

The Effects of Narrative Point of View

Narrative point of view has a significant influence on an audience's perception of characters, themes and meaning. This influence is often due to the bias of a first-person narrator as only one version of events is recounted, which leads to responders not knowing the complete truth. In the novel, "We Were Liars" (2014) by E. Lockhart, a teenage girl is on a quest to discover what turned her life upside down. This novel explores themes of love, grief and family, and is confused by an unreliable narrator. Similarly, "Wuthering Heights" (1847) by Emily Brontë, is an account of a stranger exploring the history of two isolated, but rich, families and the man bent on their destruction. "Wuthering Heights", like "We Were Liars", uses an unreliable narrator and both have characters in very similar situations. Narrative point of view influences a story in many ways. This essay will firstly discuss the effect of narrative point of view on the responder's perception of character, then themes, and finally meaning.

Narrative point of view can completely change the way the responder views characters and their mentalities. In "We Were Liars", Cadence shows the audience her perception of Gat saying, "He was contemplation and enthusiasm. Ambition and strong coffee. I could have looked at him forever". In this quote, Lockhart uses techniques such as sensory imagery, metaphor, modality and juxtaposition to get the responder to perceive Gat in a similar, idealised, fashion. The metaphor in the sentence shows how Gat is a representation of "contemplation", "enthusiasm", and "ambition" for Cadence and how his representation of these qualities has the effect of making the audience agree with Cadence's perspective. The sentence also uses very high modality. This fits in with Lockhart's style of writing using metaphors and claiming things to be something that they aren't. The technique of sensory imagery is also used in this quote as Cadence describes Gat as "strong coffee". This gives the responder a visual image of Gat's skin tone but also relates to the smell, taste and effect of coffee to wake and invigorate someone. The effect of this on the audience is that it makes Gat desirable. This causes the responder to develop a one-sided perception of Gat and his character. Conversely, in "Wuthering Heights" Heathcliff is often perceived as evil, with Mr Edgar Linton saying, "No, it was not because I disliked Mr. Heathcliff, but because Mr. Heathcliff dislikes me; and is a most diabolical man, delighting to wrong and ruin those he hates, if they give him the slightest opportunity." This statement uses alliteration in the phrase "...wrong and ruin..." and also in the words "dislikes", "diabolical", and "delighting". The effect of this technique is to make the sentence more profound. From these two quotes it can be observed that Gat is portrayed to the audience as a very favourable

character, while Heathcliff is portrayed as quite evil. Both 'We Were Liars' and 'Wuthering Heights' are similar in the roles of characters. In the two novels, Gat and Heathcliff are both in very similar situations, both being outsiders in rich families with elders who despise them. In 'We Were Liars' the narrator, Cadence, is in love with Gat. In 'Wuthering Heights', Catherine, who's in a very similar role to Cadence, is in love with Heathcliff but does not narrate the story. In this way, different narrative points of view clearly impact the way characters, who could have been quite similar, are perceived as opposites.

In 'We Were Liars' and 'Wuthering Heights' loss is a prominent theme which is also highly impacted by the narrative point of view. In 'We Were Liars' when her Grandmother dies Cadence writes, "My head and shoulders melted first, followed by my hips and knees. Before long I was a puddle..." This quote uses hyperbole, and metaphor to emphasise Cadence's sincere grief at the loss of her Grandmother and make a profound impression on the responder. The hyperbole starts from the first clause, "My head and shoulders melted..." and continues throughout the passage. Obviously, Cadence is not actually melting, but this sentence fits in with Lockhart's style of extended metaphor and helps convey the magnitude of Cadence's grief to the audience. A slightly different perspective of loss can be seen in 'Wuthering Heights'. Nelly recounts Cathy's reaction to Edgar Linton's death saying, "Whether Catherine had spent her tears, or whether the grief were too weighty to let them flow, she sat there dry-eyed till the sun rose; she sat till noon..." The metaphor in the clause "the grief were too weighty" is used by Brontë to show the responder the pressure Cathy is feeling after her father's death and how it weighs down on her. The use of anaphora in the repetition of the words "she sat" also emphasises Cathy's grief at her loss, as she is unable to do anything but sit in despair. This example is written from a third-person perspective and Cathy's grief is described in third-person as Nelly is an observer of it. This creates an important difference from Cadence's first-person account of her grief in 'We Were Liars'. Nelly's account is saddening for the responder as it describes Cathy's grief, but because of the third-person narrative point of view the responder doesn't feel the grief of loss as much as they do in Cadence's statement. In this way, a third-person narrative point of view has given a completely different perspective of the theme of loss, compared to that of the first-person narrative point of view.

The responder's perception of meaning is also often extremely dependent on narrative point of view. Different points of view or a different character's account of events could lead to a completely different meaning being conveyed to the audience. In 'We Were Liars' one possible underlying

message is that you should be grateful for what you have. This is indicated by one of Cadence's variations in which a merchant steals a rose for his daughter and loses her to the beast from whom he stole. This story alludes to 'Beauty and the Beast' and has parallels to Cadence's relationship with Gat and her grandfather's opinion on it. The story shows that it is important to be grateful for what you have, because otherwise you might lose it. Because Cadence writes these stories as a metaphor of her life it is clear that Cadence believes that the aunties and Granddad are not grateful enough for their possessions. The fact that they are, eventually, united through the loss of their children, like the father lost Beauty, indicates that one of the main morals of the story is to be grateful for what you have. This is a meaning that could also have been portrayed in 'Wuthering Heights'. In 'Wuthering Heights', Heathcliff and Catherine are desperately in love, yet marry others. They wish to be together and end up not enjoying the life they are living. This is illustrated by Catherine's quote about Heathcliff: "If all else perished, and he remained, I should still continue to be; and if all else remained, and he were annihilated, the universe would turn to a mighty stranger." This statement uses some powerful differences in word choice like "perished", "remained" and "annihilated". The effect of this is that it shows the responder how Catherine feels she is not complete without Heathcliff. Because both lovers end up unhappy with their lives and their romances the moral to be grateful for what you have is once again seen. However, despite this meaning being present, it is not brought up as it is in 'We Were Liars'. This is due to the first-person narration of 'Wuthering Heights', which doesn't allow the responder to see a complete picture, as opposed to the third-person narration of Cadence's written story. In this way, a third-person narrative point of view has made it much easier for a responder to identify one of the key meanings in a novel.

In conclusion, different narrative points of view can have large impacts on a responder's perception of characters, themes, and meaning. These impacts are often due to the specific role, bias, unreliability and singular perception of events of a first-person narrator. A responder's perception of a character's mentality can be greatly altered depending on the role of the narrator. The impact of themes can be significantly heightened by first-person narration compared to third. Finally, different meanings in novels may or may not be expressed due to different narrative points of view. From these points, it can be easily seen how narrative point of view can significantly influence a responder's perception of a story in terms of character, theme, and meaning.