

Narratology: Applying Simpson's Modality in Kafka's *The Judgement*

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Abstract

The term 'point of view' has, in the last decades, turned out to be indispensable for literary studies, is extremely abstruse and hence is in need of discussion and elucidation. According to Chatman (1978) even the regular use of the term 'point of view' embodies three discrete phenomena: perceptual point of view, conceptual point of view and interest point of view. On the contrary, when it is used in a literary sense, the term 'point of view' carries the meaning of two dissimilar notions: that of narration and that of focalization; in Genette's words, the one who speaks and the one who perceives.

Furthermore, whilst analysing point of view in a literary text the three different types of narration should be kept in mind: authorial narration (omniscient), figural narration (the narrator is an active participant in the story and has a limited viewpoint) and finally first person narration (either 'I as protagonist' or 'I as witness', whose perspective on the story world is also limited (Dassler 2003)).

This article sets out an encompassing framework for the analysis of point of view in Kafka's *The Judgement*. Brief critical overview of the story is presented to highlight the stance of the text in the literary world, and then the position of point of view in literature is discussed, after which the different opinions on point of view are explained. Subsequently, there is a practical analysis of some excerpts in the story that shows how

objective values in the story world is achieved as well as how escapism is shaped in *The Judgement*.

Keywords: Narratology, Point of View, First Person Narrator, Omniscient Narrator, Modality.

1. Critical Overview of *the Judgement*

There have been different interpretations of Kafka's short story *The Judgement*, which range from simple and elegant equivalence between Georg's life and Kafka's, to multifaceted understandings regarding the idea of judgement itself. Politzer (1962) argues that the story can be taken as an autobiography through which Kafka explains his thoughts and views about his relationship with Felice Bauer, giving as an example the imminent marriages that Georg and Kafka have had in common. He claims that the detached connection between Georg and his friend (who is in Russia) may embody the bachelor life of Georg, and consequently of Kafka.

In contrast, Tauber (1948) has analysed the story as an explanation of the disagreement between two distinct spheres, which was exposed via the clash between father and son. The sphere of the son is a domain of energetic being in which likelihood and arrangement rule, whereas the domain of the father is a world wherein every pace has an immense status.

In the meantime, Berman (2002) views the story as a dialogue on the essence of judgement in general, identifying its representation in the story as feeble and irrational but, at the same time, essential. Besides, he accentuates that Georg's need to justify why he does not dare to call his alienated friend to his wedding ceremony, is a consequence of distresses which he discards from his sight, but yet still grasps. Likewise, he highlights that Kafka allocates the procedure of discovering the human psyche through scrutinising the incentives behind actions and sentiments with the well-known theorists Friedrich Nietzsche and Sigmund Freud.

In addition to the above arguments, we assume that the story can still be interpreted from another angle; the isolated unmovable friend in Russia employs substantial influence over the major characters in the story, like Georg, his father and his betrothed, Frieda. However, it is known that Kafka in his diaries wrote that the friend in Russia is the most powerful bridge between Georg and his father, because through this connection his father is capable of reaffirming himself as a strong father and his son's opponent, and also Georg is prone to obediently embrace him as such.

2.The Position of Point of View in Literary Analysis

Some may argue about the practicality of studying the notion of point of view in literature. It is evident that, since the era of Aristotle, the different styles of narrating a story have been viewed as a vital point for the consequence of a narrative on readers, albeit narration only regulates the way a story is arbitrated. Point of view also governs the way in which whole elements of the story are observed by the characters, skilfully providing judgement on the story's actions, entities and participants (Lorenz 2008).

Additionally, point of view explicitly sways the reader's perception of the story and his empathy towards characters. As Chatman (1978) stated, the gate to a character's mind in a story is the standard entry to his perspective, and this is the natural method by which readers will probably reach a level to identify themselves with him. Grasping a character's thoughts and views assures a close connection between that character and readers. The feelings of the character could be straightforward, but sometimes it might be a self-deception. In contrast to the narrator, the character would only be unreliable to himself. Therefore, analysing point of view can be considered as vital for the effect of every literary genre.

3.Various Opinions on Point of View

Point of view is often considered as a vantage point from which the story is perceived and narrated.

Sternberg (1978) states that viewpoint is "the most comprehensive principle motivating the selection, combination and distribution of elements in the narrative text" (254). For Friedman (1955), the issue of point of view has constantly been one of subjectivity, namely, the intrusion of an authorial narrator against objectivity, or the fading of the writer. On the contrary, Booth (1961) claims that point of view is not just a technique for subjectivising or objectivising, but a narrative component that is involved with the controlling effects of the writer on the reader, constructing different categories of narrative distance between the two. Furthermore, authors will be able to touch readers' perceptions by means of reliable or unreliable narrators; "for practical criticism probably the most important of these kinds of distance is that between the fallible or unreliable narrator and the implied author who carries the reader with him in judging the narrator" (158).

It is also worth mentioning that the concept of point of view is considered by some critics as the orientating strategy of language used to form the story. A case in point is Fowler (1997/2002) who elaborates Boris Uspensky's viewpoint pattern into three levels: the spatial-temporal, ideological and psychological levels. The

phraseological level, which denotes speech features according to Uspensky, is fused with the psychological level.

Moreover, Fowler (2002) also adopted Uspensky's structure of the perceptual viewpoint with regard to linguistic features containing *verba sentiendi* (verbs of emotion) and words of estrangement. He also incorporates Genette's notion of focalisation, which distinguishes the onlooker of the actions (who perceives) from the narrator (who tells). In doing so, Fowler has an opportunity to scrutinise the identity of the narrator (whether he is only an eye witness or an active participant in the story) and his influence on the narrative. Fowler counts deeply on grammatical properties like tense and modality, along with vocabulary, to classify different categories of narration.

Nonetheless, Simpson (1993), in his book entitled *Language Ideology and Point of View*, espouses the term *modality* which has been used to indicate the attitudinal properties of language. Modality is defined as the narrator's attitude towards the actuality of a proposition conveyed by a sentence, and it is also considered the most important "exponent of the *interpersonal* function of language" (47).

For Simpson the *Modal* framework is adequately comprehensive, relatively self-contained, and will probably provide readers with a practical model with which they will be able to carry their own analyses of modality. Further to this, by applying the modality approach, a number of hypothetical and terminological issues will be cracked. And lastly, those characteristics of modality which are particularly related to examining point of view attain specific significance in the *Modal* 'package'.

The observation of the researcher is that the critical consideration that has been dedicated to point of view in *The Judgement* (1913) is minimal compared to the proliferation of studies regarding characterisation, theme and structure. Yet a close reading of *The Judgement* discloses the significance of narrative viewpoint in the story. Hence, due to the aforementioned reasons, this research adopts Simpson's modal grammar framework to scrutinise the point of view of the character-narrator in *The Judgement*.

4. Analysis

Based on Simpson's modal grammar approach, the story belongs to the Category B (R), in which it is written with an internal perspective by the use of third-person narration, which is intensely coloured with subjective indicators of the character's world-view, or which contains free indirect discourse or internal monologue, and in which the third person narrator is also a participant in the story. As Beissner (1958) asserts, in *The Judgement* no elucidation is forthcoming either for the image viewed or for the reaction felt. The central character of the story is one with the

storyteller even when the character speaks of himself in the third person (as cited in Szanto 1972).

What is more, the excerpts that are chosen for analysis are of negative shading [B (R) negative], which has some common features with A-ve and B (N)-ve. As it is known, the B (R)-ve is rich in having words of estrangement (words like: ‘apparently’, ‘perhaps’, ‘obviously’, ‘seem to’), having a high quantity of epistemic and perception modality, and encompassing evaluative adjectives and adverbs.

On the one hand, in B (R)-ve, modal expressions are the product of the consciousness of the character and not of the external narrator. On the other hand, an omniscient narrator has access to the thoughts and feelings of characters. This would probably produce a two-level point of view, similar to Genette’s notion of ‘double focalization’, which he improves to account for passages where antithetical views are created (Simpson 1993). Thus, for a reader to comprehend the events in *The Judgement*, he should be able to see the story within the narrator’s eyes, and on that level bind himself up with the narrator’s boundaries. The reader, so as to grasp the unity of point of view in *The Judgement*, needs to place himself in the locus of the narrator, and perceive the story world with equivalent eyes.

At the very beginning of the story, the narrator’s (Georg’s) eyes are concentrating on his friend. Thus, Georg’s mind begins to construe and illuminate that the friend has gone in the wrong direction: [In the following quotes we have underlined the modal words, which we will discuss more later] “What should one write to such a man, who had obviously gone off course, a man one could feel sorry for but could not help” (Kafka 1913). Here Georg is talking (using free indirect discourse), although the artificiality of the third person narration detaches the thought at first, as Leech and Short (2010) claim that the use of third person narration usually demarcates “the level of character discourse from that of narrator discourse” (216).

It is certain that the friend is in Russia, but only through Georg’s construal of his friend’s condition does a reader learn that his state is unpleasant. As the story progresses, readers will understand that the friend is probably in a poor financial state, he is possibly wasting his time in Russia, the skin of his face is perhaps growing yellow: “and the yellowish color of his skin seemed to indicate a developing sickness” (Kafka 1913). Readers are not explicitly being told anything from what the friend explains to them, or from what the friend tells Georg, but rather learn from the interpretation of Georg’s mind; thus the above possibilities are only derivative of Georg’s own perspective.

We assume that Georg has an intention of separating himself from his friend, as Simpson (1993) proclaims that Kafka often used this type of narration to indicate a

spatial distance between viewer and object. In the story, Georg appears to dissociate himself from his friend in order to avoid blame. For this reason, it can be clearly seen from Georg's perspective that the friend now has, "*in fact, no homeland and no friends any more, was it not much better for him to remain abroad, just as he was? Given these facts, could one think that he would really advance himself here?*" (Kafka 1913). On the one hand, according to Georg's mind his friend is out of help; whether the friend is truly beyond any aid is a controversial point. On the other hand, Georg claims that his friend would be suffering from loneliness wherever he goes, but again it should be kept in mind that it is only Georg who judges his friend and notices such solitude as bad.

As regards *modality*, the narrator in this story uses a set of modalised constructions to attest his degree of commitment to the factuality of propositions of his expressions. Also, modals would provide support for the narrator to articulate his point of view on the desirability or otherwise of the circumstances of the events referred to (Simpson 1993).

In the sentences we have provided above, modality is quite prominent in three areas: epistemic modality, modal lexical verbs and evaluative adjectives and adverbs. Modals in their epistemic sense are 'should', 'could' (×3) and 'would'; these words signal the degree of Georg's confidence regarding his friend's situation in Russia. Evaluative modalisers are also frequent: 'better', 'developing', 'obviously', 'sorry', 'really', and finally there are the modal lexical verbs: 'seemed to' and 'think'. Georg as the narrator is using such words to demonstrate his certainty of the things that are being spoken about. Such modal expressions represent words of estrangement. In other words, Georg's modality is one of vagueness, bewilderment and alienation.

Further to this, Georg has depicted his friend not only as feeble and lonely, but also as worthless and out of help. According to Georg's mind, "*Perhaps it would not even succeed in bringing him back home at all - he said himself that he no longer understood conditions in his homeland*" (Kafka 1913). Again, epistemic and perception modals lead Georg to postulate that his own explanations are correct; thereby he attempts to discredit the friend and forces him to remain alone: "*So then he would remain in his foreign country in spite of everything, embittered by the advice and a little more estranged from his friends*" (ibid). We suppose the rejection and estrangement of the friend could possibly stand as a rejection of Georg's idea of having the friend in the first place. To support this claim, it is evident from the previous excerpt that Georg tries to push the friend yet further from himself, further than the distant acquaintance, though the friend remains unaffected.

It is also worth noting that, according to Simpson (1993), spatial deixis also intertwines with the B(R)-ve mode similar to that of B(R) +ve, but in this situation distal rather than proximal. Besides, spatial deixis is often used to increase the

disorientating effect produced by the epistemic and perception modalities. So the above extract, which was narrated from the perspective of Georg, can be interpreted as a good example of negative shading (mode) interrelating with spatial dimension.

As regards the composition of Kafka's style, examining point of view appears to be rather complex in the following excerpt.

***Perhaps** while his mother was still alive, his father's unwillingness to accept any point of view in the business except his had prevented Georg from developing a real project of his own; **perhaps** his father, since his mother's death, had grown slacker, although he still worked all the time in the business; **perhaps** fortunate circumstances had played a much more important role - something which was, in fact, highly likely - but in any case in these two years the business had developed very unexpectedly. (Kafka 1913)*

This is simply one sentence which consists of five sentences. The several phrases between the first epistemic modal adverb 'perhaps' and the closing period can be analysed as complete sentences, and each one of them can stand on its own. The effect of running several phrases together is related closely with a repetition of the epistemic modal adverb 'perhaps' three times within those five sentences. Therefore, it could possibly be taken into account that Kafka used the epistemic modals to refrain the character 'Georg' from having the certainty of the complete knowledge of accusation. However, Kafka is not elucidating that all these epistemic modals, 'perhaps', have initiated the success of the father and son in business. In addition to this, readers will only be able to assume that these possibilities might be true, but they cannot prove them so.

5. Conclusion

There have been many interpretations of *The Judgement* [Linguistic approach by J. P. Stern (1981), Structural approach by Charles Bernheimer (1982), and Psychological approach by Walter Sokel (2002)] and each single interpretation will possibly demonstrate a distinctive viewpoint on the story. However, if readers concentrate on any approach as our paper has shown, they will realize that Kafka's style of writing not only challenges their usual ethical decisions, but also drives them to ponder how objective values can be achieved.

Our study has also presented the different readings of the story that push the reader to see the story world each time at a different angle. As a result, this paper demonstrated how Modality can function as a method to designate viewpoint of the character-narrator in the story, and how the events can be perceived through analysing modal expressions.

Further to this, in *The Judgement*, the actions of the story and its gradual emerging perspective propose a single key solution to the central character (Georg), which is a self-knocking-down of the natural existence. Moreover, taken the above analysed excerpts into consideration, an *implied reader*¹ can perceive that in this fictional world no individual liberty is plausible, since the insistence on an uncompromising otherness and the separation from the realistic mandate are represented as the right independence in Kafka's world. Finally, the notion of escapism in the previous work of Kafka has re-emerged in *The Judgement*, but this time, as this research showed, produced itself with the power of an existential commanding.

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¹ See 'The Positioned Reader' by Peter Stockwell (2013) which categorises readers into different types.

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