopts related points of view for each novel to accomplish such a purpose and to present his assertions.

II. Literary Analysis

In discussing points of view in Armah's novels, we note that he progresses with the narrative mode of the third person omniscient narrator of his first novel. Understandably, there is no surprise about this preference. For it is this point of view which enables Armah to give a panoramic exposé of corruption in this Ghanaian society by focusing on different institutions contributing to this malaise and of the Man, the protagonist's moral disposition to other characters in the novel.

The novel opens with the bus, the symbol of a sick nation whose degeneration is beyond redemption. The narrator tells us that the superannuated bus rattles in "an endless spastic shudder, as if its pieces were held together by too much rust ever to fall completely apart" (1). In this sense, the society like the bus is a misused and shattered one, held together by waste and decay --- physically and morally.

The bus as a microcosm of this Ghanaian society graphically portrays this sense of life in Ghana. It is to be recognized from the start that from the various activities in the bus, the narrator points out that this society is lacking in moral values and in decency. We are exposed to the nefarious acts of the bus conductor who cheats the passengers by keeping back part of their change (2-3); of people coughing and spitting out gobs of mucus; of others soaked in their own "viscous" saliva; of the conductor captivated by the "marvellous rottenness" (3) of the new cedi note. And of the people's use of obscene language: "you bloody fucking sonofa bitch! ... were you waiting to shit on the bus?" (6), the conductor shouts at the Man. As the Man storms his way out of the bus, he stumbles blindly on the path of an incoming vehicle, the taxi driver does not hesitate to hurl abuses at the Man: "Uncircumcised baboon. Moron of a frog... search for someone else to take your worthless life... your mother's rotten cunt!" (9). We can be uncomfortable with this kind of language, and it goes to show the lack of sublimity on the part of the citizens. For the people remain insolent and arrogant in their encounter with others.

Although much of the narrative of Armah's *The Beautiful Ones* is told in the third person omniscient narrator, in chapter six, Armah employs the narrative technique of the first person point of view. Here, the narrative gives way to Teacher's reflections of the violent birth of the independent nation which parallels the birth, growth and decline of the Nkrumah regime. The nine years reign of this independent nation are symbolically contrasted to the life span of the "man-child" (63), who completes his life cycle and dies prematurely aged at the end of his seventh year. We are told that "the man-child looked more irretrievably old, far more thoroughly decayed, than any ordinary old man could ever had looked" (63).

In *Fragments*, Armah relies much on the shifting points of view; the narrative is brought into focus through the consciousness of Naana, Baako and Juana. The novel also features interior monologue and stream-of-consciousness; literary techniques which give the reader access to characters' thoughts in all their randomness. Stream-of-consciousness is a literary device which enables a writer record a character's flow of thought or mental process. In interior monologue, however, the writer presents character's thought process in such a manner that the character appears to be talking of himself or soliloquizing. In *Fragments*, Armah achieves a deliberately disorienting effect by moving subtly from character to character, from past to present and from external events to internal thoughts. *Fragments* like the novel *Why Are We So Blest?* features many of Armah's signature experimental approaches including a rejection of chronological narrative. Rather these novels move back and forth in time. But whereas in *Fragments* the narrative is brought into focus through the consciousness of each of the central characters, in *Why Are We So Blest?*, each of the principal characters brings his individual perspective to bear on the central concerns of the novel. The effect of this is to create in *Why Are We So Blest?* a polyphony of world views.

Armah's *Fragments* is characterized as might be expected from its title by fragmentation in several significant aspects. One of these is Naana's encircling monologue and epilogue which encloses in a timeless frame the historical fragmentation recorded in the linear narrative of both the protagonist, Baako and the Puerto Rican psychiatrist, Juana.

As part of the structural design, *Fragments* is divided into thirteen Akan chapter titles which correspond with the thirteen lunar months of the traditional Akan year (Wright 139). The opening and closing chapters of the novel are captioned "Naana" and reflects her point of view, which is relayed for the most part through reminiscences. Such examples readily come to mind; the ritual observance which will ensure Baako's return from America. "Nothing" Naana tells us "was left out before he was taken up into the Sky" (3); Naana also reflects on Baako's arrival in America (10). She recalls the hurt inflicted on her grandson, Baako (198), and on the death of her great grandson (198) which she says was "a sacrifice they killed to satisfy perhaps a new god" (199) of materialism.

It should be pointed out that with the exception of the two sections on Naana at the beginning and end of the novel, where the narration is told from the first person point of view, the omniscient narrative mode is prevalent in the novel. Naana's contemplative monologue centres on issues of life, birth, death, rebirth, regeneration and the changeless "circle of the world itself" (1). Naana does not only believe that those who go away will return (3), but that there is a continuity of life in death and that contact with the dead must be maintained (3). She sees Baako's departure as a kind of "death" (10), in the sense of the circular way death leads to rebirth and of his return a "new one" (3).

In Naana's cyclical worldview, death is an elevation to a higher state of being, for as she comments: "And what is an old woman but the pregnancy that will make another ghost?" (7). Naana while visualizing her end and subsequent entrance into the spirit world says:

My spirit is straining for another beginning where there will be new eyes and where the farewells that will remain unsaid here will turn to a glad welcome and my ghost will find the beginning that will be known here as my end. (196)

What is more, Naana while gladly moving toward her death, already anticipates her role as a guardian spirit says of Baako: "when I go I will protect him if I can and if my strength is not enough I will seek out stronger spirits and speak to their souls of his need of them" (198).

Understandably, Naana's probing insight gives us a clearer picture of the workings of her mind. She is at peace with her world and knows that Baako will eventually return home (1). Her belief in the inevitability of Baako's return is in sharp contrast to the fears of both her daughter, Efua (2) and her granddaughter Araba (3). Baako's family sees him as "Osagyefo", the Akan word for saviour. One who would transform their poverty into instant wealth. For they believe that Baako will bring back from his stay in America instant return of material possessions and prestige. In view of this, Baako's mother, Efua, lives in constant expectation of her son's return so as to enjoy the wealth of an estimable son: "he went away to study", she tells Juana, "he will come back a man. A big man" (34).

It is interesting to note that Baako from the moment of his arrival from America shows himself a disappointment to the society's expectations of a "been-to" status. As Henry Brempong who already fulfils the role expected of the ideal "been-to", tells Baako in the course of their conversation: "you just have to know

what to look for when you get a chance to go abroad. Otherwise you come back empty – handed like a fool, and all the time you spent is a waste, useless” (45).

The fantastic airport reception accorded Brempong shows that society regards those who have gone abroad to have acquired a god-like status. Brempong’s sister calls him “a white man” (56). By implication one who has come to deliver them from their poverty. She bathes his feet with champagne (56), in the manner of a god who has descended “out of the sky in a plane” (34). True enough, Brempong’s sister who sees Baako as not fulfilling his obligations as a “been-to”, reaches this conclusion after she inspects him thoroughly “you mean he is also a been-to? I must say he doesn’t...” (56).

With regard to narrative situation, Armah, in *Why Are We So Blest?* adopts a clear but fragmented narrative perspective, Armah uses the diary method, a narrative form which reveals the intimate or private record of a person’s daily experience. The diary method offers the reader an opportunity for a much fuller and more unreserved insight into the psychology of the writer especially in connection to the writer’s understanding of the world in which he finds himself. It is precisely Armah’s use of the diary method, what David Ker identifies as the technique of “multiple perspective” (112), which enables the three narrators --- Solo, Modin and Aimee to relate their personal accounts directly to the reader. However, Solo functions as the authorial voice through whom the narrative is presented to us. Strikingly, Armah’s technique here represents one of the few successful departures from the omniscient narrator in the African novel.

The structure of *Why Are We So Blest?* provides additional clue to the nature of its narrative perspective. Its thirty chapters are presented in segments. Each segment bears as title the name of the principal narrator of that segment, who brings his or her view to the central concerns of the novel. Armah’s strategy here prevents him from imposing a particular interpretation on his characters as well as his readers. This allows the reader to freely assess the characters and their importance to the story based on the reader’s preferences.

It is perhaps worth emphasizing at this point that Solo Nkonam to whom Aimee Reitch entrusts the two notebooks which form the narrative account of *Why Are We So Blest?*, in presenting the story of the experiences of Modin Dofu, is symbolically giving an exploration of himself. As he points out: “I see myself in the couple; I see them in me. The man in me: the African absorbed into Europe, trying to escape death, eager to shed privilege” (232). Sensing the fundamental nature of their fate, Solo laments: “I wept for him, in impotent acknowledgment of a destiny shutting both him and me within its destructive limits” (271). For all his perceptive analyses of Modin’s situation and to elicit pity for him, Solo says that: “I read him, watching me, a specter from an unwanted destiny, wondering how little time he had to go before his fire also went out and he too was reduced to me” (138).

Like *Fragments* before it, *Why Are We So Blest?* is not written in a chronological sequence, the narrative moves back and forth as Solo tries to reconcile the past with the present. Somewhat regrettable, *Why Are We So Blest?* poses a barrier to readers soliciting continuity because the account of the events in the novel is fragmented in time and divided among its multiple narrators.

As Solo tries to make sense of the situation, seeking clarifications for Modin’s predicament from the diary entries, Solo tells us: “I try to fit my pieces of that life together, hoping – to understand?... I arrange the pieces, rearrange them... often, what seems a reasonable arrangement I know is false” (232).

In summarizing Modin’s journal Solo points out that “the things he wrote of were in general not events; they were more like concatenations of ideas. Some I have not understood at all” (71).

As Solo makes clear, if the black race has to borrow the stylistic devices and narrative method of its own destroyers, then writing itself becomes an act of betrayal and destruction. For he tells us: These notebooks... I search them... speculating, arranging and rearranging these notes to catch all possible meaning. Is it this creation? How could any exercise so useless, so clearly of no help to any destroyed be called creation? (231)

To turn now to Aimee’s point of view, one thing is certain. Her narrative perspective differs remarkably from those of Solo and Modin. In Solo’s account, Aimee’s note book, “does not contain much that promises to be understandable” (71); but are for the most part diary entries of a thrill-seeking white American with whom Modin has become fatally infatuated. Solo speaks of Aimee as “a devouring spirit, more than egoistic” (116). Solo whose personality is a reflection of Modin declares, “our disease is ordained” (83). For he sees Modin going in the direction he had taken. “Where he hoped to go I have already been” (83), Modin reveals. He sees in Modin and Aimee’s relationship, those of his own abortive love affair with the Portuguese girl Sylvia. And laments: “What is this love we suffer from, impelling us to embrace our own destroyers? (150). Essentially as Solo points out: “what is ordained for us I have not escaped... an eater of crumbs in the house of slavery” (84).

Armah’s fourth novel, *Two Thousand Seasons*, we dare say is different from any other novel in the world. Its narrative point of view is the most significant formal characteristic of the novel. Unlike the conventional novel, Armah’s *Two Thousand Seasons* has no individualized or figural narrator. Armah uses the

“we narrator” or the “collective voice”; what Larson refers to as the “collective consciousness” of the African novel, where the group-felt experience is more important than the individual (117).

Although there is no first person narrator but rather a consciousness through which the experiences of the people are filtered, it is well to remember that at the beginning of the prologue Armah employs an omniscient character who hovers around like a god and takes on the form of a seer or a prophet who admonishes the people of “the way”, thus:

Springwater flowing to the desert, where you flow there is no regeneration. The desert takes. The desert knows no giving. To the giving water of your flowing it is not in the nature of the desert to return anything but destruction. Springwater flowing to the desert, your future is extinction. (xi)

To be sure, Armah conditions the mind of the readers to the fact that the narrative of *Two Thousand Seasons* is not going to be told only by the omniscient narrator; consequently Armah in the introductory sentence establishes the controlling narrative mode: “we are not a people of yesterday. Do they ask how many single seasons we have flowed from our beginning till now? We shall point them to the proper beginning of their counting” (1).

Agreeably, the indicative word is “we”, and it is this narrator viewpoint in the first person plural “we” which dominates the story. It is easily understood that the narrator is seen speaking not just for himself alone, but for a group:

We have not found that lying trick to our taste, the trick of making up sure knowledge of things possible to think of, things possible to wonder about but impossible to know in any such ultimate way... What we do not know we do not claim to know. (3)

Two Thousand Seasons is certainly, as Isidore Okpewho sees it, a novel marked out by significant departures from the conventional value story-telling traditions. As Okpewho points out: “The collective narrator’s avowedly anti-elitist standpoint shuns the griot’s customary glorification of the matchless deeds of past heroes since the destiny of a whole people is too important to be entrusted to individual heroisms” (qtd in Wright 224).

In *The Healers*, the narrative standpoint is the omniscient point of view, which begins the narrative with the brutal murder of Prince Appia and of Densu aged twenty, set up as the fall guy:

In the twentieth year of his life, a young man found himself at the centre of strange, extraordinary events. Someone was murdered--a youth exactly the same age as himself. The killing was done in a particularly bloody, brutal way.

Those who saw the victim’s butchered body agreed on one thing: the murderer acted from a fierce, passionate motive, the kind of violent motive springing out of jealousy made hotter by pure, vindictive hate. (1)

Equally striking is the fact that at other times however, Armah introduces the voice of the ancient traditional story teller, the griot to comment: “Anonatongue, born for eloquence, continue your telling. And in the joy of your eloquence keep faith with the mind’s remembrance, lest the teller’s forgetfulness spoil the listener’s joy” (3).

It seems inescapable to notice that the narrative voice submits to the African modes of storytelling by creating a dialogue with itself to deliberate on the appropriate ways of conveying the narrative, a colloquy in which the story teller addresses its tongue, as is well brought out in this passage: “The speeding tongue forgets connections. Let the deliberate mind restore them. Proud tongue, child of the Anona masters of eloquence, before you leap so fast to speak, listen first to the mind’s remembrance” (2).

Also typical is the tendency of the narrator to call for the strength and artistic eloquence of well-known griots to make the rendering of his narrative articulate in serving social memory: “Ah, Fasseke, words fail the story-teller. Fasseke Belen Tigui, master of masters in the art of eloquence, lend me strength. Send me eloquence to finish what I have begun”(51).

The narrator also invokes the inspirational powers of higher authorities (forces) in the manner of the classical epic poet’s invocation of the muse to inspire artistic creation: “Send me words, MokopuMofolo. Send me words of eloquence. Words are mere wind, but wind too has always been part of our work, this work of sowers for the future, the work of story-tellers, the work of masters in the arts of eloquence” (52).

In *Osiris Rising*, Armah falls back on the third person narrative point of view, to depict the life’s journey into Africa of the protagonist, Ast, an African American scholar in her quest for her roots. The narrator tells us that: “She took world History for her first degree... Egyptology, for the second. Her doctorate focused on Kemt... By graduation time her search for knowledge of self... accelerated her decision: to return” (8).

One may remark in this connection that Ast’s initial impetus and interest in Africa was prompted in early childhood by her grandmother, Nwt. The narrator accounts that at the age of ten, Nwt taught Ast “to read ancient Egyptian hieroglyphs” (7). As the narrator records: “Ast found out it was Nwt who had resisted the

family's desire, at her birth, to name her after some European Saint, and given her the African Ast, most intelligent divinity, as namesake. Ast liked the sound. When she understood its meaning she fell in love with it" (7).

It is gratifying to note however, that Ast upon arrival in Africa finds it a haven. As the narrator informs us: "Here she'd found the beginning of an inner peace she'd only imagined, never experienced in America, under this sky with these stars that seemed to exist not so much above her as around her... she knew she was home"(233).

The implications we believe are worth pondering. This has much to do with the fact that Africa is the primordial "spiritual home" of American Blacks as well as the geographical location of their ethnic origin. Ultimately then, the "roots" of blackness are to be found in Africa.

Directly speaking of the peculiar American approach to the search for roots, the narrative voice tells us the approach is suspect. For roots are exported from Africa to America for Television shows and for adornment. The narrator citing Asar's view puts it thus:

It is not what roots look like that's important. It's what roots do. If we let ours do their work, they'll send amazing springs of creativity into the universe. But I've seen Americans scratch around hoping to dig them up for exhibition. It's one more way we keep rehearsing our murder. (243)

Significantly, the concern of black Americans engaged in the quest of roots in the motherland (Africa) is not limited to reconnection with Africa but includes commitment to the creation of a better future for the continent. Drawing our attention to Ast's assertion, the narrator records: "It doesn't matter how clear my vision of Africa may be. If I can't connect through work, the vision is useless" (244).

In Armah's *KMT: In the House of Life*, it is the personal account of the protagonist, Lindela as she unearths the way of life and civilization of the ancient Egyptians --- their thoughts, values, scientific observations and the causes of its disintegration. As Lindela confesses, "This is not work I chose... But the work I sought to escape found me, found and possessed me" (11).

The first person narrative point of view employed by Armah in this novel affords the readers the greatest possible involvement in the story. For it introduces the element of realism and creates the illusion of perceiving actual experiences. In this sense, the historical experiences Armah presents in this novel take on an aura of authenticity.

Lindela begins her narrative by confessing to the contradiction she has passed through. On the one hand she tries to run away from her mission in order to achieve peace of mind. On the other hand, the mission is constantly calling on her to act (11).

Primarily, what occasioned Lindela to desire "forgetfulness" was the loss of her best friend, Biko (11); who was "rusticated" from school (54); to commit suicide (56), for pointing out to his European teacher at Whitecastle School that ancient Greek scholar Aristotle confirmed the blackness of the original ancient Egyptians (50). This was his undoing. As Lindela tells us: "We were being trained, through our education to occupy specific places, subordinate stations in a hierarchy. It was a requirement that we make a habit of subordination. That would prepare us to occupy the places set aside for us in an established structure" (54).

Lindela goes on to insist that:

From our status of apprentices in the middle position, Biko had moved without waiting to be ordered to move. That was the nature of his transgression. He had not kept his place. He would be a danger to the system if allowed to become an active example, so the possibility of his maintaining contact with the rest of us was broken. He was isolated. Eliminated. I remained in the structure, safe, subordinate. (54)

Implicit in Armah's presentation here, is the fact that African intellectuals who challenged the European view that Africa contributed nothing to human civilization were made to pay gravely for their daring.

In Lindela's desire to acquire western education at Whitecastle school and to survive within the fixed European structure of "subordinate" (54), and "passive recipient of information" (39), she informs us: "I became the kind of student who carefully researched all requirements within syllabus range, then covered every topic exactly as it was supposed to be covered. I did not complicate life with inquiries into truth and false hood" (88).

It is interesting to note that Lindela in her search for historical as well as literary evidence on the connections between ancient Egypt and Africa connects with two insightful traditional repositories of Africa's knowledge --- Astw and Hor. As Lindela explains:

We've come to you because we think our history has to flow again... you here in Yarw already know a great deal of that narrative flow... to bring together all the many streams of our narrative diverted away from our common flow... lost in the confusion of European violence, that we need to bathe our consciousness again at the beginning of a great awakening. (135)

Having been given the hieroglyphic text, by these two traditionalists, Lindela set about translating the text. As she puts it: "In translating this text I've worked at rendering the meaning of the ancient originals as accurately as possible. I've also tried, wherever possible, to make the style of the translation reflect the tastes and expressive preferences of the ancestral scribes, in so far as I could infer them" (208).

Accordingly, all the information about the outstanding contributions the ancient Egyptians made to the development of human civilization are made evident from Lindela's translations from the written records of the Egyptian scribes (208). Among other things, we are informed that the Egyptians built Pyramids as tombs for their kings (318), created the world's basic forms of arithmetic (262), calendar system (246), invented a form of picture writing (261), the hieroglyphics.

In a manifest way then, if as scholars and critics have noted that the various points of narration or "centres" of consciousness on the one hand enable the readers to experience a work differently, depending on the perspective from which it gets told and thus shapes the readers' understanding and appreciation of the story; and on the other hand, also form the structure of the novel and empower literary critics to judge the worth of a novel; then points of view will continually be much of an issue in critical discourse as a fundamental device of novelistic writing.

III. Conclusion

In summarizing this paper on points of view as narrative modes in Armah's novels, this work has shown that through a close study of narrative viewpoints in Armah's seven novels, a pattern is traceable. Armah's novels show a progression from the use of the third person omniscient narrator of *The Beautiful Ones*, to rely much on the shifting points of view and far-reaching passages of self-contemplation bordering on stream-of-consciousness in *Fragments*; through a distinct but multiple narrative perspective in *Why Are We So Blest?*, to the collective point of view in *Two Thousand Seasons*, then to the omniscient narrative viewpoint in *The Healers*; to the third person narrative point of view in *Osiris Rising* and finally to the first person narrative view point in *KMT: In the House of Life*. Suffice it to say that Armah by his writerly decision chooses various points of view that determine the structure of each of his novels. Armah uses narrative points of view to brilliant effect as the primary means by which he controls and shapes his materials to reflect his understanding of the African concepts of time, space, motion and causality. Understandably, Armah's choice of point of view for each of his novels enables him to present his aesthetic vision of a unified Africa devoid of corrupting influences.

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