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BACHELOR THESIS

The Magic of the Unreliable First-Person Narrator in Selected British Novels of the Second Half of the 20th Century

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this bachelor thesis, titled "The Magic of the Unreliable First-Person Narrator in Selected British Novels of the Second Half of the 20th Century", is completely my own work and that I used only the sources that are listed on the works cited page.

Prague, 11th April 2013

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Eliška Mollová

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ABSTRACT

This thesis compares the unreliable first-person narrator in three British novels: *A Clockwork Orange* by Anthony Burgess, *The Remains of the Day* by Kazuo Ishiguro, and *The Wasp Factory* by Iain Banks. The unreliable first-person narrative form has the power to assimilate the reader's mind with that of the narrator and make him/her believe whatever the narrator wants, even though the events that are being described can be truly shocking. This thesis analyses why and how these authors use the unreliable first-person narrative form, as well as its impacts on the reader.

Key words: unreliable first-person narration, British novels, 20th century, male protagonist

ABSTRAKT

Tato bakalářská práce se zabývá nespolehlivým vypravěčem v ich-formě ve třech britských románech: *Mechanický pomeranč* od Anthonyho Burgesse, *Malíř pomíjivého světa* od Kazua Ishigura a *The Wasp Factory* of Iaina Bankse. Nespolehlivý vypravěč v ich-formě má moc sblížit čtenářovu mysl s vypravěčovou a dokáže čtenáře donutit myslet si to, co vypravěč chce, i přestože některé události, které jsou popisovány, mohou být naprosto šokující. Tato práce analyzuje nejen proč a jak používají spisovatelé nespolehlivého vypravěče v ich-formě, ale také jaký má tento vypravěč dopad na čtenáře.

Klíčová slova: nesposlehlivý vypravěč v ich-formě, britské romány, 20. století, mužský hrdina

Contents

Introduction

I chose this topic because I find it fascinating how unreliable first-person narratives can manipulate and play with the reader's mind. The novels I have chosen are good examples of how unreliable first-person narratives can influence the reader and bring him/her closer to the realities of three rather unusual fictional characters: a boy, a teenager and an elderly man.

In the theoretical section, the basics of the first-person narration are explained, followed by a discussion of the uniqueness of the unreliable first-person narrator and its power to captivate the reader's curiosity. Next, the techniques and effects that this type of narration has on the reader are discussed. Further, the use and importance of dialogues in the novels are explained.

The practical part of this thesis demonstrates how the unreliable first-person narration can affect the reader's mind and how easily the reader can start thinking what the narrator wants him or her to think. The ages of the narrators are key to understanding what stage of life the narrator is in and how this can influence the course and purpose of the story. Younger narrators tend to write about their lives as they are, older narrators incline towards stories of reminiscence and confession. The importance of the dialogues the narrators have with other characters and how they can help to reveal the narrator's unreliability will be demonstrated.

Lastly, the thesis will consider how essential the linguistic point of view is to the stories the narrators tell, because the amount and type of information disclosed by the narrators can differ hugely, depending on the styles in which they express themselves. This, too, has a great impact on their credibility and reliability or otherwise. It is crucial that the reader register the narrator's use of language because it has the ability to reveal information and aspects of character that one might not notice otherwise.

Theoretical Part

1. First-Person Narration

The first-person narrative is a narrative style in which the story is told by a single character in the novel: "The first-person narrator is a narrator who is telling the story him or herself without access to any consciousness aside from his or her own." (Felluga). The narrators tell their stories according to how they see the world and it can be hard for the reader to discern the truth and understand what is merely a figment of the narrator's imagination. There are various different kinds of first-person narratives, for example reliable or unreliable, meaning that the narrator can or cannot necessarily be trusted.

The first-person narrative in English can be dated back at least to the 8th century, when the Christian poem *The Dream of the Rood* was composed. Although the first-person narration in the poem has not been fully analysed, the power of first-person narrative seduction had been discovered and the rood, an inanimate object, was used "as a device of unexampled effectiveness in making vivid an event about which (for Christians) the entire history of the world revolved" (Rambaran-Olm). The first-person narrator's power was used to relate to the reader's (or listener's) mind even so many centuries ago, and to this day has been used for similar purposes.

The first-person narration is distinctive in the way it can draw the reader into the plot almost instantly. If a book starts with "[t]oday I'm five. I was four last night going to sleep in Wardrobe, but when I wake up in Bed in the dark I'm changed to five, abracadabra," (Donoghue, ch. 1), one immediately and unknowingly associates oneself with the narrator, who in this case is a five-year old boy sleeping in a wardrobe. It is a subjective style of narration that can capture the reader's attention and interest and prevent him or her from looking objectively at the events that are taking place.

Likewise, at its best the first-person narrative style can seduce and manipulate the reader. This is ultimately the most important aspect of this type of narration. When the writer uses the personal pronoun "I" and starts by telling his or her story, it is hard not to associate oneself with the narrator – one tends to end up thinking much the same as him or her. The first-person form can pull the reader into the story and make him or her believe that what is happening is plausible, inevitable and logical, this being the goal of the writer. This form can be used as a tool to make the reader believe or take seriously a story that might seem implausible if told in the third person (as when a teenage boy murders his sister and father, and students and teachers at school, in *We Need to Talk about Kevin (2003)* by Lionel Shriver).

However, the first-person narration also has its downsides. It is easy to lose the reader's attention because the repeated use of 'I' can become boring and dull. Also, "it's easy to succumb to didacticism" (Evers) – when the narrator talks about a subject or emotion, it may feel as though he/she is lecturing the reader. The narrator is telling the readers how they view things and endeavouring to transfer their emotions onto the reader's mind so that the reader feels the same way.

The first-person narrative form can be a captivating style of writing that has the ability to play with the mind of the reader. Furthermore, it can serve as an instrument for the writer to try make the reader believe whatever the writer wants him/her to believe. It can be gripping and seductive and if used effectively it can make the reader feel shocked, disgusted or disconcerted. "Great first-person narratives suck you into a character's world to such a degree that it seems effortless" (Evers).

2. Unreliable First-Person Narration

Most first-person narratives are presented as the truth, i.e. the narrator is describing things as he/she sees them, and the writer implies that they are broadly correct visions of reality. Of course, readers are always subjected to a limited subjective point of view, and cannot consider the narrator as a completely reliable source of information and views. The reader normally assumes that the narrator is not trying to confuse or mislead too much.

The 'unreliable' first-person narration is an interesting and important variant of the first-person narration in which the narrator cannot be trusted and tries to mislead or play games with the reader (and possibly with him or herself). As D'Hoker and Martens say in *Narrative Unreliability in the Twentieth-Century First-Person Novel (2008),* this unreliability can serve a number of different functions. For example, it can be used "as a vehicle for satire, psychological analysis, ethical questioning, or a sceptical world-view" (Intro.), showing that it can be used to express a wide range of ideas.

The unreliable first-person narration can be thus used for many different purposes and it is up to the writer to decide how and why he/she will use it. For example, it can be used as confession, by which the narrator tries to explain why, how and for what reason he/she did something, with scope for the reader to discern the darker or more questionable aspects of his or her life (*The Remains of the Day (1993)* by Kazuo Ishiguro), or as a device to trick the reader into thinking something shocking or very different to what the circumstances initially indicate (*The End of Alice (1996)* by A.M. Homes).

The term "unreliability" in narration was coined by Wayne Booth in his book *The Rhetoric of Fiction (1983).* The unreliable narrative form has emerged as a distinct sub-category only relatively recently and "the historical evolution of unreliability … has not yet been thoroughly examined" (D'Hoker and Martens, Intro.), but lately it has become popular and has been researched more. However, there "does not exist a comparative study of the uses of narrative

unreliability in different (national) literatures" (D'Hoker and Martens, Intro.), which shows just how little it has been researched; "discussions of unreliability have so far relied on a fairly limited number of texts" (D'Hoker and Martens, Intro.).

One can be in the mind of the narrator and be so convinced by the story that it is possible one may not realise that what he/she is saying and doing is wrong because to the narrator everything is as it is supposed to be. The approach can be used as a means to enter a mind of a child, adult, or elderly person, and when done well can reveal what it is like to be another person, which can be very compelling. Sometimes all of these can be used at once, which can result in an intricate scheme that the author builds and into which the reader falls. The three books discussed in this thesis mix these aspects in clever ways to charm the reader and hold his/her attention, providing first-hand experience of fascinating and often dark life stories.

To some extent, "all first-person narratives make use of the unreliable narrator. In fact, many first-person narratives construct narrative presences whom we are meant to believe almost without question," (Conroy, 3), as in Vladimir Nabokov's *Lolita (1955)*. The narrator, Humbert Humbert, "toys with us and makes a persuasive argument for our sympathies — his controlling, mocking, and delusional nature peering through his lyrical narration." (Nastasi). This "lyrical narration" can usually enchant the reader to a point that he or she stops seeing the real truth. Instead, one concentrates on the beauty of the language, and this is why the first-person narrative is a form particularly suited to disturbed or deviant characters that the reader would not normally sympathise with. The narrators have the power to divert the attention from the bad things they are doing.

The narrator's unreliability can be conveyed in various ways. For example, information can be revealed via the dialogues that the narrators have with other people in the book, or through dialogues that the narrator observes or overhears. The reader cannot necessarily trust the narrator's retelling of the dialogues, but they can bring the reader closer to the facts in the

story. When the narrator has conversations with other characters from the book, one can sometimes tell by the opinions expressed that everything is not black and white, while the discrepancies between the dialogues and what the narrator is telling the reader can be revealing.

If a novel is written as a first-person narrative and the narrator seems to be truthful and objective, he/she may nonetheless be trying to hide something or to fool the reader, e.g. by using the sophisticated language. If the narrators does not say much he/she may be hiding something too, especially when the language he/she uses is shady and uninviting. Sometimes narrators can seem open and willing to talk about anything, but it may become clear that he/she is hiding something, as is often evident in the type of language the narrator uses when feeling threatened *(The Catcher in the Rye (1951)* by J.D. Salinger*).*

The magic of the first-person narration is partly hidden in the language of the narrator, and is a factor that plays an important role in the unravelling of the story. The ways that the narrators speak and express themselves can tell the reader a great deal about them, and can also show the reader what type of story it is going to be and what to be prepared for. "Narrators show that linguistic norms also play a role in determining how far a given narrator deviates from some implied default" (D'Hoker and Martens, ch. 2), i.e. narrators have a lot of power over the reader just by the way they speak. However, the problem still remains that "[i]n both critical practice and theoretical work on unreliable narration, however, these different sets of norms are usually not explicitly set out but merely introduced in passing, and they seldom if ever receive any theoretical examination" (D'Hoker and Martens, ch. 2). This means that the linguistic point of view does not get much attention, which is a shame because the linguistic side of the novel has great potential but is rarely properly analysed, and it deprives the reader of the joy of discovering hidden information in another, less conventional way.

3. Three case studies

The three novels under discussion are excellent examples of how the unreliable first person narrative form developed in the UK in the second half of the 20th century. They span the period from 1962 (*A Clockwork Orange*) to 1986 (*An Artist of the Floating World),* and each reflects different aspects and potential of the form.

A Clockwork Orange by Anthony Burgess is a novel in which the reader is effortlessly seduced by the intricacy and complexity of the language used, as well as the literary devices employed. The narrator, Alex, seems not to have any worthy characteristics as a human being, but the reader still ends up sympathising with him, to some extent. This is achieved in large part by his linguistic and rhetorical skills that dominate the novel. Burgess used a range of slang words, colloquialisms, Middle English pronouns, high and low class-English to capture the reader's attention and manipulate with his or her mind, and many a reader will be mesmerised by the beauty and complexity of the language. As Gordon Bowker states in his review of *The Real Life of Anthony Burgess*, "the miracle of the language" (Bowker) fascinated Burgess and had a great impact on his writing. Alex is a fascinating example of how an evil protagonist can manipulate the reader's mind with elegance and grace.

The Wasp Factory (1984) by Iain Banks uses some of the same themes as *A Clockwork Orange.* "In the context of Banks' novels, the overlaps between genres add layers of sophistication to narratives and plotlines that are already impressive in their complexity" (Colebrook, 2). *The Wasp Factory'*s ability to lure the reader in and make the story plausible is very powerful, leaving the reader surprised as to how easily he or she was seduced. As Craig Cairns says in *Iain Bank's Complicity: A Reader's Guide,* "Iain Banks is a player of games with rules of fiction," (23), and often wrote in ways way that would somehow play with the reader. (As if to drive this point home, his second science fiction novel, from 1988, was called *The Player of Games.)*

When reading *The Wasp Factory*, the reader gets a great deal of insight into the narrator's life but it is important to stress that this insight is acquired only through Frank's eyes. The few brief encounters with other people reported by Frank can help the reader uncover more about his life, something that he may not be saying directly, either on purpose or just because it does not suit the situation.

The intricate language Banks employs can give away crucial details about the characters, and the reader should be fully aware and prepared for this. When Frank talks about his past, he says, "I can't remember anything about it at all, just as I can't remember anything before the age of three. But then, of course, I have my own good reasons for that." (Banks, ch. 6). One might easily suspect that Frank is deliberately trying to overlook something.

In *An Artist of the Floating World*, Kazuo Ishiguro's approach and use of language differs considerably from the other two works under consideration. The language is always sophisticated and the story is told by a seemingly believable narrator, making the reader trust him at first. However, as the story progresses, the reader finds himself or herself doubting the narrator more and more, coming to "recognize the dissembling that is a hallmark of Ono's narrative style" (Liaschenko, ch. 1). This is achieved by Ishiguro's placing small hints throughout the novel that make the reader question the narrator's veracity. These hints are mainly the narrator's slight confusion when retelling what happened to him and changing the details each time he recalls moments from his past. Masuji's narration is full of "empathic denials, strange silences and red herrings such as 'small laughs' or his repeated reference to respect and esteem" (D'Hoker and Martens, ch. 6), which can "alert the reader to certain unspoken preoccupations and doubts" (D'Hoker and Martens, ch. 6). The reader becomes more and more sceptical until, inevitably, the narrator's retelling of the events comes to look thoroughly untrustworthy.

Three case studies

1. *The Wasp Factory*

The Wasp Factory was published in 1984 and was Iain Banks' first novel. It was greeted with acclaim and considerable controversy due to its disturbing depiction of violence to both people and animals. It is written as an unreliable first-person narrative, and is a subjective and complicated story. The narrator, Frank, a boy of sixteen living in Scotland, depicts what he sees and understands of the world, and the reader is provided with no other outside information.

Frank is an unreliable narrator who slowly uncovers the truth about his past. He wants to know what exactly happened to him, in part because all his life there has been a secret concerning himself that he has not been able to discover. He is fearful, though, of what it might be, hence the information and impressions disclosed to the reader cannot be trusted fully.

Banks makes Frank an unreliable narrator by making him use many euphemisms, he shows the reader his distorted visions of reality, but mainly he tries to make the reader pity Frank. The more the reader can find understanding for the narrator, the harder it would be for him or her to condemn Frank completely. The reader will not judge Frank as harshly, so he can get away with more bad deeds.

Banks also makes Frank an anti-hero, with many characteristics opposite to those of a conventional hero. Everything Frank does he does for the good of himself, he does not care about anyone else except for his brother and behaves accordingly, as one can see throughout the novel.

1.1 Frank

Banks uses a range of narrative devices to make the story more gripping and interesting for the reader. They are used to lure the reader into the story and make him or her intrigued by the different things that happen, uncovering the reality of Frank's life little by little until the climax at the end of the novel.

Of the three narrators under consideration, Frank is mentally the youngest. He has committed serious crimes that would be considered ruthless by most people but does not seem to regret having done any of them. However, the one thing that does seem to trouble him is the safety of his mentally insane brother who is escaping from a mental asylum. Frank is worried about what he might do as Eric has a history of setting dogs on fire and Frank does not want this to happen again, furthermore he does not want the police involved. All of his other acts and doings suggest he is a psychopath with absolutely no conscience save for his relationship with his brother.

He may be telling the story as a sort of confession of his life because he starts out by explaining his rituals and his family life. This might be intended to demonstrate that he is a human being who has his human habits and who even has some friends. However, when it is disclosed that his habits involve urinating on a stick or catching a wasp and putting it in a maze to find out which way it turns before it dies in order to tell the future, the reader might feel a bit disconcerted, especially as Frank clearly enjoys his sadistic behaviour. "Once I tied a wasp to the striking-surface of each of the copper-coloured bells on top, where the little hammer would hit them in the morning when the alarm went off. I always wake up before the alarm goes, so I got to watch." (Banks, ch. 1). Frank does not care that such activities may seem off-putting, he seems fascinated by them and tries to transfer his awe onto the reader. Due to Frank's honesty, the reader might feel as though he is someone trustworthy, and appreciate this aspect more.

Though *The Wasp Factory* covers a wide range of themes and ideas, three are especially important: Frank's murders of three of his family members, his complicated perception of his sexuality, and his relationship with his brother, Eric. As sadistic as Frank may seem, he does not kill entirely for his own enjoyment. He has certain "logical" reasons for the murders, and what he did was acceptable, in his mind even necessary.

He talks about the deaths and killings of certain family members done by him in such a by-the-way manner one gets the feeling he does not regret what he did and that he would only feel sorry if he had not had done it. "Two years after I killed Blyth I murdered my young brother Paul, for quite different and more fundamental reasons than I'd disposed of Blyth, and then a year after that I did for my young cousin Esmerelda, more or less on a whim." (Banks, ch. 2). Frank shows no remorse, he finds his actions logical and tries to explain how.

In part, he tells about his life to boast of his killings to the reader. He seems very confident and smug of himself, as he himself says, "[l]ooking at me, you'd never guess I'd killed three people. It isn't fair." (Banks, ch. 1). Or, when talking about his brother Eric, "I had thought that I was the only murderer in the family, but old Eric beat me to it, killing his mum before he had even drawn breath. Unintentional, admittedly, but it isn't always the thought that counts." (Banks, ch. 2). Frank almost sees it as a game he plays and that is why he compares himself to Eric about his score. As Frank tells the reader about his killing in a playful manner, it is possible that the reader may start seeing it that way too, therefore leaving even less space for objectivity.

He tells the reader that he planned the killings in advance and always tries to explain the circumstances in a logical way. After all, there is nothing else in his life that he has done that could be considered as clever and thought-through, "I killed little Esmerelda because I felt I owed it to myself and to the world in general. I had, after all, accounted for two male children and thus done womankind something of a statistical favour. If I really had the courage of my convictions, I reasoned, I ought to redress the balance at least slightly. My cousin was simply

the easiest and most obvious target." (Banks, ch. 5). Frank tries to demonstrate that he had to kill Esmeralda because otherwise it would have been "unfair" to the male population. This is a fine example of a euphemism. Instead of saying "I murdered two male children", he uses the verb 'account for' which does not have a negative connotation. Through this means Banks is able to play with the reader's mind, perhaps making him/her feel less inclined against Frank, despite the series of brutal murders that he commits.

Frank's reasoning may seem illogical when looked at from outside because he is explaining why he killed his female cousin instead of explaining why he killed anyone at all. However, when the reader finds himself/herself in Frank's mind, it seems logical for Frank to explain why he chose a female instead of a male, and the reader might not think twice about the absurdity of the situation.

Similarly, Frank uses a euphemism when talking about his uncle's death. Frank is in hospital and the uncle is just about to die, when Frank says, "[h]e (a 'black' man) hit and fatally injured my innocent and unfortunate uncle whose muttered last words in hospital, before his coma became a full stop, were: 'My God, the buggers've learned to fly.'" (Banks, ch. 2). Again, the reader understands that the uncle died but as Frank put it in such an elegant, metaphorical way, the reader may not even envision the death. Instead, one might concentrate on the way Frank put it.

The next theme of the three, Frank's sexuality, is of great importance in the novel. On various occasions Frank discusses the male/female role in life and is very much against females, making the ultimate discovery that 'he' himself is one all the more shocking. The reader may finally understand why Frank talked about this hatred so much as he was trying to make things clear in his head and make sense of what had happened. The reader may start to pity Frank and see him as a victim, therefore partly forgiving him for the killings he had done.

He may be telling his story as a self-realisation for himself, a sort of recollection of his actions and the reasons that may have affected his judgment. He does not necessarily remember these reasons, as he says, "[p]oor Eric came home to see his brother, only to find (Zap! Pow! Dams burst! Bombs go off! Wasps fry: tsss!) he's got a sister." (Banks, ch. 12). Banks thus provides Frank with a climatic epiphany at the end of the novel, though it is left unresolved, left open to the reader to make of it what one likes.

The third theme in the book concerns Frank's relationship with his half-brother Eric which is about the only positive thing about Frank. He loves his brother dearly but has a complicated relationship with him. The reader can see that Frank cares deeply for Eric, and often expresses concern for his brother's safety as he is of an unsound mind. Later in the book the reader finds out why Eric went insane, but as soon as one finds out he/she may start feeling sad not only for Eric, who seemed like a clever boy whose only hobby at the present is torching dogs and calling Frank on the phone, but also for Frank. Something like this is never easy for a family member, and Frank wins over more of the reader's sympathy, as one can see when he comments on his brother's incident, "[p]oor unlucky soul; he was just in the wrong place at the wrong time." (Banks, ch. 2). This sadness is one of the rare occasions when Frank shows empathy for another person and is depicted in a more humane way. The reader can sympathise with him, which puts Frank in a position where it is easier to manipulate with the reader's mind.

Frank always gets nervous when his brother phones him, he always tries to calm Eric down, and is constantly worrying about him before and even after telephone calls. He feels sad for his brother losing his sanity and hopes nothing will happen to him, "I hissed, glancing up the stairs for shadows, crouching down at the phone and covering up my mouth with my free hand." The reader goes through this tough time with Frank, so each time the phone call ends well the reader feels relief and when it does not end well the reader feels sad for him. When the reader is more vulnerable it is easier to play with his or her emotions.

Dialogues in *The Wasp Factory* helps the reader form a clearer picture of what is happening along the way and provide a clearer picture of Frank's distorted view of the world. Without these talks and conversations, one would not know as much and would have only the subjective view of the narrator. On one occasion, for example, Frank and his father are making small talk. His father tells him, "'I hope you weren't out killing any of God's creatures.'"(Banks, ch. 1). Frank does not reply, he just shrugs and informs the reader, "[o]f course I was out killing things. How the hell am I supposed to get heads and bodies for the Poles and the Bunker if I don't kill things?" (Banks, ch. 1). The reader can now see what Frank does, with more being revealed about him and the realisation that there is something deeply wrong with the activities he practices.

2. *A Clockwork Orange*

A Clockwork Orange is a dystopian novella written by Anthony Burgess in 1962. Like *1984* (and clearly influenced by *1984*) it is set in the not-so-distant future where the government tries to have complete control over society. The book is written as a first-person narrative, giving the reader a view of the main protagonist Alex, a rebellious fifteen-year-old teenager.

Alex is aggressive, unforgiving, brutal and psychopathic, but is also extremely intelligent and has excellent linguistic skills. His idea of amusement consists of beating people up and getting intoxicated with his friends. At one point, he gets arrested and is sent to prison. Alex takes the reader through this journey and describes each and every one of his crimes in a manner designed to elicit a certain degree of understanding and sympathy from the reader.

Alex's reason for recounting his experiences is not clear; it appears he simply wants to tell his life story. Like Frank, he is a typical anti-hero. He does not listen to anyone, he does what he likes and lives in the illusion that nothing bad can ever happen to him. He thinks of himself

as misunderstood and better than everyone else. He feels alienated from his parents and does not understand their behaviour because it is so different to his sociopathic and brutal as he has no regard for anyone except for himself.

2.1 Alex

A Clockwork Orange is ostensibly about Alex, a 15-year old boy in a dystopian future. At a deeper level, though, the book is about language and how it can be used to communicate, mystify, conceal and play. Anthony Burgess studied languages and linguistics, among other things, and most of the techniques and literary devices in the book centre around language. As a narrator Alex is unreliable largely because of his clever and deceptive use of language, making the reader work hard to see through the language veil and understand his manipulations.

Burgess's aim is to make Alex an unreliable narrator who is nonetheless capable of making the reader believe whatever he wants him/her to believe. One cannot really trust what Alex says as his views are highly subjective and often seem distorted, but his rhetorical skills are next to brilliant and it is hard for the reader not to accept much of what he says. Alex uses language to sway the reader into believing him, or at least not seeing his grim story as negatively as this might have otherwise been the case.

The first way in which Alex uses language is to adapt his words and speech to the situation he finds himself in. He is able to talk in various different ways, whether it be in high-class or low-class English, using the slang that he made up, Nadsat. If he needs to convince people of his goodness and innocence he starts talking like a courteous gentleman and depicts himself as the poor abused teenager who was not consciously doing anything wrong and is now very sorry for his misdeeds. One can see this, for example, when he is talking to his advisor when being

held in custody for his crimes. He says, "'[i]t wasn't me, brother, sir'" (Burgess, part 1, ch. 7), and "'[s]peak up for me, sir, I'm not so bad. I was led on by the treachery of the others, sir.'" (Burgess, part 1, ch. 7). Alex has a way with words and is very good at using them to his advantage.

When Alex needs to sound convincing and look like a good, obedient boy, he starts talking very politely, he pretends to show respect to the other party and tries to persuade them to be kind and leave him alone. He offers his advisor tea in the most polite way, as when he asks, "'[a] cup of the old chai, sir? Tea, I mean,'" (Burgess, part 1, ch. 4), and "'[t]o what do I owe the extreme pleasure? Is anything wrong, sir?'" (Burgess, part 1, ch. 4). One may start to feel his annoyance, because he has no interest in being questioned and one might be inclined to take his side, wanting the advisor to accept his story and depart.

The second device Alex employs is euphemisms that make the situations he is describing appear less violent than they actually are. One example can be found when his 'droog' Billy is in a fight and end up getting hurt. Alex says, "[t]hen in the dratsing this droog of Billyboy's suddenly found himself opened up like a peapod, with his belly bare and his old yarbles showing" (Burgess, part 1, ch. 2), when describing his 'droog' being beaten up and cut. Likewise, when Alex does something cruel, for example, when he talks about having sex with women, he uses the phrase 'the good in and out' which does not evoke as many negative feelings in the reader as a more vulgar phrase might. In this case he uses a euphemism to hide the reality of an aggressive rape scene.

The use of Nadsat may mislead the reader even more. Nadsat is comprised of everyday words that have somehow been changed to sound more playful, different and interesting. Many of the words come from Russian; 'nadsat' is the Russian suffix equivalent of '-teen'. For example, 'rooker', which means 'hand' or 'prestoopnik' for 'criminal'. Some are made up, such as 'appy polly loggy' which is an exaggerated 'apology', or 'baddiwad' which stands for 'bad'.

Some are inspired by London cockney slang, as one can see from the word ‘cutter’, which means money. For Alex, such words and terms are used to make his crimes seem less violent, brutal or disgusting, because the euphemisms conceal the full gravity of what he is describing.

In a similar fashion, Alex uses slang and colloquialisms that add to the complexity of his language. Moreover, these elements add to the musicality of the language, which he appreciates as he is a music composer as well. He often uses words that are made up, in whole or in part, designed to conceal the seriousness of what is going on or make the reader think about the words more than the actions being described. A typical example is when Alex tells the reader that he and his ‘droogs’ are going to rob a shop. When talking about the money they stole, he describes it as ‘a flip horrorshow takings’, where ‘flip’ is derived from the English phrase ‘to flip out’, which means to go crazy. Since it is used in an unfamiliar way, the reader may not realise quite what the gang has done. The use of the word ‘horrorshow’, a Nadsat word inspired by the Russian word ‘khorosho’, which means good or well, might puzzle the reader and distract him or her from thinking about the crimes being described. For example, in one rape scene Alex describes himself “locking her rookers from the back, while I ripped away at this and that and the other, the others going haw haw haw still, a real good horrorshow groodies they were that then exhibited their pink glazzies.” (Burgess, part 1, ch. 2). The reader, not being familiar with all the words, may have trouble understanding what is going on, which suits Alex perfectly as he tries to tempt the reader onto his side right from the beginning.

The third way in which Alex uses language is via his own made-up words. He uses these to make his speech sound more playful (and perhaps childish), while diverting attention from his brutal actions. The reader might start thinking about the language rather than about the fact that Alex is committing yet another crime. When caught red-handed in a house that he had been raiding, he tells the reader that “P. R. Deltoid then did something I never thought any man like him who was supposed to turn us baddiwads into real horrorshow malchicks would do,

especially with all those rozzes around." (Burgess, part 1, ch. 7). The words 'baddiwad' and 'malchicks' sound euphonic, and combined with the words, 'horrorshow' and 'rozzes', which are cacophonic, can easily distract the reader via the play of words rather than Alex's reality.

The fourth technique used is that Alex keeps addressing the reader throughout the story, calling him/her 'brother' when he says, "[t]he Korova Milkbar was a milk-plus mesto, and you may, O my brothers, have forgotten what these mestos were like." (Burgess, part 1, ch. 1), or calling himself a 'friend and humble narrator': "Then there was the starry very grim magistrate in the lower court govoreeting some very hard slovos against your Friend and Humble Narrator." (Burgess, part 1, ch. 1). Alex addresses the reader at every opportunity, as it is his way of calling for attention and sympathy. The reader feels the narrator is talking to him and starts paying more attention, the storytelling is more gripping this way and this is exactly what Alex wants to achieve. Burgess uses this technique to make the reader feel closer to the narrator and to establish a relationship between the reader and the narrator, a particular kind of familiarity, which can serve well when the narrator wants the reader to empathise with him/her and not judge him too harshly.

The fifth linguistic device is that when Alex speaks he incorporates the archaic pronouns 'thee', 'thy' and 'thou' into his speech. When he wants his speech to sound more cryptic, when he wants to talk down to someone or when he is not in control of a situation he often uses these expressions, as when he says, "'[b]olshy great yarblockos to thee and thine.'" (Burgess, part 3, ch. 6), to the minister when he comes to visit him in the hospital after nearly killing himself, or "[i]f fear thou hast in thy heart, O brother." (Burgess, part 1, ch. 2), when the man of the house they are about to raid answers the door. This creates an environment likely to be strange to the reader because, when taken together with all the colloquialisms that Alex uses, one may not really know what is going on. The reader might focus on trying to decipher what Alex means, thus creating a situation that he exploits to make his actions less important to the reader.

In *A Clockwork Orange*, Alex tells the reader a great deal about what he is doing and thinking, thus one has an idea about what is happening in the book. However, the perspective is very subjective and the reader cannot be sure that the narrator is telling the truth. Alex uses many understatements to mislead the reader about what happening around him. Sometimes, though, the dialogues reveal more, which can help the reader to look at situations objectively. An example of this is quite early in the book, when Alex's probation officer pays him a visit and the reader finds out that "'[o]ne of a certain fat boy's friends was ambulanced off late from near the Power Plant and hospitalized, cut about very unpleasantly, yes.'" (Burgess, part 1, ch. 4). Alex understates the fact that the boy is in a very bad condition after what Alex did to him. Were it not for this conversation, one would not know that the beating was so extreme.

Foreshadowing is another narrative device Burgess uses to build up the tension of the story. When Alex is in prison, he foreshadows the fact that he will be going through a very painful procedure. "'Well, Alex boy, little 6655321 as was, you have copped it lucky and no mistake. You are really going to enjoy it here.'" (Burgess, part 2, ch. 3).The reader is not fooled by his optimism and knows that something bad is bound to happen.

The climax of the story comes when Alex is set free from jail after having undergone this experimental procedure that renders him harmless and not wanting to be violent anymore. This climax serves as a turning-point for Alex's narration. The power shifts from him to the people he has been hurting through the story and he is unable to fight back as he is now incapable of violence. The only power he has left is the power of rhetoric, so he tries to make the reader pity him and feel sorry for him. This does not work too well, though, because there are moments when one can see through him and know that he is a psychopathic hypocrite. Even though he tries very hard to sway the reader to his side, one can see that he is desperate. Moreover, it is hard to pity someone that, at the beginning of the novel, beat up people for behaving the way he is behaving now. One example of this can be found when he is in a library, seeking refuge.

Some elderly people know that they can finally get some payback for when he hurt them and so Alex says, "[b]ut these starry avengers still came after me, panting like dying, with their animal claws all trembling to get at your friend and Humble Narrator." (Burgess, part 3, ch. 2). Alex makes himself seem like a victim, like someone whose life is destined to only get worse, even though he started this conflict by going around the city and hurting people.

Still, the pain does not stop there. His former gang members – now in the police – beat him up so severely that he is nearly rendered unconscious. "I will not go into what they did, but it was all like panting and thudding against like this background of whirring farm engines and the twitttwit-twittering in the bare or nagoy branches." (Burgess, part 3, ch. 3). They make him suffer because Alex formerly exploited his role as leader and was very aggressive towards them. Again, Alex depicts himself as the victim, trying to persuade the reader to feel sorry for him. Once again, this does not work. Although the reader can feel the pain Alex is going through, one cannot sympathise with him completely because he spent the first part of the book hurting others.

3. *An Artist of the Floating World*

An Artist of the Floating World by Kazuo Ishiguro was published in 1986. The novel is set in the post-WWII Japan and one of its major themes is how Japanese society dealt with the forces of Americanisation in the late 1940s. The novel is written as a first-person narrative by an elderly man reminiscing about his past and coming to terms with his life and some of the bad choices that he made. The 'Floating World' of the novel's title is based on a Japanese word referring to the art of prints, and can be read as 'an artist living in a changing world.'

The main protagonist of the novel, Masuji, is a former artist who assisted the anti-American propagandists in Japan during the Second World War. Initially Masuji's story seems like a confession, but neither he nor the reader come to see it that way because there is a build-up that almost leads to Masuji admitting he had sinned, followed by his complete denial of it. "Ishiguro's unreliable narrators do not intend to lie; they deceive themselves as well as the reader." (Lalrinferi, 51). His actions are those of someone who is uninterested in the world and what is happening in it. He denies anything he is accused of and is incapable of recognising his faults, unable to realise that his past actions could have had very negative consequences for people around him. All these are reasons why he can be classified as an anti-hero. Unlike Frank and Alex, he does not commit violent crimes like murder or rape, but taken together, his character features make him an unattractive narrator and the reader struggles to sympathise with him.

Kazuo Ishiguro is of Japanese origin and his writing is heavily influenced by aspects of Japanese culture and behaviour. The Western stereotype of Japanese people is of being overly polite and giving little away while practicing small talk. *An Artist of the Floating World* has a similar feel and reveals little about the darker aspects of Masuji's life directly, but through the subtle details that the narrator provides one finds out what really happened and that Masuji's life may not have been quite as innocent as he portrays it.

3.1 Masuji

The key to the novel is the gap between what Masuji believes about the world and what was actually happening out there. Ishiguro uses a range of techniques to make Masuji Ono into an unreliable narrator. These techniques are based on a very good linguistic understanding of the English language because the most notable feature in this novel is the slow, almost unrecognizable drip-feeding of information to the reader – information that often contrasts with or undermines what Masuji is saying. This way, Ishiguro builds up the tension and makes the reader want to uncover more and read on.

Ishiguro begins by depicting Masuji as a pleasant and confident person, as one can read when he is talking about how he acquired his house and that it was thanks to his career as a respectable artist: "I can still recall the deep satisfaction I felt when I learnt the Sugimuras – after the most thorough investigation – had deemed me the most worthy of the house they so prized" (Ishiguro, ch. October 1948), but one discovers in due course that this is not entirely true.

This misrepresentation technique puts the reader on edge throughout the novel because one does not know what to expect or what to trust. Masuji constantly remembers things wrongly, and talks about situations from the past more than once, describing them a bit differently each time – sometimes leaving some details out or adding details that he did not mention before. Throughout the novel, Masuji jumps from the reality of the present to the past and tells the reader about it. He does this by taking a situation in which he finds himself, letting his mind roam and talking freely about what it reminds him of.

Additionally, when Masuji gets into a confrontation, for example with his son-in-law concerning WWII that Japan had a part in, he always tries to evade responsibility for what he did. He never admits to having been wrong and always uses excuses even at the risk of him sounding ignorant or blind, or just says he did what he did in good faith and that is what counts,

as can be seen repeatedly: “All I can say is that at the time I acted in good faith.” (Ishiguro, ch. April 1949), “[t]here is surely no great shame in mistakes made in the best of faith.” (Ishiguro, ch. November 1949), or “[w]e did at the time in the best of faith.” (Ishiguro, ch. June 1950). The reader does not get the feeling Masuji himself truly believes what he is saying because he keeps reminding himself of his past actions.

One way in which Masuji is revealed to be an unreliable narrator is that he does not understand how the post-war Japan operates, and it becomes clear that his old age is making it harder for him to understand. For example, quite late in the book his young grandson wants to try some sake. As a man, Masuji thinks it a good idea and tells his grandson that it will be possible. He knows his daughter Setsuko might be opposed to this idea, but that does not stop him from saying: “’I remember he (Masuji’s son Kenji, killed during the war) had his first taste of sake at around your age. I’ll see to it, Ichiro, you get a small taste tonight’” (Ishiguro, ch. November 1949). At dinner that evening the mother overrides Masuji and does not let the grandson have any alcohol. Masuji does not understand that Japan has changed, that the boy’s mother will and can make the decision. He still thinks it is the men that have the final word. It becomes clear that he does not grasp the new post-war reality.

Another example of Masuji not really understanding the present happens when his grandson Ichiro starts eating too much spinach and beating his chest. This appears strange to Masuji, so he questions Ichiro, asking him if he is trying to be a man drinking sake. Ichiro answers that he is ‘Popeye Sailorman’. For many readers this may not be extraordinary but for Masuji it is something completely new. Masuji has no idea who that is and the reader can see that in a world that is being Americanised Masuji clearly does not fit in. He does not understand the world he is living in and for that reason his words cannot necessarily be trusted.

A crucial scene in the book shows how Masuji lives in his own world in which he did nothing wrong, even though the evidence he provides seems to show otherwise. Masuji goes to

visit his former colleague, Kuroda, who was sent to jail because Masuji had reported him as a rebel during WWII. Masuji, not knowing what he had got Kuroda into, does not realise that Kuroda does not want to see him. Kuroda's former student Enchi sends Masuji home by saying, "'[s]ir, I have come to know Mr Kuroda well, and in my judgement it is best you leave. He will not wish to see you.'" (Ishiguro, ch. April 1949). Masuji does not understand what is going on, because Enchi then further explains about Kuroda's time in jail and how the wardens tortured him: "'But of course, they remembered it ("it" being his painful shoulder) well enough whenever they decided to give him another beating.'" (Ishiguro, ch. April 1949). Masuji, incapable of admitting anything, replies: "'You're too young, Mr Enchi, to know about this world and complications.'" (Ishiguro, ch. April 1949). The reader can see Masuji had done something wrong and that he is unwilling to admit it, consequently making the reader even more uncomfortable and mistrusting.

The reader also finds out through the dialogues Masuji had with his daughters that he used to be strict with them. One of his daughters observes of the other, "'[s]he only remembers you from when you were a tyrant and ordered us all around.'" (Ishiguro, ch. October 1948). Masuji denies this accusation, saying, "'[s]he's talking nonsense as usual." (Ishiguro, ch. October 1948). The reader, understanding that people's memories often end up rose-tinted, is inclined to believe Masuji's daughters, making him even more unreliable. This scene is early in the book and warns the reader that the events Masuji describes might not have taken place exactly as he describes.

Another way in which Masuji is portrayed as an unreliable narrator is when he reminisces about his past and even then he does not realise what the situation in Japan was like and how serious it was. Masuji lives in his own made-up world in which he only sees things he wanted to see. One can see this happening when he is talking to Matsuda, a visitor who comes to talk about politics. Matsuda says, "'I doubt, for instance, if you could even tell me who Karl

Marx was.'" (Ishiguro, ch. Novermber 1949). Masuji replies, lying, "'[d]on't be ridiculous. Of course I know of Karl Marx.'" (Ishiguro, ch. November 1949). Because Masuji had lied he loses even more of the reader's trust. One can see that he is entirely incapable of acknowledging any of his faults, so the reader cannot truly know what else he has been hiding.

This conversation also shows how little Masuji knows or cares about the world around him. Matsuda rightly observes, "'[y]our knowledge of the world is like a child's.'" (Ishiguro, ch. November 1949). Masuji downplays this encounter, stressing that he is educated in the areas that matter, but the reader can feel an uneasiness in how he handled the situation. Masuji seems remarkably confident for somebody who knows so little about important matters, making the reader doubt what he claims to be true.

Another point raised by this conversation is Masuji's unwillingness to admit anything wrong about himself, even when he was a young man. The fact that he is so set in his ways and so confident does not show him in a positive manner. Furthermore, when he starts arguing with Matsuda, trying to divert the attention away from himself by saying, "[f]orgive me, Matsuda, but it strikes me it's you who are in fact the naïve one." (Ishiguro, ch. November 1949), the reader might view him as behaving like a child whose pride has been hurt, undermining his veracity further still.

The next technique that is used to make Masuji's story-telling even more unreliable is that the reader sees he has come to believe his lies. When his older daughter, Noriko, was supposed to get married, the groom's family broke off the wedding suddenly and nobody knew why. He later says, "[m]y own guess is that there was nothing so remarkable about the matter. True, their withdrawal at the last moment was most unexpected, but why should one suppose from this that there was anything peculiar in it?" (Ishiguro, ch. October 1948). It is not customary to break off a wedding in this fashion in Japan without giving a reason. The reader suspects that Masuji's

past has something to do with it, and because he does not consider this as a factor that could have affected the wedding, the reader feels less inclined to trust him.

Another technique that is used to make the reader doubt the narrator is the projecting of the narrator's views onto the reader. The narrator does this by assuming how he or she might be feeling about the situation and explains why one need not feel so. One can see this when Mori-san, an artist and teacher with whom the students live with, tells them: "'Perhaps you'd all leave me now.'" (Ishiguro, ch. November 1949). Mori-san lets the students see his paintings but often tells them to leave after some time. As this comment is quite neutral, the reader would probably not have thought anything of it, however Masuji explains why Mori-san said this and why: "As I recount this I am aware that Mori-san's behaviour may strike you as somewhat arrogant." (Ishiguro, ch. November 1949). Morisan's comment must have stirred up some kind of emotion in Masuji, because otherwise he would not have mentioned it. Since he explains it to the reader and says that it was not meant in an arrogant way, one assumes that he himself saw it that way. This means that the reader might start thinking why Masuji started explaining his teacher's behaviour, therefore planting this idea in the reader's mind as well.

The climax of the book comes when Masuji decides to paint a politically propagandist painting. In the novel, this event serves as an enlightenment for Masuji, because he says, "[b]ut I now feel it is time for me to progress onto other things." (Ishiguro, ch. November 1949). He was persuaded to join the propagandist movement when a member of the political party came to visit him. The reader sees that he is suddenly overly interested in the politics of his country. This comes as a surprise because one can see he went from one extreme to another. One might not see this change as positive because one now knows from earlier on that he is not someone that understands the world. This sudden change of mind could be seen as impulsive, which could result in something negative happening, which is exactly Masuji's case. The reader might feel disconcerted by this sudden change of heart and might start doubting him even more,

because before he was so sure he knew everything he needed to and didn't really need to know about what was happening in the world around him and out of nowhere he became so engaged.

At the end of the book Masuji starts reminiscing about his past. He describes his life as a constant struggle to do what he thought was right, what he thought at the time was the way to go. Nevertheless, he never actually admits to doing anything wrong, and convinces himself that he led a good life and that he has nothing to be ashamed of, saying, "[b]ut those who fought and worked loyally for our country during the war cannot be called war criminals." (Ishiguro, ch. October 1948). He convinced himself of being innocent, however one does not feel sympathetic towards him anymore, on the contrary, and one feels saddened and disappointed by his conclusion.

Conclusion

The unreliable first-person narrative form is a powerful instrument to manipulate the reader's mind and make him/her doubt the veracity of the narrator and question what is actually happening in the novels. It depends on the way the narrators see the world, which does not necessarily have to be the way the world really is, as each person has a different view of it. The reader may encounter this subjectivity early on, as in *A Clockwork Orange* and *The Wasp Factory*, where one is immediately drawn into the stories being told by the narrators. *An Artist of the Floating World* is different since it takes time for the reader to get drawn in and understand what Ishiguro is trying to do, but the book still has the ability to manipulate the reader.

The purpose of this thesis was to determine how the unreliable first-person narration impacts the reader and how it can, in the novels under scrutiny, change the mind of the reader multiple times. This was done by providing extracts from the three novels and showing how the reader might interpret them and how the narrator takes advantage of the situation by trying to make one believe whatever the narrator wants.

The first conclusion is that the age of the narrators are vital to the unravelling and understanding of the stories. Their ages may help the reader figure out what the ultimate goal of the narrator is and what kind of a story the narrator is telling and why. The social situation helps to reveal information about the narrators when they are talking because the ways that people express themselves can indicate who they are and how they view themselves. In Frank's case, because he is young, the narrative is not a life confession that he feels bad and perhaps repentant about; instead he is content with what he did and wants life to carry on. Likewise, Alex does not regret anything and just continues living. His tale sounds like a coming of age story in which he grows up and now is ready for the next stage of his life. Masuji, is telling his life confession because he is an old man. He comes closer to regretting some of the choices he

has made in his life, but ultimately fails to learn from his introspection and other people's comments and returns to his previous state of mind.

The second major finding is that the linguistic aspect is critically important as it has great power to sway the reader in the direction the narrator wants. In *The Wasp Factory*, for example, one can tell that Frank is not a typical teenager with normal interests and activities, as he starts off his story very seriously and the language of the book is unusually sophisticated, in part because he uses long, complicated words. *A Clockwork Orange* works slightly differently. The contrast of Alex's language skills with those of other, normal people indicates straight away that he is somehow unique and gifted. His language is filled with euphemisms, complex syntax and a language he made up himself. Masuji's case is quite the opposite. His language is also very elaborate, he uses long sentences and his knowledge of different kind of words is vast, but he reveals very little about himself even as he rambles on and says quite a lot. This becomes clear to the reader early on and he/she can start taking more notice of his expositions, trying to figure out the deeper message behind the words. This linguistic aspect of the novels provides them with much of their charm, as well as the power to interest readers in the stories and draw them in.

The third finding is that the dialogues the narrators have with people around them can play a crucial role in unveiling information to the reader – information that the narrator would often prefer to have kept hidden. In *The Wasp Factory* the dialogues help the reader form a clearer picture of the narrator's current condition and personal history. This is achieved by Frank talking to his father and brother quite a lot. In *A Clockwork Orange* the dialogues stop the reader from believing what Alex is saying so confidently and reveal a bit of reality; they serve to make the reader question what Alex is saying and doing instead of blindly trusting him. Likewise, in *An Artist of the Floating World* the dialogues serve as an instrument to enlighten the reader

about what is really happening in the book since Masuji cannot be trusted and the reader needs an outside opinion to help calibrate the narrator's views.

One implication of these findings is that both the narrator's social status and his/her ways of expressing themselves should be taken into account when analysing these novels, as they are instruments that can be used to manipulate the minds of readers. Highly intellectual and sophisticated language can be a form of euphemism, or can be used to confuse the reader, as in *A Clockwork Orange.* Likewise, the elaborate and complicated language can be used to gloss over and conceal a grim reality, as in *An Artist of The Floating World* or *The Wasp Factory.* Furthermore, in *The Wasp Factory*, Frank's language helps the reader to understand what situation he is living in and what one can expect from him.

Taken together, these results suggest that the first-person narrative form is a powerful way of making the reader view the story and action in a subjective manner, thereby leaving little room for an objective point of view. The reader can become so captivated by the narrator's viewpoint and explanations that he or she may not realise the full extent or implications of the events being described, and may sympathise more with the narrator because their understandings and behaviour are so neatly explained and self-consistent.

These findings about how the first-person narration works and the implications it might have for the reader are intriguing, but their results are limited by the small number of novels that were analysed, as well as the country the writers come from, since these novels are all British. The power of the first-person narration differs between novels and by comparing and contrasting more of them, one could end up seeing many more realities and one's horizons could expand thanks to the different points of view and emotions that the narrators would contribute. It would be valuable to investigate the unreliable first-person narration in international novels to see if the same findings are evident there.

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