



A stylistic analysis on narrative unreliability and point of view in relation to the drunk narrator in A.L. Kennedy's (2004) novel *Paradise*

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A novel which is considered 'gripping' and 'stylistically consummate', A.L. Kennedy's *Paradise* does not hesitate to explore the compulsive, dependent, and cyclical nature of alcohol addiction (Micheline Wandor, *The Sunday Times*, 2004). Kennedy is unafraid to capture the intoxicated state of mind of Hannah Luckraft, a first-person narrator who 'simply describes her surroundings, with no knowledge of who or where she is' (Ali Smith, *The Guardian*, 2004). As Hannah has frequent blackouts throughout the novel, Kennedy presents the reader with an unreliable narrator that struggles to recall events accurately. Through stylistic analysis, this essay will demonstrate how the narrator's unreliable point of view inflicts the same sense of disorientation upon the reader.

Literary criticism has explored the unreliable and inebriated state of mind of Kennedy's first-person narrator. Jackson (2021) argues that in *Paradise*, 'alcohol has unsettling effects on narrative time and consciousness' and 'equips its drinkers with the mental elasticity to simply disregard temporal stability' (108). However, I argue that this destabilisation of narrative time has a direct effect on the reader's sense of time. It is the narrator's ability to 'surf between time' and escape 'from linear time' that will form the basis of my stylistic analysis, exploring how through language, Kennedy manipulates the reader's perspective of time and space (*Paradise* 2004: 18-19). In order to understand how Kennedy achieves this, I will substantiate the existing literary criticism by adopting a more text-based analytical method, engaging with fictional point of view (POV) and narrative unreliability. I will principally be focusing on the idea of POV on the spatial, temporal, and psychological plane, proposed by Uspensky (1973) and Fowler (1996 [1986]). With particular consideration of Simpson's (1993) subsequent adaptations of the Uspensky-Fowler model, this essay will argue through modality, deixis, and the narrator's mental processes, that the reader is immersed into the same state of drunken disorientation and confusion. I will also explore how the concept of unreliability in conjunction with narrative POV, ultimately manipulates the reader's perspective of time.

According to Leech and Short (2007), fictional POV concerns 'the viewpoint held by one or more characters whose consciousness is represented through the fiction' (29899). This theory has been investigated from a variety of stylistic angles, ranging from Genette's (1980) structuralist theory on the homological model of focalization, to the Chomskian transformational-generative (TG) model. Drawing upon the aforementioned frameworks, Simpson (1993) takes an 'interpersonal' approach to POV, focusing on the individual linguistic choices that 'create a text's personality' (38). By asserting that viewpoint must 'be expressed in and through language' as opposed to exclusively focusing on the 'grammar of narrative' and the 'grammar of the sentences which make up narratives', Simpson

**A stylistic analysis on narrative unreliability and point of view in relation to
the drunk narrator in A.L. Kennedy's (2004) novel Paradise**

contends that structuralist and generative methods are rather linguistically reductive (Ibid. 35).

Simpson (1993) thus employs the interpersonal approach to POV as a way of tackling the aforementioned linguistic issue at hand, which follows and builds on the principle of the Uspensky-Fowler model. Uspensky's (1973) and Fowler's (1996) seminal framework proposes that narrative viewpoint can be analysed across four 'planes' of composition: the ideological, the temporal, the spatial and the psychological. Fowler developed the model by proposing a four-way model of psychological POV, primarily looking at 'subjective' modes of narration, which involve the 'character's consciousness' (Simpson 1993: 39). Simpson draws on Fowler's model but insists that the spatial and temporal planes 'might be more appropriately regarded as a subsystem of point of view on the psychological plane' (Ibid. 43). A major component of the spatio-temporal plane is the grammatical system of modality, which Simpson regards as a 'relatively neglected concept' in approaches to POV (Ibid. 9). This system refers 'broadly to a speaker's attitude towards, or opinion about, the truth of a proposition expressed by a sentence' (Ibid. 47). The interplay between the spatio-temporal plane and the psychological plane is what will form the core of my analysis, examining how the narrator's mental processes, deictic positioning, and modal constructions contribute to disrupting a linear sense of time and place for the reader.

Simpson's reformulation of this model led him to distinguishing between Category A and Category B narratives. Category A narratives are defined as 'those which are narrated in the first person by a *participating character* within the story' (Ibid. 55). He then subdivides this narrative framework into three broad shades of modality: positive, negative, and neutral. In adopting Simpson's modal grammar of POV, this essay will demonstrate that *Paradise* exemplifies a 'Category A' narrative with 'negative shading' (Ibid. 56). As the focaliser can be described as having alcohol-related cognitive impairment (ARCI), which includes difficulties with sense of direction, remembering, and processing information, I have selected passages which make clear use of Simpson's linguistic features of modal grammar as a means to disrupt the reader's sense of time and place.

To return to the concept 'unreliable' in its narratological sense, Booth (1961, 1983) asserts that a narrator is '*reliable* when he speaks for or acts in accordance with the norms of the work (which is to say the implied author's norms), *unreliable* when he does not' (158-9). The 'implied author' refers to 'the author-image evoked by a work and constituted by the stylistic, ideological, and aesthetic properties for which indexical signs can be found in the text' (Schmid 2013: 1). While Booth (1983) relates unreliability to the implied author, Hansen (2007) contends that 'the various attempts to reformulate the implied author do not solve any problems regarding the unreliable narrator' (232). In light of this criticism, Hansen distinguishes between four forms of unreliable narration: intranarrational, internarrational, intertextual, and extratextual. To a great degree, Kennedy's novel conforms to the 'intranarrational' form of unreliability, whereby the narrator, as a result of her intoxication, experiences what Wall (1994) terms as 'verbal tics' – which are 'small interjections and comments that hint at an uncertainty in the narrator's relating of events' (Hansen 2007: 241). In a similar vein, Rimmon-Kenan (2002) argues that one of the main sources of unreliability is 'the narrator's limited knowledge' (103). Kennedy's narrator exhibits such a

'limited' understanding as a result of her frequent alcohol-induced blackouts, which are episodes of temporary amnesia. Consequentially, the narrator's unreliability is most salient when she is inebriated, ultimately limiting her capacity to accurately recall events and compromising her ability to process information. Her obscure and blurred memory therefore aligns with the assertion that 'an unreliable narrator [...] is one whose rendering on the story and/or commentary on it the reader has reasons to suspect' (Rimmon-Kenan 2002: 103).

The opening sentence of the novel starts *in media res*, throwing the reader into the same worldview as the narrator. This is achieved through the use of the indefinite third person singular pronoun 'it' (1) which presupposes that the reader has already been given the complete information to understand what 'it' is that has already happened. The indefinite article 'it' is a distal deictic marker, which distances the narrator and thus temporarily alienates them from the narrator as they do not share the same knowledge. However, as Short points out, *media res* is a device that 'draw[s] the reader into seeing events from the narrator's viewpoint and with [her] ideological assumptions' (Short 1999; Cited in Simpson 2004: 181). Thus, albeit at a distance, the reader is invited to position themselves in the same world. Moreover, in sentence (2) the homodiegetic narrator is introduced through the first-person pronoun 'I', meaning that they are the 'one who is internal to the narrative [...] on the "same" plane of exegesis as the story' (Genette 1980; Cited in Simpson, 2004: 28). This further presupposes familiarity with the experiencing eye and thus suggests that this world is seen from the viewpoint of someone present in it. It is also through the first-person narrator that the 'story produces a personal relationship with the reader' which 'inevitably tends to bias the reader in favour of the narrator' (Leech and Short 2007: 213). This personal relationship will ultimately make it more difficult for the reader to condemn the narrator of unreliability as a shared experience has been established early on in the novel.

The reader is also aligned with the narrator's POV on the spatial plane. According to Simpson (1993), one of the most important linguistic components of spatio-temporal point of view is the 'system of deixis' (13). It is the spatial deixis, which is 'realized through terms which denote the relationship of objects to a speaker, or which signal how a speaker is situated in a physical space' that can best indicate the reflector's directionality and location (Ibid. 13). Sentence (2) thus situates the reader and the narrator on the same spatial plane of perspective, which is achieved through the deictic adverb 'here', expressing proximal reference. As Wales (2011) asserts, this is an adverb which can 'orientate or "anchor" our utterances in the context of proximity of space' (105). While the narrator is not necessarily unreliable at this point in time, there is a degree of ambiguity to her location as she introduces her deictic positioning through the adverb 'here' as opposed to a concrete noun, such as *hotel*, which would provide a more definitive and recognisable location. Albeit temporarily, this not only immerses the reader in the narrator's worldview, but also forces them to experience the same uncertain and indefinite spatial point of view due to being deictically anchored on the same spatial plane.

The narrator's spatio-temporal viewpoint subsequently shifts from 'here' (2), to a 'boxy room' (2), establishing a deictic field whereby the Hannah is the 'origo' in the narrative, the focal point around which objects are positioned relative to their proximity or distance to her (Simpson 2004: 29). This spatio-temporal shift gives the reader access to the narrator's 'fictional reality' (Simpson 1993: 15), enabling them to transform into Hannah's 'common-sense world' (Fowler, 1996: 225). The negative lexis 'dirty' (2) used to describe the 'boxy

**A stylistic analysis on narrative unreliability and point of view in relation to
the drunk narrator in A.L. Kennedy's (2004) novel Paradise**

room' indicates that she finds it extremely unpleasant and unnerving, emphasising how it creates an 'unmistakable haze of claustrophobia' (2). The claustrophobic space is intensified by the hyphenated utterance 'over-large clock' (3), with the prefix 'over' suggesting that the clock is abnormally sized in proportion to the 'boxy room' (2). The locative expressions in this passage further indicate that the narrator feels positioned too unbearably close in relation to the objects around her as the clock is 'to [her] right' (3) and just 'above' (5) her is a string of lights. This shows that the deictic relationship is proximal, serving to heighten the extreme discomfort and suffocation she feels from being in that location. As the reader enters this claustrophobic and anxious POV *in media res*, they are made aware of the potential mental deterioration that could subsequently occur. Moreover, as locative expressions 'serve to anchor the viewing position as that of the narrating subject', the proximal deictic relationship suggests that her point of view is restricted to just the four walls of the room (Simpson 1993: 18). It is through these stylistic cues that Kennedy aligns the reader's viewing position with the narrator as they are both 'trying to make sense of the world around [them]' at the same time (Simpson 2004: 125).

The reader is reinforced more physically into the spatio-temporal plane by the progressive aspect. The perfect continuous verb 'holding' in sentence (8), 'I'm holding a key' indicates that the narrator the subject of consciousness and that she is talking about the events at the same time as they are unfolding. This immerses the reader into the present, narrative action, suggesting that they gain a 'rapid' impression of the events moving (Fowler 1986: 127; Cited in Simpson 1993: 13). Moreover, the narrator directly addresses the reader while speaking in the present continuous: 'I'll tell you what I do like' (9), 'I'm looking right at it, right now and it is gorgeous' (9). The pronouns move from first-person 'I' (2) to second-person 'you' (9) relatively quickly, signalling that the addressee has been acknowledged by the narrator. The present continuous 'looking' (9), the perceptual deictic pronoun 'you' (9) and the temporal deictic verb 'now' (9) all express proximal reference, immersing the reader directly into the action of the narrative as the temporal relationship between the speaking time and the event is synchronic. The use of direct address and present continuous verbs makes Hannah's presence feel even more tangible. Kennedy's construction of the narrative across the temporal plane is twofold. On one hand, it 'provides a kind of temporal backgrounding' or 'point of orientation' for the reader (Wales 2011: 343). On the other hand, because Hannah's presence is almost tangible, the reader may struggle to condemn her for unreliability as the immediacy of the temporal perspective does not permit them enough time to be able to question her construal of events.

Simpson (2004) insists that the spatial perspective shifts almost 'seamlessly into the cognitive field of a character' (80). On the spatio-temporal plane, the reader is positioned in proximal reference to the narrator which strengthens her trustworthiness. However, as the reader enters Hannah's POV on the psychological plane, which is where the 'authorial point of view relies on an individual consciousness' (Uspensky 1973: 81), the reader begins to have 'reasons to suspect' that her recollection of events is potentially unreliable (Rimmon-Kenan 2002: 103). This is because the narrator's knowledge of time and location becomes convoluted and imprecise. At first, Hannah's construal of the time begins with the assertion that '[the clock] shows 8.42' (4). The factive verb 'shows' is indicative of her assuredness, as it 'presuppose[s] the truth of what is being asserted' (Leech and Short 2007: 65). Hannah repeats that it is '8.42.' (6) but this time it constitutes as a single

utterance on its own, which suggests that she is confirming her original assertion. Although the repetition and the initial use of the factive verb indicates truthfulness and certainty, it is subsequently undermined by the hedge 'I don't know', rendering her unable to identify if it is 'night or morning' (7). The overall tone of this extract is thus imbued with uncertainty.

Hannah's hesitation and doubt is reinforced through the use of epistemic modality, which is concerned with 'the speaker's [...] lack of confidence in the truth of a proposition expressed' (Simpson 1993: 48). The narrator hesitantly asserts that 'this surely must be breakfast' (14). The attenuated focalisation, which is indicated by the demonstrative pronoun 'this' (14), momentarily restricts the reader's visual range of the character, making it more difficult to determine her spatial POV. This spatial disorientation and unreliability are further enhanced by the narrator's uncertainty of her location. The epistemic nature of the modal adverb 'surely' (9) directly followed by the modal verb 'must' (9) demonstrates that she is not only attempting to convince herself that it is the genuine truth, but also the reader. Sentence (15) further indicates her uncertainty, as the modal adverb 'perhaps' suggests that she does not know if she is at 'home' in England, or in a foreign country. According to Simpson (1993), the modal verb '*must* [...]' renders the speaker's commitment to the factuality of propositions explicitly dependent on their own knowledge' (50). Given that the narrator's language in this extract is permeated by epistemic modal operators, her 'knowledge' and construal of events can therefore be deemed as 'limited', like her spatial POV. This 'limited knowledge' that the narrator exhibits is what Rimmon-Kenan (2002) classifies as unreliability (103). Her unreliability is heightened by the brief interjection in sentence (14) in which Hannah claims that the time is '8.44, no 8.45'. Such interjections are what Wall defines as 'verbal tics' which 'hint at an uncertainty in the narrator's relating of events' (1994: 19). The interjection 'no' implies that she is unaware of the reality of her situation, and thus so is the reader, given they are located on the same spatio-temporal POV.

The narrator's POV on the psychological plane is frequently signalled through Kennedy's reference to the 'reflector's senses, thoughts and feelings', indicating a more 'internalised, psychological perspective' (Simpson 2004: 79). Hannah's attempt to work out her location is demonstrated by reference to verbs of perception. Sentence (10) is a direct reference: "I can see there are no windows'. Sentence (11) on the other hand, is indirect: 'I can't deny that he is also speaking English, just about – which is a clue'. The idea that she can hear a man speaking in a familiar language, as well as visually observing that there is a lack of windows, Hannah concludes that she 'can probably assume [she is] in a hotel somewhere' (12). This demonstrates that although she has the ability to frame and recall her own spatial and temporal parameters in 'a hotel' and at 'the airport' (17), she cannot remember anything beyond the physical features of these locations, which is evident in sentence (13), 'the walls display reproductions of old European advertisements'. This is an example of 'negative shading' as she 'relies on external signals and appearances to sustain a description' (Ibid. 127). Her perceptions are warped by her drunken consciousness – she cannot fully grasp reality or guarantee that her senses, such as sight and hearing, will reveal the truth of her situation. The nature of these epistemic assertions thus 'foregrounds the narrator's efforts to interpret and make sense of what [she] sees and hears' (Ibid. 126), shown by the modal adverb 'probably' and the modal lexical verb 'assume'. Hannah's inability to accurately remember events emphasises her unsuccessful attempt at 'trying to make sense of the world' (Ibid.125).

A stylistic analysis on narrative unreliability and point of view in relation to the drunk narrator in A.L. Kennedy's (2004) novel *Paradise*

The narrator's inability to accurately recall events impairs her capacity to discern between what is genuine and what is a fabrication of her drunken consciousness. To an extent, she admits her unreliability to the reader, explicitly stating that she has a 'lack of memory' (16) and acknowledges that 'once you've begun to have blackouts [...] you've mastered the art of escaping from linear time' (19). Although the reader realises that the narrator's recollection of events is unreliable, the perceptual deixis, which is 'expressions concerning the perceptive participants in the text, encoded in pronouns', immerses them into a similar state of confusion (Stockwell 2019: 54). The textual *you*, which can also be extended to 'you've', 'your' and 'you're', constitutes as what Herman (1994) defines as 'actualized address' (381). This second person narrative 'entails address that exceeds the frame [...] of fiction to reach the audience' (Ibid. 381). After attempting to work out her location, Hannah explains the struggle of not being able to remember:

You trot from room to room and can't imagine where you left your keys the night before: without them, you're locked in your house [É.] You sit on your bed, despairing, unsure of who has your spares and if they still like you (Kennedy 2004: 7).

The textual *you* in this context depends on 'naturalization', defined as 'relying on the core experience of a narrator addressing an audience and telling [her] story' (Fludernik 1993: 221). Hannah is not only telling the addressee the reason she has forgotten where she is, but she is also trying to justify it by pushing her experience onto the reader. Her keys are 'your keys', and her bed is equally 'your bed'. Such naturalization gives way 'to the narrator's rhetorical urge to relive events', and also functions as a form of self-address, to 'relieve herself' of the events (Ibid. 221). The oscillation between the first-person *I* and second-person *you* therefore force the reader to align with the narrator's POV on the spatial, temporal, and psychological plane. This ultimately leaves the reader equally as unable to discern what events have actually happened and what they have been falsely told.

By taking into particular consideration Simpson's modal grammar of POV, I have used stylistic analysis to prove Jackson's (2021) assertion that 'alcohol has unsettling effects on narrative time and consciousness' in *Paradise* (108). I have also demonstrated how the reader plays a crucial role in the narrative by analysing how the reader is aligned with Hannah's POV on the spatio-temporal and psychological plane. In this regard, the reader *should* be able to construct their own interpretations of her location and time. However, narrative unreliability reveals that while the reader has 'reasons to suspect' that she is not telling the whole truth because of her epistemic assertions, the personal and proximal relationship that is created between them makes such a claim difficult to pursue (Rimmon-Kenan 2002: 103). Thus, by analysing POV from both a stylistic and narratological perspective, I have shown how Kennedy not only manipulates the reader's sense of time, but also how she makes it more difficult for them to discern between what is the genuine truth, and what is false. Such a combined approach thus lends itself to Wall's (1994) assertion that 'sometimes the discourse itself offers clues to narrators' unreliability' (19).

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A stylistic analysis on narrative unreliability and point of view in relation to the drunk narrator in A.L. Kennedy's (2004) novel Paradise

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Appendices

A.L Kennedy, *Paradise*. London: Jonathan Cape. Chapter 1: p.3, p.4, p.5, p.6, p.9, p.16, p.18, p.19.

- (1) How it happens is a long story, always.
- (2) And I apparently begin with being here: a boxy room that's too wide to be cosy, its dirty ceiling hung just low enough to press down on a broad, unmistakable haze of claustrophobia.
- (3) To my right is an over-large clock of the kind favoured by play schools and homes for the elderly, the kind with bold, black numbers and cartoon-thick hands that effectively shout what time it is whether you're curious or not.
- (4) It shows 8.42 and counting.
- (5) Above, is a generalised string of yellow light.
- (6) 8.42
- (7) But I don't know which one – night or morning.

[...]

- (8) In one fist, I notice, I'm holding a key.

[...]

- (9) I'll tell you what I do like, though: what I adore – I'm looking right at it, right now, and it is gorgeous, quite the prettiest thing I've ever seen since 8.41.

[...]

- (10) Checking swiftly, I can see there are no windows, which may explain his lack of meteorological certainty.

[...]

- (11) But I can't deny that he is also speaking English, just about – which is a clue.

- (12) It means that I can probably assume I'm in a hotel somewhere English-speaking.

[...]

- (13) At uneasy intervals the walls display reproductions of old European advertisements: a British hotel, then.

[...]

- (14) And this surely must be breakfast. So: 8.44, no 8.45, in the morning and breakfast in a cheap, British hotel.

- (15) I'm home. Perhaps.

[...]

**A stylistic analysis on narrative unreliability and point of view in relation to
the drunk narrator in A.L. Kennedy's (2004) novel Paradise**

(16) My lack of memory, if I were in a film, would mean that I am a killing machine, patiently trained by some dreadful governmental agency and soon my amnesia will evaporate in a bloodbath of conscienceless combat and burning cars.

[...]

(17) I could swear I'm on my way home, so why am I still at the airport?

[...]

(19) Because once you've begun to have blackouts, you'll never stop and so before and after don't exist – you've mastered the art of escaping from linear time.

[...]

(20) Why not surf between time and time, content in yourself as yourself and the only constant point?