

# A Narrative of Different Voices: Stylistic Analysis of Multiple Points of View in Zadie Smith’s “NW”

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**Abstract.** While the post-colonial approach (Fernández Carbajal, 2016; López-Roperero, 2016) has dominated research on Zadie Smith’s postmodern work, *NW* (2013), there has been little to no stylistic analysis of the novel. The article aims to fill in this theoretical gap by examining the different modes of point of view, indicating how they are linguistically encoded. Using Leech and Short’s model of narratological aspects of viewpoint (2007), the stylistic features of the third-person narrator and the reflectors are revealed. The analysis seeks to demonstrate that the narrative style varies with each shift of perspective and that the voice of the narrator and the characters’ points of view are linguistically intertwined. The research points out the stylistic metamorphosis of the narrator who moves from mimetic storytelling to metafiction, alternating between the covert narrator who foregrounds the characters’ point of view and the overt one who constantly pinpoints the linguistic identity of the novel. The fusion of form and content becomes the storyline of this novel, where the differences between viewpoints of the narrating voices reflect the differences between their lives.

**Keywords:** NW; Zadie Smith; point of view; reflector; metafiction.

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## Introduction

In everyday life, when listening to the daily news, watching a movie or talking to friends, one becomes involved, shapes ideas, and reacts to the stories. On the other hand, everyone transforms into a narrator in everyday conversations, turning the events of life into narratives (Fludernik, 2009, p. 1); thereby, when recounting one's own experiences, one endeavours to convey them in such a manner that is engaging (Toolan, 2013, p. 105). In a similar vein, an author who produces a work of fiction needs to decide on the subject matter and how it will be rendered (Leech, Short, 2007, p. 124), the pivotal choices involving that of who the narrator will be and through which point of view the narrative will be related.

Point of view, the position through which the events of the novel are viewed or perceived (Neary, 2014, p. 175), which exerts an influence over other aspects of the narrative, is one of the most widely researched areas within the sphere of stylistics. In this regard, stylistics explores why a certain point of view has been selected over the others, how it is realized linguistically, and what its impact is on interpreting the work.

In postmodern literature, new trends in form, voice, content and style continuously emerge, affecting the manner literary works are written. Believing that truth and meaning are not universal but are dependent on a personal point of view and being aware of diversity, multiculturalism and plurality, a growing corpus of postmodern novels go beyond the limits of a single point of view, challenging the notion of objective truth by incorporating multiple perspectives and storylines that may be regarded as literary representations of consciousness and knowledge. Illustrations of varying points of view from daily reality such as the parable of "The Blind Men and an Elephant", the famous dispute of whether it is a "six" or a "nine", or broadly speaking if one is "right" or "wrong" make plain how the same object, idea, scene or event can be perceived in different ways. The stamp of multiple points of view novels is that they do not comprise a single overarching story but are composed of a multitude of narratives, each conveying a personalized way of looking at reality. In this sense, the multi-voiced narration contrasts the unified worldview in favour of individual world-versions, all compounded together within a fictional work.

*NW* is a postmodern literary work whose peculiar brief title stands for North West, a postcode area in London and encapsulates the story-world of the novel. What sets the book apart is that this fictional world, a small-scale version of contemporary reality, is moulded through the narrative accounts of four characters: Leah, Felix, Natalie and Nathan, whose voices coexist both in dissonance and harmony and which together shape the text. These lifelong Londoners share the same place of origin, but as Manitski brings to the fore, their lives have followed different courses (2016, p. 48). They struggle to find their voice in this multicultural city, recount their truths and depict their diverse realities.

This paper intends to join the ongoing scholarly discussion on narrative and point of view. By analyzing *NW* stylistically, it hopes to take its place in the field, filling a gap in analyzing the novel from a different perspective and through its means to give its contribution to the emerging body of research in Zadie Smith's fiction.

Using Leech and Short's model of narratological aspects of viewpoint (2007), the paper focuses on the identification of the type of viewpoints and their linguistic representation, their function on the manipulation of point of view and their effect on interpreting the text. Special emphasis is given to the interrelation of the narrator's voice and the character's point of view by observing the narrator and characters' linguistic indicators of style.

## **1.1 Methodology**

Leech and Short's six-part taxonomy was first proposed in their seminal work *Style in Fiction* (2007). Introduced by Uspensky and later refined by Simpson and Fowler, the model of narratological aspects of viewpoint demonstrates how point of view can function on several planes, namely spatial, temporal, psychological and ideological, to which Leech and Short add the social and personal attitudinal viewpoint.

Spatial viewpoint, which can be distal, medial or proximal, functions as a deictic centre, projecting the action, objects and events, and the characters and the readers in the narrative space via spatial deictic terms, locative expressions or depiction of a character's movements. Temporal viewpoint, perceived as either remote or proximal in time, is expressed through tense, deictic adverbs and various temporal expressions. Psychological viewpoint embodies the reflection of a narrative through a character or narrator's individual consciousness (Neary, 2014, p. 177), including perception and cognition. Ideological viewpoint, as defined by Simpson, is the array of ideological beliefs and values conveyed through the mouthpiece of the author, narrator or character, through which they make sense of and interact with the world (2004, p.78). Leech and Short explain that attitudinal viewpoint is integrated into the model more under the function of a subtype of ideological viewpoint, referring to the characters' personal, social and political attitudinal values. In contrast, social viewpoint stands for the social relationship towards the reflector and other characters (2007, p. 299) such as social status or un/familiarity. The protagonists will be referred to as "reflector", a term adopted by Leech and Short and defined as the character whose viewpoint is being represented (2007, p. 40).

Adhering to the insights of the famous Genettian distinction between who sees and who speaks, meaning between whose point of view is being represented and who the narrator is, this paper sees an opportunity to investigate this issue through stylistic means.

## **2. Results**

### **2.1 Linguistic features of the narrator**

*NW* employs multiple points of view but also brings into play a third-person narrator that becomes a mediator between the reflectors and the readership. The narrative mode is such that the novel is recounted from its characters' point of view, imparting how they perceive an event in a third-person voice. Consistent with the illustrious Genettian differentiation between mood and voice (1980) and Rimmon-Kenan's (2002) view, speaking and seeing

do not necessarily have to be ascribed to the same entity, that is, to the story-teller. As the novel opens, in its first pages, a line catches the eye of the readers simultaneously as it catches Leah's ear on the radio: "I am the sole author of the dictionary that defines me" (Smith, 2013, p. 3). The line is of utmost importance to the content and form of the novel. It echoes the main theme, that of whether an individual can in truth be "the sole author" of his or her own life or whether one's life is governed by the external forces (Manitski, 2016, p. 93), and it is also tacitly correlated to the narrative strategies of the work. The lives of the reflectors take the form of stories written in a book, but they are not told by them. The "sole author" of their narratives becomes an external voice, or to use Bal's terminology, "a fictitious spokesman" (1985) who orchestrates the narratives and refers to the characters by third-person pronouns, by their names, or by what may be atypical in a fictional work, the set of two, name and last name. The unnamed narrator is not an all-knowing figure: in the same way that the characters are limited by not speaking through their own "I", the narrator, serving as a sort of "voice-over", is similarly restricted in communicating information. By taking up each character's point of view, the narrator can only narrate what that character does, knows, feels or thinks, as exemplified: "*37 Ridley Avenue*- a street on the corner of her own. This is all she reads" (Smith, 2013, p. 5). The address is written in italics to reproduce the writing on the paper Leah is looking at so that the readers can see exactly what Leah reads. However, when the narrator says, "this is all she reads", it appears as a justification for not being able to give further details. As Leah registers nothing else, there is a selection of information due to the narrator's restricted knowledge. The narrator, and as a result, the readers, know as much (or as little) as the reflector. To turn to another example: "Unbelievable. Wish I'd been there Pauline, let me tell you. I wish I had been there. To avoid listening to this conversation, Leah steps into the garden" (Smith, 2013, p. 18).

This line is drawn from the phone conversation between Pauline and Michel. The narrative voice informs the readers about Leah's purpose "to avoid listening to this conversation". From this point forward, the conversation ceases, and the readers never hear the rest of it because the reflector is no longer listening. Bound to Leah's psychological and spatial viewpoint in the present case, both the narrator and the readers follow her when she "steps into the garden". Since Leah is now out of earshot, details of the conversation are omitted. Thus, despite the third-person narrator, the reflector's point of view directs the narrative.

In the line: "Left Davon with Lloyd and went --- wherever. Wherever she went" (Smith, 2013, p. 170), Felix's lack of information is reflected by the dashes added in the middle. The limited third-person narrator's knowledge cannot surpass the reflector's knowledge and cannot fill in this deficiency of information. However, the levels of the narrator's limitation shift, as in Felix's section where Tom's point of view is adopted: "He examined a distorted Felix through the bottom of his pint glass" (Smith, 2013, p. 132). The word "distorted" conveys an image of Felix as seen through Tom's eyes looking through the glass. When the narrator later states that he (Tom) "wore an inconclusive expression" (Smith, 2013, p. 135), there is a shifting back to Felix's point of view who cannot enter Tom's mind to tell what lies behind that "inconclusive expression".

In “crossing”, the narrator is not as well-informed about Nathan as he is about the other three reflectors: “A young man (...) reached over and muttered into Nathan’s ear. Nathan listened for a moment, shook his head, stepped back” (Smith, 2013, p. 310). In this illustration, the narrator surveys Nathan externally. The verb “muttered” implies that the narrator cannot distinguish anything from the conversation but this sound. Nathan, who is listening closely, can hear it clearly, as evidenced by the words “shook his head”. Moreover, the person who speaks into Nathan’s ear is identified only as “a young man” because the narrator does not recognize him, but by the confidential means of communication between them, whispering in the ear, it becomes apparent that Nathan knows him.

The powerful tool of the narrator of *NW* is the competence to narrate from four different points of view modifying the role and stylistic features accordingly and synthesizing the multiple experiences.

## 2.2 Linguistic features of the reflectors

### 2.2.1 Leah

The third-person speaker in “visitation” is in harmony with what Leah does, thinks, feels or perceives. This is expressed via deictics, lexical choices, word order and tense siding with Leah’s point of view:

The fat sun stalls by the phone masts. Anti-climb paint turns sulphurous on school gates and lamp posts. In Willesden people go barefoot, the streets turn European, there is a mania for eating outside. She keeps to the shade. Redheaded. On the radio: I am the sole author of the dictionary that defines me. A good line – write it out on the back of a magazine. In a hammock, in the garden of a basement flat. Fenced in, on all sides (...) Shriveled blossom and bitter little apples. Birds singing the wrong tunes in the wrong trees too early in the year. Don’t you bloody start! Look up: the girl’s paunch rests on the railing. Here’s what Michel likes to say: not everyone can be invited to the party. Not this century. Cruel opinion-she doesn’t share it. In marriage not everything is shared. Yellow sun high in the sky. Blue cross on a white stick, clear, definitive. What to do? (...) Nothing else to listen to but this bloody girl. (Smith, 2013, p. 3)

These opening lines construct the setting in the readers’ minds, thrusting them into it and placing the character in the story-world as a deictic centre from which objects, scenes, events and people are seen. No attempt is made to introduce Leah, and “redheaded” is the only comment narrator makes, afterwards transmitting her thoughts directly. The acoustic impressions of what she hears on the radio and the voice of a girl interrupting her thoughts “Don’t you bloody start!” are recorded automatically as they are heard, and the reflection “a good line” expresses Leah’s ideological stance. The adjuncts of place “In a hammock”, “in the garden of a basement flat”, “fenced in, on all sides” anchor readers to Leah’s spatial dimension, whereas present tense suggests simultaneous experience. The use of “shriveled”, “bitter”, “wrong tunes”, “wrong trees”, “bloody girl” mark Leah’s attitudinal

viewpoint, her resentment with the world. Although a lovely day, everything seems wrong in the outer world because of Leah's inner turmoil. "Blue cross on a white stick, clear, definitive" reveals her real dread of a confrontation with motherhood. "What to do?", as if it were a dialogic question, imparts her apprehension to the readers, putting them in her shoes and urging them to think about "what to do". The short, elliptic sentences represent Leah's psychological sequencing and indicate the immediateness of the experience.

### 2.2.2 *Felix*

When Leah's section closes, the readers are dislocated from the previous deictic centre and are reoriented towards a new point of view that has no connection to the former one. Nguyễn-Quang (2018) and Franklin (2012) highlight the same belief that "guest" is the least innovative section and hence the more traditional; however, there is a synchrony of conventional and innovatory tendencies in this segment of the novel. Through the frequency of reporting verbs "said" and "thought", the use of quotation marks in the representation of speech, the narration of Felix's actions and references to his mental state, the narrator here is more conspicuous linguistically than in the first section. Nonetheless, similar to Leah's section, in the viewing of events, the narrator withdraws:

Fifty yards away, on Oxford Street, people pressed against people, dense as carnival, almost as loud. Back here, all was silent, empty. Slick black doors, brass knobs, brass letterboxes, lamp posts out of fairy stories. Old paintings in ornate gold frames, resting on easels, angled towards the street. PRICE UPON APPLICATION (...) At the end of this little row, Felix spotted a customer through a mullioned, glittering window sitting on a leather pouffe, trying on one of those green jackets, waxy like a table cloth, with the tartan inside (...) The type Felix saw all the time, especially in this part of the town. A great tribe of them. Didn't mix much-kept to their own kind. THE HORSE AND HARE. (Smith, 2013, p. 122)

Except for using the noun "Felix", the narrator surrenders the narrative competencies completely to the reflector. "Fifty yards away", aside from indicating Felix's spatial viewpoint, also draws a line between the poor neighbourhood where Felix lives and this distinct part of the city he encounters. "Dense as carnival", "loud" are counterpointed by "empty" and "silent" and express his ideological viewpoint as he compares the two streets in his mind. The parallel noun phrases project Felix's mental perceptions and record what he presumably sees as he is walking. They are pre-modified or post-modified by descriptive adjectives such as "slick", "brass", "gold", "ornate", "glittering" which accompanied by such nouns as "pouffe" and "tartan" point out to the luxuriousness of the area, reflecting an undertone of Felix's antipathetic attitudinal viewpoint. The proximal deixis "this" creates the illusion of Felix's motion forward, escorted by the readers who move along in lines, following the character faithfully. "The type", "a great tribe of them", "kept to their own kind" are markers of both Felix's social and attitudinal viewpoint. He

distances himself both physically and ideologically, as the metaphorical juxtaposition with “horse and hare” suggests, reinforced semantically through capitalization. Illustrating the narrator’s consistency in retaining the limited position, a few pages after the readers hear on TV, at the same time as Leah does, that Felix Cooper was murdered, an event that at first does not have any significance, they are invited to take on Felix’s point of view, and they do so with the acute awareness that Felix is already dead. On this occasion, the readers feel more knowledgeable than the narrator, who withholds information remaining true to Felix’s point of view, and more knowledgeable than the character because they already know what happened.

### 2.2.3 *Natalie*

The third part, “host”, is a fragmented narration that diverges from the coherence and linearity of the preceding narratives as it is broken into 185 fragmentary passages. The formerly limited speaker takes hold of the narrative power, stepping in repeatedly to comment on the mode of telling and the stylistic choices. The third narrative is characterized by its metafictional nature, drawing inferences on the similitude between penning a novel and creating one’s day-to-day reality. It is no surprise that precisely Natalie’s section, which has as its subject her construction of identity, discloses its status as a literary composition (López-Ropero, 2016, p.131). In this part, both of the character’s selves, Keisha and Natalie, are unveiled to the readers:

Keisha thought: now she is going to say she’s heading to Marks & Sparks and when this was exactly what she did say Keisha experienced an unforgettable pulse of authorial omnipotence. Maybe the world really was hers for the making. (Smith, 2013, pp. 179–180)

The text positions Keisha as reflector via Free Direct Thought, including the temporal expression “now”, the proximal deixis “this”, the epistemic modal adverb “maybe” and the intensifying adverb “really”. The formulation “unforgettable pulse of authorial omnipotence” indicates a more mature narrative voice, as Keisha is still a child at this point in the narrative. This implicit metalinguistic reflection communicates Keisha’s urge to be in control of her life and that of the others, aspiring for overall omnipotence in her narrative, intensified by the last sentence in this paragraph that relays Keisha’s ideological confidence that this world, albeit fictional “was hers for the making”. The metafictional allusion of Keisha’s ambition to become an omnipotent narrator becomes a parody of the literary convention itself by which the narrator refuses to be bound, disregarding it as an outdated, non-realistic literary form.

Across the room hung a mirror. Two admirable young sisters, their hair still plaited by their mothers (...). That’s you. That’s her. She is real. You are a forgery. Look closer. Look away. She is consistent. You are making it up as you go along. (Smith, 2013, p. 191)



The narrator's role is minimal, keeping an external perspective, where the prepositional phrase "across the room" positions the readers in Natalie's spatial plane, whereas the word order stays true to Natalie's psychological sequencing. The readers slip into Natalie's head listening in on her direct thoughts as if Natalie was addressing them, an impression formed by the pronoun "you", the notable switch from the past to the present tense and the imperatives "Look closer", "look away". Curiously, the "you" is not directed to the readers, of whose presence Natalie is not aware, but to her other self. The parallelisms of "you" and "her", "you" and "she", "real" and "forgery", "consistent" and "making it up" contradict one another and mirror Natalie's conflict of identity. This excerpt can be viewed in a metafictional light because, as Waugh points out, in a metafictional work, characters become unexpectedly aware of not having a being (2001, p.91). Analogously, here Natalie realizes that she is "a forgery" and that she is "making it up" as she "goes along".

#### 2.2.4 *Nathan*

Nathan's narrative is mostly written in dialogue. The narrator speaks mainly to depict actions from an external standpoint. Although short, "crossing" adds a significant dimension to the novel and is counterpointed to the other three sections in textual proportion and narrative style. Nathan competes to be the reflector of his brief narrative, with Natalie as co-protagonist (Custer, 2014, p. 36):

- 1) You trying to break back in? (Smith, 2013, p. 304)
- 2) But I ain't in your dream, Keisha. You're in mine (...) Listen: my dream is my dream. You get me? Your dream is your dream. You can't dream my dream (...) That's your problem: You want to be up in everybody else's dream. (Smith, 2013, p. 320)

Nathan claims the right to tell his story, which Natalie is trying to usurp. He does not accept to be excluded within the narrative as he is in society. As opposed to Felix and Leah, whose viewpoint is no longer taken after their sections finish, when "host" ends, Natalie refuses to stay behind and "crosses" into Nathan's narrative:

She was lifting her knee to climb when a man's voice called out to her.  
Natalie Blake.

Across the road and to her left. He stood beneath a horse chestnut tree with his hands thrust deep in the pockets of his hoodie. (Smith, 2013, p. 306)

The personal pronoun indicates Natalie. Nathan enters what is supposedly his section through her point of view. When she hears her name being called, she can only identify "a man's voice" before realizing who it belongs to. The adjunct "across the road and to her left" positions Nathan spatially in the narrative in the way that Natalie perceives him. She refers to him by the pronoun "he" without previously saying his name because she knows him from life prior to the text. Interestingly, sometimes, the text embodies the point of view of two reflectors at once:



They crossed over, Natalie Blake and Nathan Bogle and kept climbing, past the narrow red mansion flats, up into money. The world of council flats lay far behind them, at the bottom of the hill. (Smith, 2013, p. 314)

Characters are referred to by the plural pronouns “they” and “them” and the verb “crossed” alludes to the section’s title, advocating the idea of a shared narrative. They share the first three letters of their names “Nat” and their surnames start with the same alphabetic letter. In line with Custer (2014, p. 37), Nathan and Natalie are alternate selves with different lives and in the very few times the narrator harmonizes their viewpoints together, their opposite realities *cross*. Accordingly, this doubled viewpoint is represented as if it were a single one braiding together Natalie and Nathan’s spatial viewpoint through the adjuncts of place “past the narrow red mansion flats”, “far behind them”, and psychological viewpoint through the sequencing of perceptions. The social viewpoint is embodied in the social class hierarchy, spatially represented as “up into money” being a rich area and “at the bottom of the hill” being the impoverished council flats, where Natalie and Nathan have their roots in.

On the subject of verbal exchanges or the mechanism of turn-takings, Nathan has 124 turn-takings in total compared to Natalie, who has 97. Though not a major difference, this power relation becomes more notable when calculating the initiation/reply aspect. Nathan is the more powerful speaker as he controls the dialogue, decides on the topics, initiates exchanges and provides longer replies, sometimes even in long paragraphs. Typically, Nathan has the conversation going on and Keisha mainly responds to Nathan’s questions. A considerable number of her replies are short, such as “Yes”; “No”; “I don’t know”; “What?”; “Oh” and suchlike. So, despite their battle for the floor in this section, in terms of dialogue, Natalie is the more inferior speaker.

Nathan’s point of view is realized through speech, at odds with Leah, Felix and Natalie’s, whose thoughts are revealed instead. The lack of transmitted thoughts implies the withdrawal of the narrator and allows Nathan to be the epicentre of the narrative, free to construct reality with his own words (see also Custer, 2014).

As the narrator steps back, not intervening with evaluations or commentary, this responsibility is transferred to the readers, who learn about Nathan through his dialogue with Keisha and what he decides to tell her. They take on the same role as Keisha, that of the listener, and when Nathan insists on several occasions that he is not “gonna lie”, it depends on the readers whether or not they trust him.

### ***2.3 Interwoven voices and metafiction***

What Leah, Felix and Nathan’s narratives have in common, though not quite at the same degree, the scale being slightly higher in “visitation”, is the narrator’s position as an onlooker and the foregrounding of the reflector. In the sentences, “Leah plants her feet on the ground and pushes back on her chair” (Smith, 2013, p. 34); “Felix kissed her in the forehead” (Smith, 2013, p. 161); and “He slipped off his hood” (Smith, 2013, p. 312), the

narrative voice is discernible from the reflector. Yet, the narrator is still spatially proximal with the characters watching their actions simultaneously with the readers. Once Leah, Felix, or Nathan's point of view is established, the narrator keeps a distance, foregrounding the characters' point of view:

She fears the destination. Be objective! What is the fear? It is something to do with death and time and age. Simply: I am eighteen in my mind I am eighteen and if I do nothing if I stand still nothing will change I will be eighteen always. For always. Time will stop. I'll never die. Very banal, this fear. Everyone has it these days. What else? She is happy enough in the moment they are in (...)Why must moments change? (Smith, 2013, p. 24)

This excerpt remarkably combines the speaker's voice and Leah's psychological point of view, prompted by particular stylistic features. The third person pronoun disappears temporarily, and Leah struggles to take control of the narrative speaking through the pronoun "I", supported by the fact that her thoughts are not narrated but rather emulated. The general statement "everyone has it these days" blurs the distinction between the speaker and reflector, as it can be equally attributed to both. Notwithstanding the narrator's linguistic visibility, various stylistic elements such as the first-person singular pronoun, the imperative (sentence 2), the questions (sentence 3), modality (will, must), the proximal demonstratives (this, these), definite article "the" to suggest known information, word repetition, the lexical items "enough" and "exactly", elliptic sentences, lack of punctuation indicating the unmediated flow of her thoughts, side with Leah's point of view hence the narrator's voice is barely heard.

The following example also displays the fusion of speaker and viewer's linguistic elements: "It was that particular tone, enquiring and high- and suddenly Jamaican- coiling up to Felix like a snake rising from its basket" (Smith, 2013, p. 111). These lines are appropriate to Felix's psychological point of view in two ways, firstly as a moment of realization "it was that particular tone" and secondly as a reference to his internal state "coiling up". The adjectives "enquiring", "high", and "suddenly Jamaican" are consistent with his attitudinal viewpoint. However, the simile "like a snake rising from its basket" can be attributed to the narrator, verbalizing the anger rising within Felix, presenting his emotional state faithfully through the narrator's stylistic indicators.

As in "visitation" and "guest", in "crossing", the narrator is an observer, or rather an unobserved listener that overhears the conversation between Nathan and Natalie and transcribes it to the readers verbatim: "What are we doing? Nathan? What are we doing? Traipsing. North. That's where you want to go, right? Yes" (Smith, 2013, p. 308). In these lines, which exemplify how the section operates, two voices intersperse, not that of the character and narrator as in the other narratives, but of the two protagonists. As the literary conventions associated with dialogue, such as the narrator's remarks, reporting verbs such as "he said" or "she replied", signalling punctuation marks or identification of speakers are discarded, it becomes demanding to keep up with who is speaking. Natalie and Nathan are left in charge of the narrative, and in such cases, when there is no narrator

to escort them, the readers descend under the fallacy that they are witnessing the drama first-hand (Diasamidze, 2014, p. 164).

The distinctions between Leah and Felix's sections and that of Nathan are revealed through the narrative techniques representing their point of view: in the first two narratives, Free Direct Thought prevails, while in Nathan's narrative, Free Direct Speech is mostly used. These three narratives are alike in the sense that thoughts (in Leah and Felix's section) and speech (in Nathan's section) are put forward with little or no interference from the narrator.

In the third part, a genre-crossing from mimetic storytelling to metafiction and then to a sort-of-drama in the fourth section takes place. This results in a transition from the covert, inconspicuous narrator to a stylistically overt one who takes control of the narrative that has so far privileged the reflectors' point of view. Metanarrative comments in Natalie's section appear in a variety of styles:

1. With metanarrative statements on the literary techniques as in: "the above is a metaphorical figure." (Smith, 2013, p. 215)
2. The overt reference to the narrator's authority as illustrated by the line "I am the sole author". In the "stage direction" vignette, the narrator shifts from prose to drama to indicate the control over Natalie and the stage techniques, the setting of time and place such as "night" (p. 278) or "front door, ajar" (p. 279), on the characters' actions "walks to the door, returns, sits" (p. 279), and on what they say "NAT: Yes [types quickly] No. Yes." (p. 279)
3. With the overt reference to the narrator's voice as separate from the character's point of view, such as in: "It was Natalie's belief"; "(This was Natalie's interpretation)" (p. 215).
4. With gnomic statements articulated as collective wisdom and universal truths: "friends are friendly to each other, friends help each other out." (p. 216)
5. By directly addressing the readers, making them complicit in creating meaning: "we must admit it" (p. 193); "a local tip: the bus stop outside Kilburn's Poundland is the site of many of the more engaging conversations to be heard in the city of London. You're welcome." (p. 283)

In one of the lines, Natalie wonders: "Is a voice something you can own?" (Smith, 2013, p. 292). While it may seem that she is denied a voice, as her narrative is dominated by an authoritative speaker, an interesting occurrence leads towards another interpretation:

More symbols, she presumed, though of a kind she couldn't decode. To explain herself to herself, Natalie Blake employed a conventional image. Broad river. Turbulent water. Stepping stones. (Smith, 2013, p. 228)

In this excerpt, metafiction as a technique replicates Natalie's point of view, creating the impression that she is the overriding narrator of her section, an idea supported especially by the formulations "to explain herself to herself" and "employed a conventional image" which are functions within the teller's domain, a domain which seems to be enclosed

within the rules of conventionality. The use of "she" instead of "I" to speak of herself could be explained by the dichotomy of two personalities within herself. To know oneself, "we become the object of our own recent history, we become a third person, we become other people" (Crews, 1999, p.33). As Natalie's narrative comprises her whole life from childhood to the present and her struggle to construct her identity, she may be looking back on her history and inventing her narrative just as she framed her reality. In this way, the imagery of "stepping stones" equalizes reality and fiction as constructions, determined by the signifying nature of language.

## Conclusion

The stylistic analysis of points of view in *NW* reveals a third-person narrator who does not intrude over the narrative but recounts the story from the four characters' angles, constrained in the knowledge imparted and transforming stylistically by taking on the attributes of each of the reflectors in turn. In Leah and Felix's sections, the proximal deixis, evaluative lexical choices, imperative forms, the narration of internal state, modality, elliptic sentences and word order reflect the characters' point of view. Despite the third-person observer, characters experience events autonomously, and their sensory experiences, thoughts, feelings and perceptions are faithfully rendered to the readers.

Unlike these two sections, where the reflectors' spatial, psychological, ideological, attitudinal, social and temporal viewpoints prevail, in the third part, the external speaking voice from being unobtrusive, takes a firm grip on the narrative by commenting on the linguistic choices suggesting thus the constructed nature of the narrative and that of reality itself.

Nathan's viewpoint is related through his own speech, positioning the readers as its listeners. The narrator retreats as Nathan mostly narrates his story in his voice and the deictics, repetitions, grammatical errors, abbreviated forms and catchphrases are all appropriate to him. Three of the narratives in *NW* are comparable with each other as either the thoughts of the characters (Leah and Felix) or their speech (Nathan) are represented with little or no mediation at all. On the other hand, in Natalie's section, the voice of the narrator, who makes metanarrative and gnomic statements, self-references and overt declarations, destroys this illusion, addressing the readers directly.

Besides foregrounding the point of view of the reflector, the narrator demonstrates the intermingling of voices belonging to two characters and blends the objective generic voice with the subjectivity of the linguistic markers of the reflector. Furthermore, the technique of metafiction as the reproduction of the character's point of view and as a final demolition of the objective narrative voice becomes a powerful image of the interplay between reality and fiction.

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