

## The narrator and their role

All novels have a narrator of some sort: someone who tells the story. It is important to explore the different types of narrator and the reasons behind an author's choice because it usually has an impact on the narrative and the way in which we view what is written.

Firstly, write definitions for each of the following types of narrator:

Type of narrator	Definition
First person	
Third person	
Omniscient	
Unreliable	
Multiple	
Stream of consciousness	

Now look at the extracts on the following pages and decide which type of narrator is being used in each case. You will find that there is sometimes more than one definition for an extract and you may disagree on some. What is important in the exercise is not that you find a definitive answer for each one but that you can argue why you believe a certain label fits an extract and that you can provide proof from the text as your evidence. Next, think about why an author would want to use a particular type of narrative voice; why, for example, would a writer want to use an unreliable narrator or why might it be effective to have multiple narrators or perspectives on an event?

Only Gatsby, the man who gives his name to this book, was exempt from my reaction – Gatsby, who represented everything for which I have an unaffected scorn. If personality is an unbroken series of successful gestures, then there was something gorgeous about him, some heightened sensitivity to the promises of life, as if he were related to one of those intricate machines that register earthquakes ten thousand miles away. ... No, Gatsby turned out all right at the end; it is what preyed on Gatsby, what foul dust floated in the wake of his dreams that temporarily closed out my interest in the abortive sorrows and shortwinded elations of men.

From: *The Great Gatsby* by F Scott Fitzgerald, 1926

'Shut up that moaning.' Luster said. 'I can't make them come if they ain't coming, no can I. If you don't hush up, mammy ain't going to have no birthday for you. You don't hush, you know I going to do. I going to eat that cake all up. Eat them candles, too. Eat all them thirty-three candles. Come on, let's go down to the branch. I got to find my quarter. Maybe we can find one of them balls. Here. Here they is. Way over your ear. See.' He came to the fence and pointed his arm. 'See them. They ain't coming back here no more. Come on.'

We went along the fence and came to the garden fence, where our shadows were. My shadow was higher than Luster's on the fence. We came to the broken place and went through it.

'Wait a minute.' Luster said. 'You snagged on that nail again. Can't you never crawl through here without snagging on that nail.'

*Caddy uncaught me and we crawled through. Uncle Maury said to not let anybody see us, so we better stoop over, Caddy said. Stoop over, see. Like this, see. We stooped over and crossed the garden, where the flowers rasped and rattled against us. The ground was hard. We climbed the fence, where the dogs were grunting and snuffing. I expect they're sorry because one of them got killed today, Caddy said. The ground was hard, churned and knotted.*

From: *The Sound and the Fury* by William Faulkner, 1929

The name on the driving licence in his wallet was Paul Bradley. 'Paul Bradley' was a nicely forgettable name. He was several degrees of separation away from his real name now, a name that no longer felt as if it had ever belonged to him. When he wasn't working he often (but not always) went by the name 'Ray'.

...

Martin had never done anything like that in his life before. He didn't even kill flies in the house, instead he patiently stalked them, trapping them with a glass and a plate before letting them free. The mice will inherit the earth. He was fifty and had never knowingly committed an act of violence against another living creature, although sometimes he thought might be more to do with cowardice than pacifism.

...

Gloria hadn't really seen what had happened. By the time the rumour of it had rippled down the spine of the office she suspected it had become a Chinese whisper, *Someone had been murdered. Queue-jumping probably,* she said matter-of-factly to a twittery Pam standing next to her. Gloria was stoical in queues, irritated by people who complained and shuffled as if their individual queuing was in some way a mark of their individuality.

From: *The Good Turn* by Kate Atkinson, 2006

'My darling,' I said, 'my Maxim, my love.' I laid his hands against my face, I put my lips against them.

'Do you understand?' he said, 'do you, do you?'

'Yes,' I said, 'my sweet, my love.' But I looked away from him so he should not see my face. What did it matter whether I understood him or not? My heart was light like a feather floating in the air. He had never loved Rebecca.

'I don't want to look back on those years,' he said slowly. 'I don't want even to tell you about them. The shame and the degradation. The lie we lived, she and I. The shabby, sordid farce we played together. Before friends, before relations, even before the servants, before faithful, trusting creatures like old Frith. They all believed in her dream here, they all admired her, they never knew how she laughed at them behind their backs, jeered at them, mimicked them.'

From: *Rebecca* by Daphne Du Maurier, 1938

The past is a foreign country: they do things differently there.

When I came upon the diary it was lying at the bottom of a rather watered red cardboard-collar box, in which as a small boy I kept my Eton collars. Some one, probably my mother, had filled it with treasures dating from those days. ...

I did not want to touch it and told myself that this was because it challenged my memory: I was proud of my memory and disliked having it prompted. I sat staring at the diary, as at a blank space in a crossword puzzle.

...

The invitation came about in this way. Maudsley had never been a special friend of mine, as witness the fact that I have forgotten his Christian name. Perhaps it will come to me later; it may be one of the things that my memory fights shy of. But in those days schoolboys seldom called each other by their first names. These were regarded simply as a liability, though not such a heavy liability as one's middle name, which it was just foolhardy to reveal.

From: *The Go-Between* by L P Hartley, 1953

A wide plain, where the broadening river hurries on between its green banks to the sea, and the loving tide, rushing to meet it, checks its passage with an impetuous embrace. On this mighty tide the black ships – laden with the fresh-scented fir-planks, with rounded sacks of oil-bearing seed, or with the dazzling glitter of coal – are borne along to the town of St Ogg's, which shows its aged, fluted red roof and the broad gables of its wharves between the low wooded hill and the river bringing the water with a soft purple hue under the transient glance of this February sun.

From: *The Mill on the Floss* by George Eliot, 1880

It was admitted by all her friends, and also by her enemies, - who were in truth the more numerous and active body of the two, - that Lizzie Greystock had done very well with herself. We will tell the story of Lizzie Greystock from the beginning, but we will not dwell over it at great length, as we might do if we loved her. She was the only child of old Admiral Greystock, whose latter years of his life was much perplexed by the possession of a daughter. The admiral was a man who liked whist, wine, - and wickedness in general we may perhaps say, - and whose ambition it was to live every day of his life up to the end of it. People say that he succeeded, and that the whist, wine, and wickedness were there, at the side even of his dying bed.

From: *The Eustace Diamonds* by Anthony Trollope, 1873