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Final Thesis  
**The pros and cons of Multi-Pov  
through the analysis of contemporary novels  
and the self-published novel *All that Lies Ahead***

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To all the Raffaella Cerullo who couldn't write their own stories,  
and to the Elena Greco who wrote them for them.

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## 1. Introduction

Stories can be told through different consciousnesses. Readers can move from one viewpoint to another, and what initially appears to be a shared reality becomes something layered and sometimes contradictory. Nowadays, this phenomenon is frequently referred to as Multi-Pov, yet the label can be deceptively simple: it tends to group together narrative solutions that are technically very different. A novel can rotate narrators in the first person, keep a stable third-person narrator while shifting focalization, combine multiple perspectives with an authorial framework, or even create the appearance of multi-perspectivity without fully committing to it. Because of this variety, Multi-Pov is not only a matter of “how many voices” are present, but of how voice, focalization, and access to consciousness are organized and what this organization allows the narrative to achieve.

This thesis investigates Multi-Pov narration as a structural strategy; a way of distributing information and interiority across a story, with specific effects on the reader’s experience. The aim is not to declare Multi-Pov better than other narrative structures, but to understand when it works, how it works, and what risks does it involve. In particular, the thesis explores how Multi-Pov can intensify psychological intimacy, generate suspense through fragmentation and recomposition, or create redundancy and disorientation if the alternation is not carefully designed. This approach also requires keeping one distinction constantly clear: the difference between who speaks (narrative voice) and who sees (focalization). In narratology, these categories are treated as separate but interacting systems; and Multi-Pov becomes most interesting precisely where they are combined.

My interest in this topic is both academic and personal. From an academic perspective, Multi-Pov is a visible narrative technique in contemporary publishing, and can be praised for its ability

to represent complexity. At the same time, from a writer's perspective, it is also one of the most demanding techniques to manage. My own novel, *All That Lies Ahead*, is structured around Multi-Pov, and the decision to write it in this way raised practical questions that could not be answered by intuition alone. I wanted to understand what Multi-Pov can offer that a more traditional authorial narration might not. In other words, the technique became both an object of study and a concrete personal problem; to use Multi-Pov effectively, I needed to understand its strengths and its limits.

By combining theoretical tools with close reading (and by including a serial, self-published project as a case study) this thesis aims to offer a clearer vocabulary for describing Multi-Pov choices and evaluating their narrative consequences.

Within this framework, the thesis develops two main guiding questions. The first is: Is Multi-POV functional in the novels analyzed, and if so, in what way? "Functional" here does not mean flawless; it means that the technique is used with a recognizable purpose and produces effects that are coherent with the narrative's design. The second question is: Why choose Multi-Pov when authorial narration could axiomatically provide structural control more easily? This question matters because Multi-Pov is frequently justified in broad terms, e.g., "it adds depth", but depth alone is not an automatic result of alternation. A novel can switch perspectives and still feel uniform; it can multiply viewpoints and still fail to build a meaningful contrast. The thesis therefore treats Multi-Pov not as a guarantee of complexity, but as a technique whose value depends on how it is executed

Methodologically, the thesis combines mapping the complex taxonomy of the narratological conversation on voice and perspective with textual analysis. The theoretical chapters draw mainly on classical narratological frameworks, particularly the models associated with Gérard Genette, Franz K. Stanzel and Mike Bal, while also incorporating contributions that refine or problematize those models, such as Monika Fludernik's discussion on authorial narration. A

large section is dedicated to Dorrit Cohn's work on the representation of consciousness, since Multi-Pov is ultimately a technique that depends on how a text can render different "centers of consciousness." On the analytical side, I used close reading to track how narrative voice and focalization work at the level of openings, and through a selection of relevant. Rather than treating each novel as a general example, the analysis focuses on narrative mechanisms: how a perspective shift is introduced, how it changes what the reader can know, how it shapes tone and interior access, and whether the alternation creates meaningful difference or repeats content.

The corpus was selected to highlight three different uses of Multi-Pov in contemporary fiction. *Blue Sisters* is examined as a novel where Multi-Pov works through a stable narrative voice that is repeatedly retuned to different characters, producing a strong sense of psychological proximity while maintaining overall coherence. *Kala* is analyzed as a text where Multi-Pov is closely tied to suspense; the rotation of voices becomes a structural device that distributes knowledge unevenly and turns interpretation into a process of recomposition. *Hazel Says No* offers a critical case; it shows how a text can create the expectation of Multi-Pov while relying mainly on a stable authorial narration with variable focalization, raising important questions about what counts as Multi-Pov in a "strong" sense and what remains closer to guided reframing.

Finally, the thesis includes a creative and critical chapter on *All That Lies Ahead*, an ongoing Multi-Pov project published serially. This chapter functions as both a case study and a reflective lens; it applies the same narratological tools used for the published novels to a work-in-progress, and it addresses the need for orientation in episodic reading; when chapters are read days or weeks apart, perspective shifts must be signaled clearly and consistently, and structural labels, e.g. place/date/focalizer headings, become part of the Multi-Pov technique rather than mere paratext.

The thesis is structured in four parts. Chapter 2 establishes the theoretical foundation; it clarifies key narratological terms (narrative levels, voice, focalization, and narrative minds), defines what Multi-Pov/multiperspectivity means and outlines the main advantages and risks of multiple focalization, especially when it interacts with authorial narration. Chapter 3 applies this framework to the three selected novels, first providing the stories overviews and then developing close analyses of how Multi-Pov is built and what it accomplishes in each text. The chapter ends by returning to the question of functionality, comparing the three narrative designs and identifying the conditions under which Multi-Pov becomes an effective organizing principle. Chapter 4 presents my narrative project; it briefly explains the platform where I published it, i.e. Substack, and then analyses how Multi-Pov operates in *All That Lies Ahead*, focusing on how perspective rotation and mind-style modulation can be managed in a form that unfolds over time. The conclusion draws together the main findings; Multi-Pov emerges as a powerful but demanding technique, one that succeeds when its internal logic is clear and when perspective changes do real work while it becomes less convincing when rotation is superficial or when fragmentation is not balanced by a coherent design.

## 2. The Narrative Technique of Multi-Pov

### 2.1 Required Definitions, Narrative Levels, Narrative Voices and Narrative Minds

Before addressing the Multi-Pov technique, it is necessary to clarify the terms of narratology that I will use and the narrative theories developed over the years by those who have studied narratology. Firstly, because it cannot be taken for granted that all readers, understood as readers of fictional narratives, are familiar with these terms and the discussions that have arisen over time around fiction; secondly, precise definitions of basic narratological terms such as narrative levels, voices, and modes of focalization are essential to examine the contemporary novels of Chapter 3 that use the Multi-Pov as a narrative technique.

This first section draws primarily on Gérard Genette's structuralist framework as presented in *Narrative Discourse: An Essay on Method*, one of the most influential books for the development of narratology, originally published in French as *Discours du récit* (1972) and translated in English in 1980 by Jane E. Lewin and systematized by Monika Fludernik in *An Introduction to Narratology* (2009) (among many others). Genette's model is still a central reference point in narratological studies and provides a stable terminology that constitutes the so-called classical narratology.

According with Fludernik's *An Introduction to Narratology*, Genette adheres to the linguistic communication<sup>1</sup> model: this model presupposes the presence of an "addresser" sending a message to an "addressee" and it applies to written texts.

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<sup>1</sup> Oxford Reference defines "Linguistic communication model" as "A linguistic model of interpersonal communication outlined in 1960 by Jakobson. Drawing on work by Bühler dating from the 1930s, he proposed a model of verbal communication which moved beyond basic transmission models, highlighting the importance of the codes and social contexts involved. He outlines what he regards as the six constitutive factors in any act of verbal communication: 'The addresser sends a message to the addressee. To be operative the message requires a context referred to ('referent' in another, somewhat ambivalent, nomenclature), seizable by the addressee, and either verbal or capable of being verbalized, a code fully, or at least partially, common to the addresser and

Genette's narrative theory is based on structuralist principles; he identifies three levels of narrative: "narration", "discourse" and "story" (98). The "story" is the chronological order of events, the "discourse" is the organization that the narrator gives to the story, and the "narration" is the act of narrating itself and the relationship between narrator and text. The relationships between these three fundamental elements are dictated by "voice," "tense," and "mode" (98). Genette begins by making a distinction between "voice" and "mode"; in simple terms, "voice" is 'Who speaks?' and mode is 'Who sees?' or the "perspective from which the story is presented" (98). The term Genette uses to indicate perspective is "focalization", as we will see in what follows.

The element of "voice", the most important in Genette's narrative analysis, is made up of three elements: "time of narration" (subsequent simultaneous, prior and interpolated), "person" (homodiegetic and heterodiegetic) and "narrative levels" (intradiegetic, extradiegetic and hypodiegetic/metadiegetic).

The main purpose of the narrative levels is to describe the interlocking structure between the act of narrating and the story being told.

Genette created a distinction between the level of the story, calling it the "diegetic level," and the level of the narration, calling it the "extradiegetic level" (100). The diegetic level refers to everything that is part of the narrative universe of a story, such as the plot, the characters, the setting, and the events that occur within it.

The "extradiegetic level," on the other hand, as the term itself suggests is external to the diegesis. Axiomatically, the authorial narrator belongs to this level as he does not participate in

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addressee (or in other words, to the encoder and decoder of the message); and finally, a contact, a physical channel and psychological connection between the addresser and the addressee, enabling both of them to stay in communication.' Jakobson proposes that each of these six factors (addresser, message, context, contact, code, and addressee) determines a different linguistic function. His model demonstrates that messages and meanings cannot be isolated from contextual factors." *Oxford Reference*, Oxford University Press, [www.oxfordreference.com/display/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803100107516](http://www.oxfordreference.com/display/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803100107516). Accessed 26 Jan. 2026.

the events of the story but knows everything about the characters who belong to the “diegetic level” (157). Genette also creates a distinction between “the diegetic level” and the “embedded diegetic” level, i.e., the story within the story.

To define this “story within the story,” Genette uses the term “metadiegetic.” Mieke Bal calls it “hypodiegetic” to clarify the term originally used by Genette could appear misleading<sup>2</sup> (100). The “hypodiegetic” level occurs when, for example, one character tells a story to another character (157).

As it is well known, Genette creates a distinction between “voice” and “focalization”.

The term “voice” refers to the narrator's relationship to the story, specifically their role and existence in relation to the events narrated and this relationship can be of two types: “homodiegetic” and “heterodiegetic.”

A “homodiegetic narrator” is a character who tells a story in which she/he is a participant and this kind of narrator uses the first-person pronoun “I” to narrate events she/he has experienced, either as a main character or a side character, while a “heterodiegetic narrator” is a third-person narrator who is not a character in the story and exists outside the fictional world (162).

Focalization, on the other hand, is the narrative point of view, i.e., “Who sees?” (158), and is divided into three types: “zero,” in which the narrator is omniscient and knows everything; “internal,” when information is limited to what the characters perceive, know, remember, and interpret, in this case the narrator does not exceed the cognitive boundaries of the focalizer; and “external,” in which the narrator is an outside observer, like a camera, who merely records without accessing the characters' thoughts.

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<sup>2</sup> By analogy with metalinguistic, one would expect metadiegetic to refer to a story about rather than within a story

In the analysis of the books in Chapter 3, the types of narrators will be associated with the types of focalizations.

Frank Karl Stanzel is another key figure of the so-called classical narratology, he is considered Genette's German counterpart; his work *A Theory of Narrative* (1984), originally published as *Theorie des Erzählens* in 1982 is a masterpiece in field of narratology. Various narratologists have long debated which theory to use, pointing out the limitations of both, as we will see later.

In “Teller-Characters and Reflector-Characters in Narrative Theory,” published in 1981 in *Poetics Today*, Stanzel summarizes his own theory and explains that it focuses primarily on the process of narrative transmission.

The theory assumes that “mediacy” (Mittelbarkeit) is a “generic characteristic” that distinguishes fiction from drama, poetry, and cinema, because it always implies a mediator of the story (5). Stanzel argues that this mediation must be analyzed through three fundamental oppositions: “identity/non-identity of the realism of the fictional characters and of the narrator,” i.e., first and third person; “internal/external perspective,” i.e., limited focus or omniscience; and “teller-character/reflector-character” as agents of transmission (telling/showing) (5).

These oppositions are not descriptive but structural; a transition from one pole to the other changes the meaning of the text. According to Stanzel, these distinctions date back “to the beginnings of literary theory” because they refer to the concepts of “diegesis” and “mimesis”<sup>3</sup> (6).

According to Stanzel the main function of the “teller character” is “to tell, narrate, report, to communicate with the reader, to quote witnesses and sources, to comment on the story, to

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<sup>3</sup> The terms *mimesis* and *diegesis* are used in this way by Plato in Book III of the *Republic* (392D–394D) when he says the narrator of the Homeric epics speaks ‘in his own voice’ (diegesis), or lets the characters speak (mimesis). In Genette’s terminology, “diegesis” refers to the plot or story level of the narrative and mimesis” is the story understood as a direct representation of events, as opposed to the narrative that recounts them. (Fludernik 151)

anticipate the outcome of an action or to recapitulate what has happened before the story happens” (6). Meanwhile, the function of the “reflector character” is “to mirror in his consciousness what is going on in the world outside or inside himself” (6). A “reflector character” never narrates with the intention of giving voice to his perceptions, feelings, and thoughts, because his goal is not to recount them to the reader. This creates the illusion in the readers that they are seeing the story directly.

Typically, the “teller character” “comprise[s] all kind of authorial narrators” (regardless of the person used) “who actually function as narrators in the sense that they address the reader, comment on the story or on the act of narration” (7).

Stanzel is keen to point out that first-person narrators who do not openly verbalize their thoughts and who do not communicate with the reader but only with themselves are then “reflector characters.”

Stanzel also argues that the reading and interpretation of a story is influenced by the choice of using a “teller character” or a “reflector character” as “the main agent of narrative transmission” (7).

What is narrated by a “teller character” is intended to be a “complete record of events,” (8) and any gaps in information can be attributed to the narrator. The same cannot be said when we have a reflector character; consciousness will be “fragmented” and “isolated,” and experience will be limited to the character's subjective perception (8).

The two types of characters also differ in terms of “reliability.” According to Stanzel, it is incorrect to extend the concept of “unreliable narrator” to reflector characters, as even a “teller” can lie and manipulate. In Stanzel's model, the unreliable narrator is a category that works when there is a teller; someone who tells something to an addressee and selects, orders, comments, justifies, and therefore can also manipulate. There is a discursive responsibility; that character

can be caught in contradictions, can lie, can be strategically reticent. The “unreliability” therefore concerns the story (the narrative as discourse), not just perception.

A “reflector,” on the other hand, as already pointed out, does not communicate, and the reader has access to his mind, so there can be no question of reliability. In Stanzel's figural narrative situation, the reflector does not “tell” the story; the story reveals itself through his experience. Therefore, for Stanzel, calling a reflector an “unreliable narrator” is incorrect because the reflector does not produce a narrative discourse addressed to someone; he does not choose to lie as a narrator because what the reader sees is a perceptual mediation, not a narrative strategy. To sustain what I just stated I find it useful to give two examples from two of the books I will analyze soon; *Blue Sisters* and *Kala*:

Lucky was late. Irresponsibly, hopelessly late, so much so that she risked losing her job. At noon she had a fitting at a fashion house in the Marais, but noon had passed ten minutes ago and she was still on the métro, miles away. The night before she had been at a fashion week party, and while enjoying the unlimited drinks (the only kind of drinks she was interested in), she had met a couple of graffiti artists.  
(Mellors 13)

The first passage is from *Blue Sisters* and it is constructed as an internal focalization; the narrative is in the third person, but the reader perceives the character's urgency right from the start: “Lucky was late. Irresponsibly, hopelessly late...” In Stanzel’s terms, Lucky is a reflector character; there is not an “I” who narrates and organizes retrospectively for the reader, but a figural presentation in which the narrative is filtered by a specific character’s consciousness.

On the contrary, in *Kala*, we have a teller character:

I'm over thirty and I still love it when summer bursts into this city. That school holiday atmosphere. As soon as I catch the scent of sun cream or freshly cut grass, I feel butterflies in my stomach. And every time, it's like a surprise. It's as if every

year I forget that all these smells exist, and then *bam!* The world becomes young again. The evenings getting longer, the buzzing of the bees, all these beautiful things. (Walsh 16)

Mush, the teller character, speaks in the first person, with comments and linguistic markers (“like”, “bam!”). The opening lines “I’m over thirty and I still love it when summer explodes in this city...” establish a narrator-person who introduces himself and selects details important to him. I will return to this once I’ll discuss *Kala* in Chapter 3.

In Stanzel, this is the point; here, the mediating instance is a narrator not just a center of consciousness. Even when Mush describes sensations “As soon as I catch the scent...”, he does so within a narrative framework, full of commentary and evaluation.

Although Genette and Stanzel theories are among the most authoritative in their field, some narratologists have identified their limitations.

Monika Fludernik's article "New Wine in Old Bottles? Voice, Focalization, and New Writing" (2001) demonstrates that the concepts of narrative voice and focalization in narratology as examined by Genette and Stanzel, i.e., classical narratology, are insufficient when faced with more modern narrative practices.

Fludernik reconstructs the contrast between Genette and Stanzel; Genette rigidly separates “voice” and “focalization,” while Stanzel was more interested in finding fixed combinations between perspective and voice. Stanzel himself was criticized by Genette in *Narrative Discourse* as being among the scholars who confused “voice” (who speaks) with “focalization” (who sees).

As for Stanzel's model, Fludernik argues that “it is confined by its circular typology and has difficulties accommodating new narrative techniques” (621) and that “Stanzel's model is also less flexible in explaining new and daring combinations” (621).

Genette, on the other hand, rejects on principle the possibility of narration without a narrator, but Fludernik argues that this position stems from a communicational bias, namely that of treating every narrative text as an act of real communication, and therefore with a speaker and an addressee. In Fludernik's words: "for Genette the narrative voice is ultimately a reflection of the voice of the author, the actual transmitter of the narrative qua message" (622). She considers Genette's "insistence on the narrative voice as a constitutive element of texts" to be "theoretically suspect" and an "interpretative move in which the reader concludes from the presence of a narrative discourse that somebody must be narrating the story and that therefore there must be a hidden narrator (or narrative voice) in the text" (622).

Based on this latter opinion on Genette's theory, Fludernik points out that "real level" readers do indeed apply the "communicational framework" to narrative texts and calls this phenomenon "narrativization," that is, the act of projecting "real-life parameters into the reading process and, if at all possible, treating the text as a real-life instance of narrating" (623). For Fludernik, this may be a "useful strategy" for "real level" readers, but it is limiting for scholars.

I have reported Fludernik's criticisms to emphasize that these theories may have limitations and that it is right to bear them in mind when analyzing a work.

Nevertheless, as already stated, in this thesis I will mainly use the models proposed by Stanzel and Genette, as the texts I will analyze do not have complicated prose and the aim is to understand the potential of the Multi-Pov technique.

Another expert in the field of narratology who must be mentioned here, and whose work allows me to advance some considerations on the use of Multi-Pov, is Dorrit Cohn.

Dorrit Cohn, a scholar of comparative literature and narratology, is known for her fundamental contribution to the study of the representation of consciousness in narrative texts.

Her book *Transparent Minds: Narrative Modes for Presenting Consciousness in Fiction* (1978) is a seminal work in the field of narratology, in which she explores the ways in which authors

make the minds of characters “transparent” through various narrative techniques. We must therefore bear in mind that in this case we are not going to talk about “Who speaks?” or “Who sees?”, but we are going to reflect on the “minds” of the characters, thus entering a linguistic field that belongs exclusively to fiction and that “depends on the presence of fictional minds within the text” (29). According to Cohn, narrative fiction is “the only literary genre and the only narrative form in which everything that remains unsaid about a third person can be represented” (29).

I will now briefly summarize Cohn's theories regarding the three major techniques of third-person narrations and the retrospective technique of first-person narration. Furthermore, during the summary, I will ask myself questions about how these techniques could be linked to Multi-Pov, but I will only explore them in depth in the following section.

According to Cohn, the most realistic and well-rounded characters in fictional narration are “those we know most intimately” and “whom we would not be able to know so deeply even in real life” (27). Based on this assumption, I pose the first question, which will anticipate what I will discuss in the following chapters: the texts examined by Cohn mostly use a single character; therefore, we can see that we have the “point of view” of a single character. If hypothetically there were multiple points of view, as in the case of Multi-Pov, how these multiple points of view provide a deeper knowledge of the characters minds than authorial narration? I will answer this question mainly with the analysis of *Blue Sisters*.

The first technique Cohn analyzes in *Transparent Minds* is “psycho-narration,” described as “the narrator’s discourse about a character’s consciousness” (14), a technique that maintains the third-person reference, the basic tense of narration, which has “almost unlimited flexibility over time” (34) and that can be either “dissonant” or “consonant”. Cohn points out that this type of narrative has been mistakenly called “omniscient” and “internal analysis”; firstly, anything can be described in an omniscient manner, not just the psyche, and secondly, the idea

of “internal” implies a process that “takes place in the mind rather than a process that is applied to the mind”, whereas the term “psycho-narration” refers to both the object and the activity it denotes (32-33).

A characteristic of the psycho-narration of the early novels examined by Cohn, mainly written in the 1800s, is that the narrator uses his own language to describe the thoughts and inner life of a character, but Cohn notes that this approach risks leading to a “markedly authorial narrative” in which “the inner life of a single character becomes a sounding board for general truths” and where “it almost seems as if the authorial narrator jealously guards his prerogative as the only thinking being” (43-44). However, we must remember that Cohn's analysis follows a historical order and that, with the increasing interest in the human psyche witnessed around the turn of the twentieth century, writers are also becoming more interested in the minds of their characters.

Cohn goes on to say that when the most extreme forms of authorial narration are abandoned and fictional consciousness begins to take center stage, the ways of narrating the latter begin to vary. She identifies two of these: “dissonant” and “consonant.”

Dissonant psycho-narration is dominated by a clearly visible narrator who, while focusing meticulously on the psyche he describes, remains distant from it, typically through an ironic tone, implicit moral judgment, and a markedly abstract analytical vocabulary that, according to Cohn, refers to the figure of the psychiatrist who “with his diagnostic notes distances himself from his patient's free associations” (47).

These characteristics indicate that the narrator possesses superior knowledge of the character's life and mind, but the stronger this authorial style is, the more marked is the cognitive privilege that allows him to give voice to thoughts that the character does not want to admit to himself/herself. Dissonance is typical of those narrators who want to provide moral guidance.

With consonant psycho-narration, on the other hand, the narrator remains hidden and is willing to merge with the character's consciousness. This happens when the narrative voice is very discreet, giving priority to the character's thoughts and feelings as they are expressed. Furthermore, what the narrator knows about the character seems to coincide with what the character knows about himself; there is no cognitive privilege as in the case of dissonance.

Two of the most important characteristics of psycho-narration are: the “almost unlimited temporal flexibility” (it can cover a long period of time but also expand the moment) (53-55) and that it can effectively articulate a psychic life that remains “shadowy,” thus allowing the character, through the narrator, to express thoughts and feelings that they would not be able to express in words.

The second technique presented by Cohn regarding the third person narration is the “quoted monologue.”

Cohn defines the “quoted monologue” as “a character's mental discourse” and it can be easily recognized compared to other techniques due to its “overarching grammatical structure,” i.e., its “reference to the thinking self in the first person, and to the narrated moment in the present tense” (13). As with psycho-narration, Cohn reports that the term “interior monologue” could be subject to “terminological ambiguity” and therefore prefers to make a distinction between “quoted (interior) monologue” and “autonomous (interior) monologue.” The former refers to a third-person narrative mediated by a narrator, while the latter refers to the narrative genre in the first person, “unmediated and apparently self-generated” (15).

Here too, Cohn follows the historical development of the novel; before realism, quoted monologues were introduced by the narrator (e.g., “he/she exclaimed”) and later became silent, “standard signs” (60) were rarely reported, and “introductory phrases” were often omitted (62). A prime example is James Joyce's *Ulysses*, which became a hallmark of stream-of-consciousness, creating the impression of reading unmediated figural thought. Although quoted

monologue may give the impression of transporting the reader directly into the character's mind, Cohn points out that the monologizing character in a third-person narrative is always “more or less subordinated to the narrator” (66) and that it is up to the narrator to decide whether to reduce the distance between himself and the character.

The last technique described by Cohn for third-person narration is the “narrated monologue.” The narrated monologue is commonly called free indirect discourse (FID) and, although it is very complex, it is the most widely used technique for representing figural consciousness (13). Cohn defines it as “the technique for rendering a character's thought in his own idiom while maintaining the third-person reference and the basic tense of narration” (100) and describes it as “transposed thought quotations” (109). We begin to find examples of narrated monologue with realism, and it reached its peak in the twentieth century with psychological novels.

A useful method for distinguishing and identifying narrated monologue is to examine its linguistic relationship with the techniques already mentioned and fictional narrative; tense and person distinguish it from quoted monologue, while the absence of mental verbs distinguishes it from psycho-narration.

The narrated monologue “imitates the language the character uses when speaking to himself without abandoning the grammar the narrator uses to talk about him” (112), thus creating a juxtaposition of the two voices and a “characteristic indeterminateness.” When the two figures of the character and the narrator get too close, the reader may not understand “who speaks” or “who sees” (113).

Finally, we come to the representation of consciousness in first-person narrative; Cohn identifies four retrospective techniques for first-person: self-narration, self-quoted monologue, self-narrated monologue and memory monologue.

In first-person retrospective narration, Cohn argues that the narrator is “split into two different manifestations of the same self: one who narrates and one who experiences,” (143) creating a temporal and psychological separation between the two.

In the next chapter, I will quote passages from the book *Kala*, which is partly narrated in the first person in the form of “self-narration” and “self-narrated monologue.” Therefore, I will now explain only these two narrative techniques.

When self-narration is present, the narrator is lucid, “looking back on a past steeped in ignorance, confusion, and disappointment” (145), and the result of this introspection should lead to “elucidations and interpretations,” emphasizing “the cognitive privilege of the narrating self over the living self” (149).

Self-narration too can be “consonant” or “dissonant.” Self-narration is dissonant when the narrator creates a distance or conflict with their past self, and consonant, when the narrator identifies with or adopts the perspective of their past self. Furthermore, just like psycho-narration, it can involve irony or a sense of moral or cognitive superiority of the present self over the past self.

As for the self-narrated monologue, it often corresponds to the narrated monologue of third-person stories, “the relationship between the narrating self and the living-self corresponds to the relationship between the narrator and the character of a third-person fictional novel” (162).

Cohn points out that in first-person stories, there may be moments when the narrator makes statements about past events that are contradicted shortly afterwards by what happens or asks questions that are answered within a short narrative arc. When we encounter this type of narration, it is easy to recognize it because, despite the “lack of quotation marks and the absence of the verb tense of direct speech,” we can imagine linguistic markers such as “I thought that...” or “I imagined that...” (161).

The self-narrated monologue also has the peculiarity of allowing the reader to identify the area where first-person and third-person texts come close to each other.

Now that I have introduced the most authoritative narrative theories and clarified the terminology I will be using, I can finally introduce the Multi-Pov technique.

I will explain why this technique allows the author/narrator to give more depth to their characters. Some might argue that it is not necessary to use multiple focalization when the authorial narration exists, but that is not the aim of this thesis. As already stated, the aim is to understand the applications of multiple focalization and its pros and cons.

## **2.2 What is the Multi-Pov technique?**

In *The Living Handbook of Narratology*, Marcus Hartner explains that the term “multiperspectivity” is employed in a variety of different and often incongruous ways; the most common use of the term refers to multiperspectivity as a mode of storytelling in which multiple voices are used to tell a story. Hunter explains that multiperspectivity “is conceptually related to the notion of perspective and point of view” (1). I must therefore return to the terms “perspective” and “point of view.”

Fludernik defines the term “perspective” as a synonym for the English term “point of view,” which “corresponds to narrative perspective” (37) and she points out that the aim of perspective is to “make a distinction between narratives in which the story is filtered through the consciousness of a character” i.e. a reflector figure “and those in which there is a view from outside” (37). We thus return to Stanzel's dichotomy between internal and external perspective; an external perspective without restrictions on the imaginary world contrasts with an internal perspective limited to the knowledge and perceptions of the reflector figure. In contrast to Stanzel's model, we have those of Genette and Mike Bal.

As I have already explained, Genette's focalization is divided into zero, internal, and external. It should be noted that Fludernik points out that "Genette's zero focalization corresponds to Stanzel's authorial narrative situation, in which the authorial narrator is above the world of the action [...] and is able to see into the characters' minds as well as shifting between the various locations where the story takes place", in this case, therefore, the perspective is "unrestricted or unlimited in contrast to the limitations of internal and external focalization" (38). When we have an internal perspective, the view is restricted to that of a single character (as we will see this limitation could be overcome by choosing a multiple internal focalization), while with an external perspective we do not have access to the inner world of characters.

Mieke Bal improved these models by creating a distinction between "the focalizing instance" and "the visible and invisible focalized objects" (39). The "focalizing instance" is the subject who sees, or filters, the story and the "focalized" instance is the object or events being seen from that perspective. According to Bal, when we have a reflector figure, then this will be both the focalized and the focalizing instance; for the reflector figure, his or her very being is an invisible focalized object, "he/she can see and discuss his own thoughts and feelings" (39), whereas the things/people that inhabit his world are visible focalized objects, but not their minds. In an authorial narrative, the focalizing instance is the narrator "who sees visible and invisible focalized objects in the fictional world." Even in a first-person narrative, the narrator is the focalizing instance, but "he/she is just as limited in his perspective as the reflector figure" (39).

Now that we stated how to interpret perspective, we can return to multi-perspective, which in the pages that follow, I will refer to with the expression Multi-Pov.

Let's return to Marcus Hartner's mapping. According to Hartner, several scholars who have addressed the issue of perspective tend to consider multiperspectivity "as a general, inherent aspect of narration" since "the presentation of a narrative invariably implies diverse choices of

selection and projection on different levels, each choice potentially activates alternative perspectives” (1). Based on this definition, Hartner notes that multiperspectivity is therefore an almost intrinsic feature of novels and that it can be used in different ways.

Nevertheless, throughout the history of narratology, the term has undergone various interpretations; if we consider the narrative level of the story, then the term refers to a text with multiple narrators, but it can also refer to the perspective of a character rather than the narrator. In fact, we can have a third-person narrative with multiple focalizations, or a first-person narrative with multiple focalizations; one does not exclude the other, as we will see in the next chapter.

Multiperspectivity can take two forms: open and closed. The closed form seems to be particularly suited to “stage the relative or limited nature of individual viewpoints, while at the same time creating a dominant voice that provides an authorial account of the narrated events” (2), while the open form “is marked by an overall quality of dissonance, contradiction and dialogism” and it’s recognizable because it “features discordant, sometimes kaleidoscopic arrangements of conflicting perspectives” (3).

Although the definition of multiperspectivity is multifaceted and debated, it is commonly agreed that as a narrative form it leads the reader “into much closer scrutiny of the text” since “each new perspective potentially provides a different view on plot and character” (4).

Hartner goes on to say that multiperspectivity is not exclusive to novels narrated by multiple characters, but it is obviously easier to identify in such works. A typical feature of novels with a multiperspectivity is the narration of the same event but with a change of perspective, which Hartner also calls “multiple narration” (4).

In summary, multiperspectivity is closely linked to the concept of focalization; to give some order to what I will say in the rest of this thesis, I will follow the logic proposed by Genette, Stanzel, and Bal. We can have a multiple internally focalized perspective as well as a

multiple externally focalized perspective. The whole thing could become more complicated when multiperspectivity is combined with an authorial narrator.

Up to this point, I have mentioned the term “authorial narrator” without going into detail. Since in the next paragraphs I will show how the Multi-Pov technique blends with authorial narration it is important to dwell for a moment on this figure from Stanzel's point of view and from Genette's point of view.

The term authorial narrator can be misleading if used as if it had a single universal meaning, because in Stanzel and Genette it does not refer to the same thing.

Within Stanzel's typology, the authorial narrative situation indicates a mode of narration in which the narrator is clearly positioned outside the story-world and functions as an overt mediating instance; the narrator organizes, connects, interprets, and can also evaluate. To say that a passage is authorial in the Stanzelian sense means that the reader is faced with a narrator who looks down from above. This does not imply that the narrator cannot enter the minds of the characters, but it does imply that the narration retains a clear margin of direction and commentary.

Differently, the concept that Genette attributes to authorial narration is based entirely on the distinction between voice and focalization once again. From the perspective of voice, many texts that feel authorial are narrated by an extradiegetic, heterodiegetic narrator. Yet the impression of authorial control depends less on the narrator's position and more on focalization. What is normally called “omniscience” corresponds to Genette's zero focalization, a situation in which the narrative is not restricted to any character's knowledge and can supply information that exceeds what characters can perceive or know. However, Genette's categories are combinatory; an extradiegetic heterodiegetic narrator may adopt internal focalization or external focalization without stopping to be extradiegetic and heterodiegetic. In

other words, for Genette the authorial narration is the result of how voice and focalization are arranged.

Therefore, while Stanzel tends to conceive the authorial narration as an overall mode of narration, Genette invites to describe precisely in what sense a passage appears authorial; whether it is due to the type of voice, the breadth of information, the removal of perspective limitations, or the presence of commentary and evaluation.

Fludernik, however, criticizes Genette's position; she highlights that associating the authorial narrator with the zero focalization may cause misunderstandings because the narrator does not “see”; focalization concerns the relation between discourse and story, not the narrator’s viewpoint.

Fludernik identifies markers that allow us to recognize the presence of an authorial narration: an open narrative characterized by a “broad sweep of the world of the novel, with a historical abstract or a sociological analysis of a district or period,” comments or reflections on human nature, and comments on the narrative form itself (125), but Fludernik also points out that sometimes the authorial narrator can be “elusive, or covert, disappearing behind the panorama that it is sketching” (125).

Fludernik goes on to say that we must be careful with the omniscience of the authorial narrator; it cannot be taken for granted that an authorial narrator, and therefore omniscient according to Stanzel's terminology, knows everything or sees everything. The narration of an authorial narrator can be incredibly selective in that they can decide to read the minds of some characters and ignore those of others.

However, the difference between Stanzel's and Genette's authorial narration becomes really useful in Multi-Pov novels. A text can keep the same narrator while changing the focalization from one character to another. At the same time, the narrator can sometimes step

back and sound more controlling or evaluative. In Genette's terms, that often means that the reader will deal with zero focalization.

In this thesis, I will use "authorial narrator" in Stanzel's sense to describe moments where narration becomes openly mediating and evaluative, while Genette's categories will help me specify, passage by passage, whether the narrator's voice remains external and whether focalization is internal or shifts toward zero focalization.

### **2.3 Multiple Focalized Perspective Pros and Cons and Authorial Narration**

In the previous paragraph, I explained what multiperspectivity, commonly referred to as Multi-Pov. Now, I will outline the pros and cons of a multiple focalized perspective and try to analyze how Multi-Pov can be used combined with authorial narration and how it's an interesting tool to create suspense.

I will begin by asking some questions: Why should an authorial narration use Multi Pov? Why would a writer choose to fragment the focalization? What risks does this structural choice entail? These questions will be answered as I illustrate the pros and cons of Multi-Pov narration. I begin by referring to the study conducted by Byung-Chull Bae, Yun-Gyung Cheong, and R. Michael Young "Automated Story Generation with Multiple Internal Focalization" which, despite examining stories created for video games, refers to the narrative theories illustrated so far.

I will begin by specifying that the authors embrace the concept of focalization proposed by Bal, so we have a focalizer and a focalized. According to them, focalization, which for the moment is not yet understood as multiple, has a dual function; it can be both an "information filter" and "a window through which the reader can view or perceive the events occurring in the story world" (211).

The authors examine the various forms of focalization (zero, external, internal) and consider the one that allows for the construction of complex narratives, namely multiple focalization. However, we must be careful not to confuse it with “variable” focalization; in variable focalization, the perspective changes throughout the narrative, following different characters at different times, while multiple focalization presents multiple versions of the same set of events, reconstructed according to the individual perceptions of the characters involved. Most of the time, as we will see in the novels I will use as examples, these two can be used together.

When dealing with multiple focalization, we must always be clear about the duration and frequency with which the focused events and objects are presented by the focalizing character. This is because the repetition of the story through different perspectives “can provide the reader with new information” that has not been revealed by the vantage points of previous characters (212). When used correctly, this technique can highlight the subjective nature of narrative reality: each character filters events according to their own knowledge, memory, desires, and prejudices. Previously, I mentioned Cohn's thinking on the ‘intimate’ knowledge of characters (Cohn 27); multi-focalization allows precisely this, because if there were only one character “who speaks” and “who sees”, the reader's knowledge would be limited, whereas with a psychological insight into the characters, each narrative becomes a reflection of their inner selves.

Furthermore, according to the authors, manipulating content through different characters can create a positive disparity in the narrative because it can help to create “the reader's cognitive emotions such as surprise or suspense” (212). Multiple focalization therefore allows information and revelations to be modulated very effectively. Each version of events adds new pieces to the puzzle, clarifying or destabilizing what the reader previously believed to know.

The authors argue that multiple focalization creates a stratification of perspective; the narrative acquires an almost three-dimensional dimension, events are no longer monolithic but multifaceted: a dense plot is created, rich in ambiguity and thematic resonances.

Nevertheless, the authors also point out that multiple focalization can have drawbacks; first and foremost, the unreliability of the narrator. When different versions of the same events contradict each other, the reader is led to wonder which voice is sincere, which is self-deception, and which is a lie. At the same time, this dynamic reinforces interpretative engagement, making reading an active and participatory experience. There is also the risk of confusing the reader; interweaving multiple perspectives can make the narrative difficult to follow if the changes in voice are not handled clearly. The same repeated event may seem redundant or difficult to understand if the differences are not clearly marked, or if the narrator does not provide sufficient elements to guide the reader through the different perceptions. Finally, multiple focalization requires great technical control; each version of events must be consistent with the character “who sees,” with their knowledge, language, and beliefs. At the same time, the different perspectives must intertwine in a credible way and contribute to an overall narrative mosaic that makes sense.

At the beginning of this section, I asked myself why should an authorial narration use Multi-Pov? If, as Stanzel states, the authorial narrator allows the reader to perceive everything that is happening in the story, why should the author decide to use Multi-Pov as well?

What emerges from the discussion so far is that multiple focalization can provide more information than authorial narration when they are combined; an authorial framework can connect and orient the reader, but if access remains tied to a single dominant center, the story is still filtered through one interpretive lens. By contrast, multiplying focalization expands the range of perceptions and interpretations available: the same event can be experienced through different cognitive and emotional positions. In Cohn’s terms, this means multiplying the

“centers of consciousness” through which the text can render interiority, allowing the reader to inhabit not one but several narrative minds.

At the same time, the pros discussed in this paragraph come with equally specific costs. Multi-Pov can fragment the story world, produce redundancy, or disorient the reader if shifts are not clearly managed; yet, when it is technically controlled, the same redistribution of access can also become a resource for suspense, because information is unevenly dispersed and only recomposed through the convergence of perspectives.

Now that I have clarified these advantages and risks, I can move on to applying this framework by analyzing the three novels.

### **3. Blue Sisters, Kala and Hazel Says No**

Before beginning an in-depth analysis of Multi-Pov in these three novels, it is necessary to explain why I chose them. First of all, all three were written using the Multi-Pov technique, but at the same time, all three use it in different ways. In *Blue Sisters*, Multi-Pov is combined with an authorial narration and I will show how this combination emphasizes the characters' perceptions and mind settings. In *Kala*, on the other hand, Multi-Pov aims to create suspense and give the reader the opportunity to reconstruct the main event of the story through the various pieces of information given by three different voices. Finally, in *Hazel Says No*, the reader might think they are dealing with a Multi-Pov narrative given the structure of the story, but in reality, they are dealing with a simple authorial narration.

In conclusion, each novel chosen brings with it various analyses of Multi-Pov.

### 3.1 Blue Sisters, Book Overview

The first book I will present to is *Blue Sisters* by Coco Mellors.

*Blue Sisters* is Coco Mellors' second novel: according to the *New York Times*<sup>4</sup>, both *Cleopatra and Frankenstein* (2022), her debut novel, and *Blue Sisters* (2025), were best sellers. Mellors' writing has also appeared in *Vogue*, *The Cut* and the *New York Times* Modern Love column. Mellors decided to use the Multi-Pov technique for both of her works. In a 2025 podcast interview for "Jack Edwards' Inklings Book Club"<sup>5</sup> when asked what advice she would give to aspiring writers, she replied that they should challenge themselves by changing the point of view in their stories: "A change in the perspective allows me, as an author, to fully enter in the minds of my characters."

Set in the present day, *Blue Sisters* follows three sisters in their early thirties, Avery, Bonnie, and Lucky, after the death of their fourth sister, Nicky, the year before the events narrated in the novel book take place. The story begins with an email from their mother: she and the sisters' father are selling the New York apartment where the girls grew up, and if the sisters want to retrieve Nicky's belongings, they must return to New York by a fixed deadline. Before her death, Nicky had been the only sister still living in that apartment, so coming back means walking into the space most saturated with memory.

At the beginning, the three women are scattered across different cities, Avery in London, Bonnie in Los Angeles, Lucky in Paris, and all of them resist coming home. Their reluctance is grief, but it is also avoidance. Nicky's death becomes the catalyst that exposes how each sister has

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/books/best-sellers/2024/09/22/hardcover-fiction/>

<sup>5</sup> *Coco Mellors Cleopatra & Frankenstein and Blue Sisters*, 20 September 2025

<https://open.spotify.com/episode/3y1gS9Wa8VGhGrNti3SAW5?si=3fac7666dedb4538>

been coping through a different form of addiction or compulsion, and how those strategies keep them isolated from one another even when they are technically in touch.

Avery, the eldest and a recovered addict, appears to be the most settled. She is a successful lawyer in London, married to her wife Chiti, and sober for years. Yet Nicky's death reactivates Avery's guilt: she is convinced that, as the recovered addict of the family, she should have noticed that Nicky was struggling with drug abuse. When Chiti suggests they have a child through artificial insemination, Avery agrees even though she does not truly want motherhood, partly because she cannot bear to disappoint her and partly because Avery still carries anger toward their mother, who she felt made her grow up too early. Unable to be honest about what she wants; Avery slips into self-sabotage and cheats on Chiti. When the affair comes out, Avery is forced to confront both her marriage and her grief, and returning to New York becomes the moment where she starts letting go of the fantasy that she could have controlled the outcome for Nicky.

Bonnie, the middle sister, is a professional boxer. She has built her identity on discipline and endurance, convinced she can master pain through training and willpower. After Nicky dies, that belief collapses: Bonnie freezes in the ring and loses a crucial match, then withdraws from her career and moves to Los Angeles, where she works as a bouncer. The novel later reveals the most traumatic detail of her grief: Bonnie was the one who found Nicky's body, and the image keeps returning no matter how hard she tries to treat it like physical pain that can be pushed through. When she returns to New York, the reunion with her sisters forces her to stop hiding, both from the loss and from her feelings for Pavel, her coach. By the end of the novel Bonnie begins rebuilding her life by choosing the sport again and allowing herself intimacy rather than isolation.

Lucky, the youngest, is a model and the sister most visibly in free fall. She cannot accept Nicky's death and numbs herself with drugs and alcohol. Living in Paris, she is kicked out of a

fashion show for being too drunk. She seeks refuge with Avery in London, but their relationship is tense; Avery's protectiveness feels like control to Lucky, and Lucky reacts by fleeing into another night of excess. Under the influence of hallucinogens and alcohol, Lucky thinks she sees Nicky, which pushes her deeper into self-destruction and toward overdose. Avery intervenes, tries to stop the spiral, and calls out what Lucky refuses to name: addiction. Lucky runs anyway, heading to New York, where Bonnie attempts to keep her clean. Eventually Lucky admits the detail that has been poisoning her with guilt—she was the one who obtained the painkillers Nicky was taking, and she feels complicit in her sister's death. Talking with Avery and Bonnie does not erase the damage, but it shifts Lucky from self-punishment toward the possibility of recovery.

Nicky, though absent from the main timeline, remains central to what the sisters are trying to understand. In the family dynamic she was often treated as the “easy” daughter, the one who seemed to live a stable, ordinary life: she taught English and wanted to become a mother. Nicky had severe endometriosis and relied on high doses of painkillers to manage pain; a hysterectomy might have relieved it, but she resisted because it would have ended her hope of pregnancy. When Bonnie recounts finding her, the cause of death is an overdose of those medications, and the novel leaves it open whether that overdose was accidental or intentional.

The epilogue, set two years after Nicky's death, offers movement rather than perfect closure. Avery and Chiti divorce because they want different things; Chiti becomes a mother, while Avery stays in New York and rebuilds her life. Bonnie builds a family with Pavel and they name their daughter Nicky, turning loss into continuity. Lucky remains vulnerable to relapse, but she begins recovery in concrete terms, tracking sober days and reaching the milestone of one hundred days.

Now that I have introduced the plot of *Blue Sisters*, I will analyze the formal choices Mellors opted for.

### 3.2 *Blue Sisters*' Narrator and the Use of Multi-Pov

At first glance, *Blue Sisters* may appear to adopt a straightforward alternation of points of view, each chapter is assigned to one of the three surviving sisters: the chapters do not have a specific title that can refer to what will happen, they are indicated as "Chapter 1.", "Chapter 2.", "Chapter 3." and so on, but below each namely chapter there is the name of the sister that the chapter focalizes through and on: "Chapter 1 Lucky", "Chapter 2 Bonnie" and "Chapter 3 Avery". The alternating focalization will remain unchanged, following a repetitive ternary sequence: Lucky, Bonnie, Avery, Lucky, Bonnie, Avery, etc. I think, as a reader, that this sequence does more than identify a protagonist; it functions as an orienting device that signals in advance the center of consciousness through which the events will be filtered, reducing potential disorientation when the plotline is interrupted and resumed elsewhere.

Yet, from a narratological standpoint, the novel's architecture is less "simple" than it looks.

Throughout the narrative Mellors relies on a heterodiegetic narrative instance while the focalization shifts from sister to sister according to the tripartite chapter structure. This distinction is crucial, because it allows the text to combine a stable narrating voice (Genette's "who speaks?") which is authorial, with the psychological plurality produced by multiple focalization (Genette's "who sees?")

The prologue is the first and most explicit indicator of this strategy. It is narrated in the third person with an evident authorial presence; the narrator opens with a general statement about sisterhood:

A sister is not a friend. Who can explain the urge to take a relationship as primal and complex as a sibling and reduce it to something as replaceable, as a banal friend? Yet this status is used again and again to connote the highest intimacy. My

mother is my best friend. My husband is my best friend. No. True sisterhood, the kind where you grow your fingernails in the same womb [...] is not the same as friendship. You don't choose each other, and there's no furtive period where you know each other. You're part of each other, right from the start. (Mellors 1)

Why is it correct to say that this is an authorial narrator? In the prologue, the presence of an authorial narrator is recognizable because the narrative voice does not rely on the perception of one of the sisters, as would happen in a figurative structure, but is immediately placed above the story, framing and interpreting it. The opening is already revealing; instead of drawing the reader into a scene or a moment in time, the text begins in an almost essayistic tone "A sister is not a friend", which functions as a statement of a principle rather than a thought localized in a consciousness. The voice constructs a real argument, using rhetorical questions "Who can explain...?" and generalizing examples "My mother is my best friend. My husband is my best friend", ending with a concluding sentence that imposes an interpretative key on the reader "You're part of each other, right from the start" (1). This type of discourse does not aim to simulate a character's experience but manifests a narrative presence that argues and guides.

In Genette's terms, the prologue is handled by a heterodiegetic narrator with zero focalization as it claims a panoramic overview.

Mellors continues the prologue having the narrator introduce the sisters: "the eldest of the Blue Sisters, their leader, is Avery, she was born wise and world-weary [...] at four years old she declared herself too tired to go on. But she did go on, she always has" (7). Bonnie follows as: "soft-spoken and strong-willed, and she can get the ice out of the tray without bashing it out of the counter" (8). Nicky is described as: "Of the girls, she was the most girly [...] if Avery was sensible and Bonnie was stoic, Nick was sensitive. She was a carnival of feelings she never tried to hide. She could apply a perfect cat eye with liquid liner in a moving taxi without

smudging the flicks” (9), and concludes with Lucky: “Lucky is sharp-witted and secretly shy [...] When she enters a room, it’s like an electric eel slipping into a bowl of goldfish” (10).

These initial descriptions of the protagonists raise two interesting questions: Do the sisters’ descriptions come from a narrator perspective? In other words, who is responsible for these descriptions, and how are they helpful for the Multi-Pov?

To answer these questions, Stanzel and Bal are useful.

For Stanzel, the difference lays on mediation; in an authorial/teller situation the narrator openly frames, summarizes, and comments, whereas a figural/reflector situation filters the story through a character’s consciousness, minimizing overt narrator commentary (Fludernik 38). Instead of introducing the sisters through their own consciousness in scene, the discourse pauses to name, judge, and summarize them.

At the same time, Bal helps clarify why it matters. According to Bal, narrating and focalizing are separate functions; narration concerns who speaks and organizes the discourse, while focalization concerns the position through which the story-world is perceived. (Fludernik 90). In this prologue, the text is clearly narrated, but the viewpoint is not anchored in a character’s perceptual position; these portraits therefore work as narrator commentary rather than as character-bound focalization.

Based on this, with the sisters’ characterizations in the prologue the extradiegetic heterodiegetic narrating instance frames the sisters through evaluative labels, anticipating how each character will later filter experience. What looks minor in terms of plot (the ice tray, the cat-eye liner, the electric eel comparison) is functional to the story itself because it gives the reader early interpretive cues so that, once the novel starts cutting between minds, the shifts are easier to track. For instance, when it is reported that Avery is “the eldest of the Blue Sisters, their leader, is Avery, she was born wise and world-weary [...] at four years old she declared herself too tired to go on. But she did go on, she always has”, the reader is already primed to read Avery’s

chapters through a controlled and disciplined mind even when the details become more complex. The prologue, in other words, does not simply introduce characters; it teaches the reader how to read them

Once the prologue ends, we enter the actual story.

The narration remains in the third person, but the perspective becomes internally focalized. This is where Stanzel's opposition between teller character and reflector character becomes relevant; although the narrator is not a character (heterodiegetic), each chapter is constructed so that the reader's access to the story world is filtered through a reflector's consciousness. The change is enormous; from now on, the narrator's discourse will mimic the characters' perceptions and feelings producing the effect that the reader is not being told about Lucky, Bonnie, or Avery, but rather inhabiting their minds. One of the distinctive features of Multi-Pov is precisely this, the reader can see things from the perspective of each character and thus gain a complete understanding of the story by accessing their minds.

There are various moments in the book that offer a clear example of how the narrator's mimics the character's perceptions and feelings. To demonstrate this, I will take the first paragraph of the first section of each sister and close read them to show how the narrator mimics their specific take on life and whether she intrudes or not.

Lucky was late. Irresponsibly, irreversibly, in-danger-of-losing-this-job late.

She had a fitting for a couture show in the Marais at noon, but that was ten minutes ago, and she was still miles away on the metro. She had spent the night before at a fashion week party enjoying the open bar (the only kind Lucky cared for), where she'd met a pair of corporate-employed graffiti artists who were anxious to restore their reputations as creatives on the fringe of society. [...]

It was also the one-year anniversary of Nicky's death.

As the metro surged on, Lucky checked her phone to find a missed call and voicemail from Avery, who was no doubt on a mission to get her to "process" her feelings about this day, plus a formal-looking email from their mother she promptly ignored. She missed the New York subway with its filth, reliable unreliability, and lack of cell service; the Paris metro was almost aggressively efficient and fully accessible by cell phone, even underground. Here, there was nowhere to hide.

She had not seen any member of her family since Nicky's funeral a year ago. That night, a strong, hot wind blew through the city; it upturned restaurant tables and sent garbage cans tumbling down avenues, it broke power lines and snapped tree branches in Central Park. And it scattered Lucky and her sisters to their corners of the world, without any intention of returning home." (Mellors 11-12)

Even before anything plot-heavy happens, the discourse leads the reader to enter Lucky mind; the opening adverb chain ("Irresponsibly, irreversibly, in-danger-of-losing-this-job late") enacts escalating self-reproach: the rhythm seems fast and breathless, like a mind talking itself into motion. This setting is not a neutral narrator habits, the narrator is mimicking a mind that catastrophizes in real time. In other words, Lucky's chapter immediately establishes a "Lucky shaped" discourse since the narrator adopts her accelerated inner tempo. The narrator does not say "Lucky thought..." or switch to first person, but mimics Lucky's urgency.

The evaluations are also anchored to her needs in the moment. She misses the New York subway for what it provided (filth, unreliability, and especially "lack of cell service"), while Paris is experienced as exposure ("there was nowhere to hide"). The narration is therefore not only reporting Lucky's situation; it is borrowing her way of sizing up shame and escape routes.

After this the narration switches to Nicky's funeral (She had not seen any member of her family since Nicky's funeral a year ago. That night, a strong, hot wind blew through the city.) The brief widening of the lens here is telling; at first glance it can appear that the narrator through briefly

breaks the internal focalization to explain why the three remaining sisters are not together, but focalization is not only literal perception in the present; it also includes mental activity (memory, summary, the way a mind organizes what happened). Whether one reads this as Lucky's retrospective framing or as a touch of narratorial shaping, the effect is clear; the narration momentarily steps back from the metro scene to make the sisters' separation legible. When the focalization shifts to Bonnie the narrator retools itself around her training habits since she a professional athlete:

Bonnie woke before dawn to the sound of invasion. Someone was rattling her front door, trying to get in. Within seconds, she had grabbed the baseball bat she kept by her bed and launched herself into the small living room. The room was dark and still, empty but for a stack of cardboard boxes in the corner and a foldout beach chair. Sulfur-yellow patches of light from the streetlamps outside streaked the bare floor. She stood still, listening. Once again, the door rattled in its frame. Bonnie held her breath and padded stealthily across the space until she was close enough to unlock the latch with a soft click. In one swift movement, she yanked the door open and slashed the bat through the air in front of her. It struck the ground at her feet with a metallic thud. She looked out onto the empty landing, lined with the wet towels her neighbor's kids left hanging on the railings overnight to dry, and shook her head. She was fighting with herself again (Mellors 29)

The opening can be read like an internalized training exercise: "Bonnie woke before dawn to the sound of invasion." The narration is presented as a sequence of actions (grab, move, listen, strike), and the relevant details are physical (frames, patches of light, metallic thud). This is figural focalization at the level of what gets selected as narratable by a character who is a professional boxer and so her mind reasons as if she were in the ring: repeating a series of mechanical actions. Bonnie's inner conflict also gets narrated in her bodily idiom; the line "She

was fighting with herself again” translates inner conflict into combat vocabulary, which fits Bonnie’s habitual thinking as a boxer. Compared to Lucky’s frantic velocity, Bonnie’s focalized discourse is tactical, it treats the world as something to counter and manage.

This boxer’s mind-style becomes even more explicit when the text slides into training concepts at the end of the chapter:

In training, she had been taught the difference between reacting and responding. Responding was when you used the tools you’d been taught to clinically counter an attack according to your game plan; reacting was when you acted purely on adrenaline, usually leaving yourself open to further harm. (Mellors 51)

Notice the second-person “you” in “Responding was when you used the tools you’d been taught”; it reads less like the narrator addressing the reader and more like an internalized coaching voice in Bonnie’s head. This is a good example of how the narrator can sound slightly explanatory without breaking the figural effect; the explanation is still Bonnie’s idiom, so the narrating voice remains one, but it is being used in a Bonnie-shaped way.

Avery’s first section shifts the register again, away from speed and procedure toward concealment and control:

At the end of the garden, behind the shed, behind the pink Queen Elizabeth rosebushes, Avery was preparing to smoke her daily cigarette. She pulled on the oversized Barbour jacket and yellow dishwashing gloves she kept squirreled behind the gardening tools for this express purpose, along with mouthwash, air freshener, and gum. She struck a long cooking match and brought it to the tip of the Winston with a feeling caught somewhere between anticipation and resignation. Long inhale, long exhale. [...]

Avery looked up the path lined with ink-blue pansies to the house, checking again that no one was coming. Her home was a narrow Victorian just two streets from Hampstead Heath. [...]

Hampstead was the England Americans liked to imagine, its sprawling heath a taste of country life without the inconvenience of actually having to leave London. Avery loved saying she lived in Hampstead because of all it instantly communicated about her - togetherness, taste, and wealth. Growing up, she and her sisters had everything they needed, but not what they wanted, which was space. Too close for comfort. A cliché, but it was true. They were too close to be comfortable in that home. There was one bathroom for all six of them; Prufrock may have measured out his life with coffee spoons, she always thought, but Avery measured hers in the hours she spent waiting for that bathroom to be free.” (Mellors 52-53)

The very first paragraph is basically a secret plan so as not to be caught smoking (tools, mouthwash, air freshener, gum), the mind-style here is ritualized. The narration lingers on the hidden “kit” (gloves, mouthwash, air freshener, gum), on checking the path, on keeping the act unseen. This careful choreography makes Avery’s consciousness feel like a system of self-control and self-presentation.

Avery’s focalization also shows a more reflective style; when Hampstead is described, the voice becomes almost like an essay, “Hampstead was the England Americans liked to imagine”, this sentence is the narrator zooming out, but it still tracks Avery’s consciousness because it’s tied to what Hampstead says about her identity and social class. Moreover, there’s the sentence about Prufrock, “Prufrock may have measured out his life with coffee spoons”<sup>6</sup> that represents

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<sup>6</sup> Prufrock: *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock* is the first professionally published poem by the American-born British poet T.S. Eliot. The speaker famously says, "I have measured out my life with coffee spoons," symbolizing a life of tedious, mundane, and unfulfilling routine.

Avery's cultural elevation, being the only sister to have attended college. Avery frames herself through status and narratives of recovery.

These last two statements, the one about Hampstead and the one about Prufrock, can be considered intrusions by the narrator, but they are sensible intrusions; it's the narrator borrowing Avery's way of making experience decodable through culture. Lucky doesn't think that way; Bonnie doesn't think that way. The same narrating voice is simply being used differently.

Put together, these three first sections of the three first chapters show Multi-Pov not as three narrators, but as a single narrator performing three distinct focalized registers. Lucky's section is quick and with rare intrusions that symbolically connect her present to the sisters shared past (the funeral wind that scattered them).

Bonnie's section translates inner conflict into the language of training and fighting; even when the narrator speaks in Bonnie's tool-based categories ("Responding..."). Avery's section is controlled and full of rituals that maintain this control.

This is the mimicking that I mentioned before; the narrator's voice remains one but it is being modulated so that each chapter feels like an inhabited consciousness. The technique is precisely what Multi-Pov promises: not just an access to three viewpoints, but an access to three minds achieved by having one narrator that learnt how to represent the three sister's languages.

What makes *Blue Sisters*' Multi-Pov easy to follow, despite the constant switching, is the regular chapter rotation and the way each sister's present time thread tends to move forward in a fairly steady chronology. Each chapter generally continues the sister's present-time arc, punctuated by flashes (childhood memories, Nicky's decline) whose appearance is motivated by the focalizer's current situation. Across the novel, the story-time advances cumulatively, yet the discourse crosscuts between strands that are sometimes simultaneous or slightly offset so the reader sometimes has to wait for information to be picked up again.

In Genette's terms, this is variable internal focalization with deliberate withholding; the story moves on, but what the readers are allowed to know depends on the focalizer's knowledge, attention, and willingness to admit things. The gaps are there because the current perspective cannot (or will not) give everything to the readers, and the narrative only fills them when it returns to the relevant consciousness.

This is especially clear in the sequence around Chapter 4-6. After being kicked out of the Paris fashion show for being too drunk, Lucky takes refuge at her sister Avery's house, but after an argument between the two, Lucky leaves in search of alcohol, returning hours later almost unconscious:

The next thing she did remember was Avery's face above her, a curtain of her wet hair swinging as she straddled her in the tub, shaking her awake. A steady stream of water beat down on them. Avery's face was contorted with effort as she dragged Lucky back to consciousness [...] Avery was saying something over and over again that she could barely make out over the water, over the ringing in her ears. It sounded like, "*Not you. Not you too. Not you.*" (Mellors 90)

Chapter 5 does not continue this scene because the focalization switches back to Bonnie, who is still in the present of her own strand, but in a different city and dealing with different pressures:

Bonnie was at home lying on her mattress on the floor when she heard the knock at the door. She crouched down and shuffled from the bedroom to the living room silently. Her heart was hammering. She'd spent the last twenty-four hours cycling through periods of frenzied activity and total inertia, manically working out to the point of paralyzing physical exhaustion, then falling into periods of shallow, fitful sleep at odd hours. (Mellors 91)

The reader must wait Chapter 6 to know what happened to Lucky:

In her perfect living room, decorated with a vintage sofa reupholstered in handmade fabric from a third-generation block printer in Jaipur, a coffee table consisting of a marble plinth shipped from Denmark, and £840-a-roll gold-embossed wallpaper from Soane Britain, interior designers to the Royals, Avery was preparing to excoriate her less-than-perfect youngest sister.

“It was a party, Avery,” said Lucky, going on the defensive before Avery could even begin the blistering opening statement she'd practiced in the shower that morning.

“Remember those? I drank too much, like everyone did, and had a bit of trouble getting my key in the lock. Please don't make a big deal out of this.”

“I found you half naked and unconscious outside my front door and you're asking me not to make a big deal of it? Why are you not making more of this? Do you have so little concern for yourself?”

Lucky rolled her eyes with such force Avery was surprised she didn't cause ligament damage.” (Mellors 106)

The effect is therefore a planned pause; the reader does not immediately find out what happens next to Lucky because the narration moves into Bonnie's focalization. Once the pattern is familiar, this kind of delay stops feeling without a logic and starts to read as part of the book's method, moments of crisis are set aside and only continued when the narrative returns to the others reflector centers.

This structure is not a general rule for Multi-Pov fiction, but in *Blue Sisters* it fits the story the book wants to tell. At the start, the sisters are emotionally and geographically distant, and the segmented rotation formalizes that distance; each strand grows in partial ignorance of the others, and the reader knowledge grows as the narration proceeds.

In conclusion, *Blue Sisters* offers a Multi-Pov design that matches the theoretical distinctions discussed earlier, because it puts them to work in the way it distributes voice and

access. The prologue briefly uses a more authorial, openly evaluative narrator to frame the sisters, and then the numbered chapters move into variable internal focalization, repeatedly placing the reader inside three different narrative minds as Cohn would say. The novel's emotional truth does not come from a single omniscient account, but from how these different, perspectives build up with each other.

### **3.3 *Kala*, Book Overview**

*Kala* (2025) is the debut novel by Irish writer Colin Walsh and, according to *The Guardian*<sup>7</sup>, is one of the best books of 2025.

The events are set in Kinlough, a coastal town in Ireland that lives mainly on tourism and for this reason always tries to be perfect and ethereal but hides a network of unspeakable secrets.

Mush, Joe, Helen, and Kala are fifteen years old and together they are experiencing the joys and pains of adolescence. Kala is the beating heart of the group, an outgoing and magnetic girl who stops at nothing. Everyone is fascinated by her in different ways and would do anything she asks.

In the summer of 2003, Kala suddenly disappears, and the question that the readers ask themselves until almost the end of the story is whether she was killed or if she just decided to leave Kinlough.

Mush, Joe, and Helen are the narrators of the events, and thanks to them, it will be possible to discover what happened to Kala that fateful summer. After Kala's disappearance, the three friends drift apart. She was the glue that held the group together, and without her, it seems that the group no longer has a reason to exist, so each goes their separate ways.

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<sup>7</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/books/article/2024/jul/31/what-were-reading-writers-and-readers-on-the-books-they-enjoyed-in-july#:~:text=Colin%20Walsh's%20debut%20novel%2C%20Kala,of%20a%20body%20are%20found.>

Mush never left Kinlough and never wanted to, something that Helen and Joe could never understand. Mush had always been the most reserved and sensitive of the group, but thanks to Kala, he was able to open and assert his ideas. After his friend's disappearance, however, everything slips away from him, and life seems like a continuous succession of events over which he has no control.

Helen is incredibly intelligent, and it is she who will piece together the clues that lead to understanding what happened to Kala. As soon as she had the chance, she left Kinlough, which she had always hated since moving there with her alcoholic father and younger sister. When she moved to Kinlough, Helen felt like the new girl that no one wanted to deal with, but Kala took her under her wing and Helen found in her a confidante who understood her pain at the loss of her mother, as Kala had also lost her mother at a very young age in mysterious circumstances. After Kala's disappearance, Helen becomes cynical and disillusioned. The only thing that could bring her peace is finding out what happened to her friend.

Joe left Kinlough to become a world-famous musician and succeeded, yet success has created more problems than benefits for him. He no longer knows who he is, and perhaps he never did. Kala was his first love, but Joe was always too insecure and selfish to understand how much Kala needed him, and now the memory of her haunts him. Joe wonders if Kala would still be alive if they hadn't had a violent argument a few days before her disappearance.

Fifteen years after the events of 2003, all three find themselves in Kinlough for the wedding of Helen's father, Rossie, to Mush's aunt, Pauline.

A few days before the wedding, two events occur that catalyze the story: the disappearance of Mush's cousins, Pauline and Ger's daughters, Donna and Marie, a pair of twins, and the discovery of Kala's remains.

At the beginning of the story, the three protagonists investigate individually to find out what happened to Kala and whether her disappearance is linked to that of the twins. During the narrative, their paths cross and together they search for the twins.

It turns out that back in 2003 Mush and Kala had discovered one of Kinlough's secrets, namely that there was a criminal organization that organized dog fights; the two had planned to free the dogs and then tell the police everything. During the liberation of the dogs, Mush suffered a serious attack with acid that got him in a coma for some time and left him with horrible scars on his face. He remembers nothing about what happened. Through the twins' father (Ger) Mush and Helen discover that the criminal organization still exists and that their various illegal businesses are covered up by the police.

Helen discovers the truth about Kala's mother from Kala's grandmother, and it is unclear whether she will ever reveal it to the others. Kala was the result of her mother being raped by her own father, Kala's grandfather. However, Kala's grandfather was the chief of police in Kinlough and, with the help of his colleagues, he made Kala's mother disappear to hide his own crimes, leading everyone to believe that the woman had simply abandoned her daughter.

Kala's grandmother tells Helen to question the moral integrity of the current chief of police in Kinlough: Joe's father. The woman knows for a fact that over the years the police have remained corrupt and use their status to commit crimes of all kinds.

Joe discovers that it was his father who killed Kala, partly because he knew that Kala was the product of incest and wanted her away from his son and partly because the girl had discovered the dog fights. Joe's father is obsessed with appearances, and Joe's family life is portrayed as perfect, as are its members. His father constantly tells Joe that he is the best and that he can aspire to anything.

Joe, Mush, and Helen discover that the twins had found out everything from their biological father Ger, who was involved in criminal activities, and Joe's father had them kidnapped.

The entire narrative is organized in such a way as to create temporal parallels between what happened to Kala and what is happening in the present, allowing the reader to reconstruct the facts from various perspectives. Throughout the narrative, Mush, Helen, and Joe begin by recounting what is happening in the present, but after a few lines, they report what happened in the past that led to Kala's disappearance. The perspectives often appear to be at odds with each other; each protagonist gives the reader their own version of what happened, and above all, each of them knows something about Kala that the others are unaware of.

In an interview for Barnes and Nobles in 2025, Walsh stated that he intentionally used different points of view to open up different interpretative spaces for the reader: “They all had a different relationship with Kala and what the reader is getting with these three characters are three different perspectives, of course each character is seeing different things and each one of them interprets what he/she sees in a different way and that opens a lot of questions. The reader is getting three perspectives that don’t seem to match, but this leaves a lot of room for the reader’s interpretation. In this way the reader can enter the book and can create different relationship with the characters.”

In the previous paragraph on *Blue Sisters*, I argued that multi-perspectivity can generate cumulative knowledge by shifting access across focalized minds. With *Kala*, my aim is slightly different: rather than focusing primarily on how a single narrative voice is retuned to multiple internal focalizations, I will show how Walsh builds Multi-Pov through a rotation of narrators (Mush, Helen, Joe) and how this choice produces suspense through the unequal distribution of knowledge.

### **3.4 *Kala* and the Use of Multi-Pov**

*Kala* opens with a two pages prologue about the events of the summer of 2003, when Kala disappears:

We're perched on our bikes at the top of the hill. Above us, the sky is melting. Below, the city sparkles. We're fifteen years old and it's the best summer of our lives, so Kinlough joins in too—the whole city reacts perfectly to our energy. It runs with us to the rhythm of dusk, buzzes over distant fields along the winding flow of the Purr River, warms itself on slate roofs and cornices, climbs up the ticking of the spokes as we race our bikes to the top of the hill, brake on the gravel with our sneakers and turn to look into the depths of the evening, slowly turning our wheels, cautiously, towards the edge.

We are the girls: Kala, Aoife, Helen. We are the boys: Aidan, Joe, Mush.

Kala stands in the middle. With her crooked eye pointing who knows where. But the other is fixed on our goal, down there.

The goal is a small passage at the bottom of the hill, where the bike path comes out onto the main road.

Kala wants to go first. She insisted. There is a tacit agreement that she can't do it alone, we all have to go together. That's how it works. We are a group. And yet, we watch her grip the handlebars, waiting for a signal. Then she bites her lower lip, and we all straighten up on our bikes. The old Converse shoes prepare themselves on the highest pedal. The sky holds its breath. Then Kala's front wheel goes over the edge and her bike plunges down the descent and time expands into something unstable as we all rush after her. [...]

We see Kala pedaling furiously, we all shout at her to brake, but she leans over her bike and leaves us behind.” (Walsh 17-18)

In *Kala's* prologue, the story does not begin with an external voice that introduces the setting from above, as in *Blue Sisters*, but with a first-person plural “we” that is already inside the action. To analyze the use of this “we,” we can refer to Natalya Bekhta's article “We-Narratives:

The Distinctiveness of Collective Narration” published in 2017 for by *Ohio State University Press*. According to Bekhta when the reader is faced with a “we” the “we” can be defined as “choral we-narration” (2). The choral we-narration compresses the group into a single discourse and this is the case of *Kala’s* prologue. By making the group’s rules explicit “we all have to go together” and staging a synchronized action “we all rush after her” the choral voice becomes a tool; it frames the event as a shared version before the novel later redistributes it through rotating voices and partial knowledge, as we will see.

The prologue’s narrative present is an immersive device; it produces immediacy and a sense of shared moment, as if the summer were unfolding in the present. At the same time, however, the prologue also makes clear that this immediacy is not the same as unmediated teenage perception. A sentence such as “the whole city reacts perfectly to our energy. It runs with us to the rhythm of dusk, buzzes over distant fields along the winding flow of the Purr River, warms itself on slate roofs and cornices, climbs up the ticking of the spokes” is telling precisely why the reader is not dealing with a teenager perception. The city is personified and made into a living entity that “reacts,” “runs,” “buzzes,” “warms itself,” and “climbs,” producing a chain of verbs that can be read like crafted prose rather than spontaneous adolescent rendering. The phrasing also relies on an almost poetic representation of sensory and imagery (“rhythm of dusk,” “winding flow,” “slate roofs and cornices,” “ticking of the spokes”), which presupposes a lexical precision and an aesthetic control unlikely to be from fifteen-year-olds. Instead, the passage suggests retrospective composition; the experiencing selves may have felt speed and excitement but the linguistic form that turns that affect into a metaphor belongs to a narrating self who has the distance to aestheticize the memory. In Genette’s terms, then, the prologue foregrounds the split between a “we” who lived the summer and an “I” who tells it.

Once the prologue is over, the Multi-Pov technique manifests itself first and foremost as an alternation of three voices: Mush, Helen, Joe. In *Kala*, the beginning and end of each chapter

are marked by the chapter title, which bears the name of the narrating voice. Unlike *Blue Sisters*, where the division of the three focalizers followed an order of three in three, *Kala's* is random. The use of three narrating voices (Mush and Helen are first person narrators while Joe is narrated in a second person and I will come back to this later) is a crucial difference compared to *Blue Sisters*; here multiperspectivity is not primarily the effect of a stable heterodiegetic narrator shifting focalization, but rather the result of voices rotation. Because each narrator is also the center of his or her sections, “who speaks” and “who sees” get closer and Bal’s focalization is anchored in the fact that the narrator filters the story world through a situated consciousness.

This architecture should therefore not be reduced to a simple alternation of chapters but understood as an epistemic distribution of information across two timelines: 2003 when Kala disappeared and 2018 when humans remain are found and the twins disappear.

Each narrator re-opens the past from the present, and each account carries limits and omissions of what happened. The reader does not move toward total knowledge through omniscience, but through recomposition; what happened to Kala can only be assembled by placing the narrators’ fragments side by side, including the moments where their versions do not seem to match.

To show what I just stated about the narrating voices used in *Kala* I find useful to analyze the sequence spanning of pp. 305–320; each narrator contributes with a different kind of information about what surrounded Kala’s disappearance, and the truth emerges as the intersection of their limits.

The three narrators are visiting Kala's grandmother (Mammy) in the hospital; Mush recounts what happened on the Halloween night when he and Kala tried to free the dogs involved in the fights, Helen collects all the information about Kala’s mother and Joe recounts what happened after the infamous Halloween night.

Mush recounts in his mind what happened during the Halloween night:

Kala and I still had our Halloween masks on. We must have looked like demons as we advanced through the tall grass. I remember the sound of dogs barking madly in their cages when we entered the barn. [...]

As soon as we entered the barn, we heard the first dog bark. Then all the others joined in. Perhaps they thought we were bringing them food. Some were muscular, but most were smaller than I expected. They all had scars. They were missing patches of fur, and their flesh was covered in bumps and holes. Kala ran along the row of cages, and I heard the bolts squeak as she opened them. [...]

I shouted, "Kala, let's go," when the dogs came out of their cages and began sniffing the air, growling at each other.

The dogs started barking at her. Kala slipped into one of the cages and pulled the door shut behind her, holding it closed with her hands.

Meanwhile, people had come out of the farmhouse and were searching the yard.

The Lyons had found her.

That's when I heard the shouting in the barn. Among the voices was Kala's. [...]

Teabag limped back and forth in front of Kala, cursing because she had let the dogs loose. His face was covered in bruises and cuts. Later, I learned from Joe that Dudley<sup>8</sup> had beaten him up, humiliating him in front of the boys. And later still, I tried to use that information to explain to myself what had happened.

"The Pig<sup>9</sup> thinks he's untouchable. He thinks Teabag<sup>10</sup> can't do anything to him."

I couldn't tell if he was talking to Kala, the boys, or himself.

His voice echoed everywhere.

"But I know how to get to that asshole Joe Brennan." [...]

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<sup>8</sup> Joe's father

<sup>9</sup> Joe

<sup>10</sup> The leader of the Lyons' criminal gang

“What do you think, guys? How many of us do you think it can hold?”

Murmurs. Agitated footsteps.

Teabag began rubbing his groin. "What if we open her like an apple?"

Kala screamed.

A wave of excitement swept through the boys.

“Do you know what this is?” he said.

He carefully unscrewed the cap and threw it at the cage next to her. A drop of thick liquid hit the mesh with a hiss. Snakes of smoke rose from the metal. A chemical smell filled the air.

“This shit would melt a dog in a second,” he said. And he waved the bottle in front of Kala.

Kala screamed and Teabag put his hand over her mouth. “Shut the fuck up,” he said, and at that point I jumped off the pallets and ran towards the barn door, bursting in screaming, and Teabag turned towards me. Kala freed her arms and started to run towards me, but Teabag pushed her back and was about to turn towards me, still holding the container in his hand, when Kala kicked him hard in the back of the leg and he screamed and bent forward and spun around, shaking the plastic container, from which a trail of thick liquid spurted out and hung in the air for an instant that seemed endless, under everyone's incredulous gaze, before splashing into my face.

(Walsh 306-308)

Mush's segment opens the past through a memory that begins with a strongly situated marker “Kala and I still had our Halloween masks on” and reconstructs the immediate aftermath of the Halloween disaster as a chain of actions that places Kala in direct proximity to the Lyons' violence. This episode does not merely add atmosphere; it supplies a crucial fragment.

Kala is seen taking initiative and she is then trapped in the barn, and the boys' aggression is explicitly framed to get Joe "But I know how to get to that asshole Joe Brennan". The threat with the corrosive liquid shows that the violence around Kala is real and sexually humiliating, and it helps the reader understand why the later disappearance cannot be approached as a simple missing-person case. Importantly, Mush's narration also exemplifies the split between experiencing-I and narrating-I; while much of the scene is rendered with the intensity of lived perception, Mush inserts retrospective knowledge acquired later "Later, I learned from Joe" which makes the memory a narrated reconstruction rather than a pure replay. In other words, Mush does not own all the information he tells; some elements come from later circulation among the group, and this is exactly how first-person Multi-Pov distributes knowledge: through partial witnessing plus subsequent recomposition.

Helen's block shifts the epistemic field from memory to institutional, familial, and procedural knowledge, and it does so in the present timeline where the disappearance is being actively re-investigated:

She looks tiny in that little bed. The bruise shines under her right eye,  
and she has another one on her neck that looks like a birthmark.

The gardaí<sup>11</sup> point us to chairs to sit on. Mush stays behind, hugging himself. He looks scared, like a child. Mammy's eyes are glassy. She doesn't look up from the sheets.

"I'm not a monster," she says. "I want you to know that."

"What happened in her house?" Mush asks her. [...]

Mammy cries out: "He told me he would find out what happened to my granddaughter. I... I just wanted..." She stops. "I wanted..."

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<sup>11</sup> The Irish police

Then something changes in her face. Her eyes meet mine. They are on fire.

“I had grounded Kala. After the Halloween disaster. 'No more sleepovers with your friends, young lady. No more wandering around town at all hours.' Christ, the way she screamed at me. And she started attacking me. Throwing everything she'd found out about Fiona<sup>12</sup> at me, thanks to that crazy woman Mulkerns. That Fiona was just a little girl. That for years I'd let her believe her mother had abandoned her, when in fact we'd kicked her out of the house. 'You lied to me about this, you lied to me about that. ' Jesus, sometimes it's better to tell a lie. It's the only thing to do.

Kids don't understand. It's all so simple for them.”

“No one judges her for sending Fiona away. I can only imagine how heartbreaking that choice must have been...”

“Choice,” says Mammy. “If you think I had a choice... I didn't send Fiona anywhere. I took her out of school and took care of her myself, at home, during the last few weeks. Then one morning I wake up. And I see her bed is empty. I can't get hold of Mick. This was before cell phones. I panic. I can't go anywhere with that damn wheelchair. I tell myself Mick<sup>13</sup> must be with her.

Maybe he took her to a doctor. How many lies you tell yourself, sitting next to that damn phone. But then Mick came home for dinner and I realized he didn't know where she was” [...]

“They found Fiona that evening. By then it was too late. There was too much blood. And then the scandal. Blinkie told me she was in the woods.

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<sup>12</sup> Kala's mother

<sup>13</sup> Kala's grandfather and father at the same time. In this passage the reader understand that Mick raped his own daughter, Fiona, and she got pregnant with Kala. Mick was also the chief of the gardai, so he covered everything up.

She was holding the baby to her chest. She had wrapped her in her coat to keep her warm. When I think of what must have been going through her mind... Mick arrived home with Kala in his arms. Ger Lyons and his men did their duty.

They made everything disappear. As if my daughter had never existed.”

I swallow hard. “What about Kala's father? Did he know...?”

“For God's sake, girl,” Mammy says. “Do I really have to tell you? Do you want me to say it out loud?”

She breathes heavily through her nose.

“Mick Lanann didn't answer to anyone.” (Walsh 310-314)

The chapter begins with a present-tense anchor “She looks tiny in that little bed” but quickly reveals that what is at stake is who knew what, and when. Mammy’s testimony introduces new information that none of the narrators could have possessed in 2003. In this block the novel shows, very directly, how the truth about Kala is entangled with a longer local history of silencing and protection. Kala’s grandmother narrates her daughter disappearance and death, the informal search networks, and above all the logic of impunity condensed in the line “Mick Lanann didn't answer to anyone.” This does not solve Kala’s case, but it changes the reader’s knowledge; it makes plausible that what happened to Kala is connected to a pattern of institutional shielding (the gardai) and Lyons-related violence, and it explains why knowledge remains asymmetrical across narrators.

Helen’s position is also narratologically distinctive; she is not recounting a memory of 2003 here, but handling witness testimony in 2018, which foregrounds the narrating-I as a mediator (her controlled questioning, her neutral expression, what she does not say aloud), and therefore adds a different kind of epistemic fragment than Mush’s recollection.

Joe’s block completes the triadic alternation by supplying the interpersonal micro-history that most directly borders on the moment of disappearance. The chapter opens on the days

immediately following Mush and Kala's failed attempt to rescue the dogs and the resulting scar on Mush's face:

The days following Mush's accident are lost in a fog. You remember the phone calls. Lots of them. Not just between you guys in the group, but also between parents. Especially between parents. You all ended up grounded. You had to beg Mom and Dad to at least let you keep your phone.

Mom and Dad were in the living room with you. You were convinced they could read your mind. You knew that for them it was Kala's fault. The nosebleed. Helen's dog. Mush's face. It was all her fault. She started texting you every night at eight o'clock, because that's when Mammy let her use the phone. Her messages were getting stranger and stranger. On the Saturday before she disappeared, she texted you: I NEED TO SEE YOU SO MUCH.

You pretended you needed to borrow a T-square from a classmate for a technical drawing project you had to do at school the following week. Mom and Dad were all happy. As you rode your bike to the Caille woods, you imagined seeing Kala there waiting for you. She ran towards you, and you got off your bike, you kissed, and the camera circled around you, with the music crescendo. But Kala wasn't there. She kept you waiting. And when she arrived, she was no longer the girl from Elsewhere. She hadn't made herself beautiful for you. She was sad and thin. She didn't even greet you properly, she didn't ask how you were. She just buried her face in your chest and held you tight.

“Come,” she said. She took you by the hand and you walked into the woods.

Her behavior frightened you. She kept looking among the trees. As if she had gone mad.

“What's wrong?”

“Nothing. It's just that... I had an argument with my grandmother and...” Her face was tense. She seemed confused. “It's as if everything is slipping away from me. I can't hold on to it, I...” She mumbled. “It would have been better if I had never been born, Joe. I'm a monster.”

“You look drunk. Are you drunk?”

That wasn't what she wanted to hear. Her face darkened. Then she pressed herself against you. “I just need to be close to you.” She slid her hand down your stomach and then onto your groin. You took a step back. “Christ, Kala. What the fuck?” “Don't you want to?” she said. And she started crying. It scared you. Too much tension, in too many directions.

“Act normal, damn it,” you said.

“I'm sorry I'm not normal enough for you. You're so...”

“I'm going home. I'm already late. Get well, okay?”

“Oh, fuck you, Joe.” Then she gave a bitter little laugh. “You're not my father.”

You turned to look at her. “Maybe if you had a father, you wouldn't be the way you are.”

And you left her alone among the trees. [...]

Hours passed. Sitting in your room, you strummed meaningless chords. That evening, she sent you a photo. It was a photo of her, kneeling in front of her fogged-up mirror. She was naked from the waist down. I LOVE YOU PLEASE DON'T LEAVE ME

You didn't reply.

From that moment on, she stopped sending you messages. [...]

You were waiting for the phone to buzz on the nightstand when the doorbell rang.

“Joe,” Mom said from downstairs. “There's a girl here for you.”

Downstairs, the cold of the night filled the hallway.

“Hey, Joe.” It was Aoife<sup>14</sup>. “What are you doing?”

“Nothing.”

“I know, it's boring as hell, isn't it? Are you grounded? I am. I told my parents I was going to Helen's to pick up a fucking book.”

“Did you talk to Helen?”

“Oh, no,” she said. “We're not really on the same page lately. I guess it's the same for you. All those secrets she's been keeping... with Kala.” By now, you knew Aoife quite well. She was waiting for you to take the bait. You knew it was better not to.

“Do you want to come in for a minute?”

She sat down on the bed, and you remained standing.

“I just wanted to see how you were doing,” she said. “Poor Mush. It's terrible, isn't it? I guess Kala will become even stranger now. You know how she treats Mush, usually. Like he was her teddy bear, you know? She always wanted to sleep with him when we had sleepovers.”

A shiver ran down your spine. Aoife kept looking at you.

“Wait, you didn't know about the sleepovers? I've got stories to tell you. Believe me.” Your heart was pounding.

“Like what?”

“Oh, nothing,” she said. “Sometimes Kala acts like a little slut. You know what I mean.”

Your head was spinning. For the first time, you wondered: what was Kala doing on the farm with Mush?

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<sup>14</sup> one of the girls in their group of friends, jealous of the deep friendship between Helen and Kala

“You know she sent me some photos” you said “Porn photos.”

Something flashed in Aoife's eyes as she looked at your phone on the table. Mom called you from downstairs. You looked out onto the landing.

“What is it?”

“Cut it out,” she said. “Remember, you're grounded.”

Aoife said goodbye with a hug. “Be careful, Joe. Kala can be so... distracted... with people sometimes.”

You went back to playing your guitar. Your head was on fire. It was a while before you looked at your phone. Only it wasn't where you usually kept it, on the nightstand next to Kala's photo. It was on the bed, where Aoife had been sitting.

(Walsh 316-320)

Unlike Mush and Helen, Joe's narration is cast in the second person “you”, which functions as a form of self-address; the narrating voice speaks to its own experiencing self, producing a split that can be described as narrating-you vs experiencing-you. To understand what this means, we can refer to Monika Fludernik's article “Introduction: Second-person narrative and related issues” published in 1994 by *Penn State University Press*. Fludernik argues that the second-person narrative main goal is to point to the protagonist and to recount specific past experiences. Crucially, Fludernik notes that second-person narration often produces an ambiguity between address and self-address, and can introduce a slight distance from the past self (a hint of interpretation/evaluation), even when the exact source of that distance remains hard to pin down.

This is especially clear at the opening of the passage, where the discourse performs temporal compression and selection, “The days following Mush's accident are lost in a fog. You remember the phone calls”; in Fludernik's sense, the second person here signals the text's retrospective reconstruction, with the “you” functioning as a form of self-address through

which memory is organized by selection. The same “you” shifts into scenes of 2003 where where the address increases experiential involvement, pulling the reader into embodied proximity and re-staging the encounter with Kala as lived pressure. Crucially, the passage contributes epistemic fragments; it emphasizes communicative traces (messages, conversations, insinuations) and ends on a small but telling displacement of an object (the phone on the bed where Aoife had sat) which lets the reader wonder what Aoife could have done with the photo Kala sent to Joe.

Joe’s second-person technique does not undermine the novel’s structure; rather, it makes the mediated nature of retrospective narration more explicit. By addressing the past self as “you,” the text foregrounds a slight distance between the self who lived the events and the voice that now organizes and recounts them. The result is a representation of how recollection is shaped through selection so that the reader still needs to recombine Joe’s partial access with Mush’s remembered scene and Helen’s testimonial/institutional information.

From here, suspense becomes almost inevitable. If the truth of what happened to Kala is distributed across three narrators whose accounts are partial and not always mutually confirming, then the narrative can only advance through recomposition; each new chapter recontextualizes what the reader thought they knew. In other words, suspense in *Kala* is not built only by withholding facts, but by structuring access to them through voice rotation cutting between Mush, Helen, and Joe at moments when knowledge is close but incomplete. This suspense built up through the voices rotation reaches its climax in the final chapters: Joe has managed to rescue the twins and tries to warn Helen and Mush, but they are still convinced that they are being held hostage and try to free them. However, they come face to face with Joe's father and realize that he has always been the culprit.

The crescendo of events begins with Joe in the hospital with the twins:

“Call Helen,” says Theresa. “They're together.”

You smile as you look at your phone, ready to give her the good news. But when Helen answers, your blood runs cold. She can't speak; she's gasping for breath, screaming and slurring her words. You hear a scream.” (Walsh 334)

Joe's narration breaks off and shifts to Helen:

“It's too late to stop. I keep running. I call Mush. He doesn't answer. I run into the barn to make sure he's already out. My footsteps echo on the stone floor. The sound bounces off the walls as I catch my breath. My body understands what is happening before my mind does. It takes me a while to realize what I am seeing. And then I scream.” (Walsh 337)

Helen's narration stops and starts again with Mush:

The phone starts ringing again. Joe again. “I'm sorry,” I say. The phone vibrates in my hands. I try to end the call, but my fingers are shaking. “Just Helen and me...” I hear a loud crack inside my skull and see a white flash, and the room comes at me so fast that it fills my head [...]

*crack*

and Mom in the café at home in a playground with Aidan on his bike with Kala and us all running in a line through the tall grass with the twins under a duvet stretched between two beds like a fortress the look Donna gave me from the window the last time I saw Kala with the baton that falls on me  
sorry, I'm so sorry  
I'm so” (Walsh 340)

In these three passages, Walsh uses Joe's voice as a trigger to close the chapter, but he does not leave the reader hanging because the narration shifts to Helen so that the reader perceives the moment when Helen shouted, “It takes me a while to realize what I'm seeing. And then I

scream” even though the reader still doesn't know how Joe heard the scream or why Helen screamed. This happens when the narration shifts again, and Mush answers these questions. Joe heard Helen because he called Mush, and Helen screamed because she saw Joe's father attack Mush, realizing that he was the one responsible for everything. However, the narrative is interrupted again with “falls on me...sorry, I'm sorry...I'm so” because Mush is brutally attacked and the reader does not know if he is still alive. Here, the suspense no longer lies in the question “who is the culprit” but “will Mush survive?” and “what is really happening?” Walsh builds the shock by collapsing Mush's perceptions, the scene fragments “crac...”, and the narrative slips into Mush's seemingly happy memories.

The last three chapters build suspense because tension is not contained within a single narrative line but emerges from voice rotation and the unequal distribution of knowledge across narrators. If the narrator had remained Joe, the reader would have been distanced from Helen and Mush's sequence. By alternating the voices, Walsh repeatedly places the reader at the edge of understanding and then displaces that edge into another voice.

Each narrator approaches the truth of 2003 and the danger of the present from a different position of access and the novel cuts away at moments when a character is about to see and connect what is happening. The result is a form of suspense that does not depend on a single withheld clue, but on the necessity of recomposition; the reader anticipates the truth because it appears always imminent, yet never fully available within one consciousness, and must therefore be assembled across different reconstructions.

In conclusion, *Kala* is a key case study for Multi-Pov because it highlights a different set of choices and effects from *Blue Sisters*. In Mellors' novel, Multi-Pov works through a stable external narratorial voice combined with shifting internal access, producing a strong immersion into three distinct mental styles while maintaining an overarching coherence. In *Kala*, by contrast, Multi-Pov is not a modulation of one narratorial voice but a rotation of three voices

across two timelines; the effect is a production of suspense through unequal access. This is precisely why the novel is crucial for this thesis; it shows that multiperspectivity can function not only as a tool for staging narrative minds, but also as a structural device that regulates information, delays recognition, and turns the reader into an active interpreter who must reconstruct the story by placing narrating voices side by side.

### **3.5 *Hazel Says No*, Book Overview**

*Hazel Says No* is the debut novel by American writer Jessica Berger Gross.

The novel is set in the present day and tells the story of the sexual harassment of an eighteen-year-old girl and the consequences it had not only on her but also on her family.

The Greenberg Blum family has just moved from New York City to a small town in Maine called Riverburg. For each member of the family, father Gus, mother Claire, eldest daughter Hazel and second child Wolf, this move represents the possibility of a new beginning. Gus will finally be able to devote himself to his literary research without having to worry about money, as his salary as a university professor is now commensurate with the cost of living in Maine. Claire no longer needs to work, so she can create the clothing collection she has long dreamed of. Hazel thinks that, being brilliant, she will easily obtain a scholarship to Vassar College, as she will be compared to her classmates who, unlike those in New York, appear less intelligent. Wolf will have the opportunity to make new friends, as no one knows about his eccentricity. However, the Blum family's dreams are shattered when, on her first day at Riverburg High, Hazel is summoned to the office of Principal Richard White. Principal White makes explicit sexual advances towards her, telling her that every year he chooses a girl in her final year and that if she satisfies his demands, he will ensure she is admitted to the college of her choice.

Hazel is torn about whether to tell her family, as she is well aware that once she does, she will become “the girl who was harassed” and she does not want this label to affect her life.

Nevertheless, she also knows that if she does not speak up, the principal will go unpunished, so she confides in them. Her father, Gus, decides to take matters into his own hands and approaches the vice-chancellor of her university to deal with the situation. From here, the novel is told from multiple points of view (Hazel's, but also her parents' and her little brother Wolf's) and shows what happens when a private matter becomes public.

News of the investigation into the Principal spreads and the town of Riverburg is divided; some defend White, while others consider him a harasser. White, for his part, continues to claim that it was Hazel who made advances towards him. Hazel becomes what she feared, namely the girl who was molested, and the school becomes a hostile place. The family also receives threats; Wolf even finds a hateful note demanding that his sister be silenced.

Wolf, who is in secondary school, experiences all this with the confusion typical of a twelve-year-old boy; he only understands bits and pieces of what is happening and just wants to be normal. He also discovers that his friend Gracie, with whom he is performing in the school play, is the daughter of Headmaster White. Wolf thus ends up in a situation that brings him into contact with the family of the accused man, and he does not want to abandon the play because he loves theatre. As the weeks go by, evidence emerges suggesting that Hazel's case is not an isolated incident; other allegations related to White's past (even outside Maine) come to light and his wife files for divorce. The story grows beyond Riverburg and attracts the attention of the national media. Proposals for television reports, podcasts and articles arrive. Hazel finds herself overwhelmed and feels that her life has become public property. However, she decides that she does not want to passively endure all this and that she wants to regain control over her narrative of events by doing what she has always loved: writing. This is where literary agent Sadie Lansky comes in, encouraging Hazel to tell not only what happened to her but also everything that followed: the division of the town, the headmaster's attempt to blame her, the sexism and hatred directed at her family. Hazel is torn; she does not want to be famous for what

happened to her, but she also feels that this could be a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. In the end, she accepts.

When it seems that White has been sidelined, the town attempts a return to normality and even discusses his return to school in a marginal role. The community opposes this and organizes a town meeting where everyone can express their opinion. Hazel, who feels she has already said enough, does not speak for herself, but she is still at the center of the storm she has triggered.

The story does not end with a verdict but with Hazel reclaiming her person and her voice; she finally meets the Principal after everything that has happened. It is a chance encounter, but Hazel realizes that she is no longer afraid.

### **3.6 *Hazel Says No* and the apparent Use of Multi-Pov**

In *Hazel Says No*, the story is told by a heterodiegetic, extradiegetic narrator: the narrating instance does not belong to the storyworld, and “who speaks” remains stable throughout.

What changes is mainly “who sees,” because the narrator repeatedly aligns the discourse with Hazel, Claire, Gus, or Wolf. For this reason, the novel can look like a Multi-Pov narrative at first glance, but the multiperspectival effect is mostly a framing impression rather than a strong rotation of voices like *Kala* or minds like *Blue Sisters*. In Genette’s terms, the book is best described as authorial narration combined with variable internal focalization: the narrator can slide into different consciousnesses while keeping one coherent authorial discourse.

This impression is reinforced by the chapter design: each chapter title announces what the focalizer character is about to do. For example, Chapter 2 is “Wolf Goes to Middle School” and Chapter 4 is “Gus Tries to Work.” In this way, the title works as an orientation cue; it separates the narrator’s stable voice from the chapter’s center of consciousness and makes focalization shifts easy to follow. However, this paratext can also be misleading; it looks like a promise of “new voices,” while the narrating instance remains the same. The headings therefore signal

perspective changes (who sees) without implying a genuine rotation of narrators (who speaks). This is one of the key differences from *Kala* (where narration is organized through a clearer voice rotation) and from *Blue Sisters* (where the stable narrator is consistently retuned to distinct mental styles).

This leads us to the central question for this section: how can an extradiegetic narrator remain authorial and external, and yet feel close to a character's mind? The following fragment from the very first chapter of the novel "The Principal's Office" shows how *Hazel Says No* achieves a strong figural effect through internal focalization and free-indirect discourse, even though the narrating voice stays stable:

In mid-August, Hazel had asked the principal if there was a school literary magazine. He said no and suggested they start one together. [...]

She wasn't sure anything would come of it. Some adults just talk.

That summer, he had acted as if it were somehow admirable, or at least noteworthy, for a teenager to be interested in something other than her phone. As if she were a genius just for reading a novel.

But now, in the harsh institutional light of his office, Hazel was realizing that at the pool, the principal had paid her more attention than was perhaps normal. [...]

"We need to talk about the literary magazine too, right? I have some ideas for us." He took a sip from his plastic coffee cup.

"We should brainstorm. Think about the themes we want to explore. The genres too. Let's figure out what you like, but also what might interest the other students, right? Find some readers, some contributors."

Hazel nodded, uncertain.

"And I was thinking we should start meeting after school. Regularly, you know? So, we can make this work. Get our first issue out by Thanksgiving. We could use

my office. Or, better yet, find a place where we can really dig in. Where we won't be constantly interrupted because some kid is smoking e-cigarettes in the bathroom. Are you free on Saturday?"

"Oh yes, that's a good idea. I'll have to think about it. But now I should probably get back to math class."

Her stomach was starting to hurt. She didn't know what to think of him. Was he one of those passionate teachers who live for their students, who change your life and inspire you to be your best? The kind of teacher you'll never forget? Or was he a very, very shady character?

"It's my first day, and that's the subject I'm worst at. I don't want to miss anything."

"You don't have to worry about that," he said.

Hazel looked at the door, adjusted her shoulder bag, and considered getting up.

"I could write you a letter."

"A letter?"

"A letter of recommendation. I'd be happy to, actually. For Vassar. I know someone in the admissions office. That kind of thing can make a difference."

Oh.

He moved away from the desk and sat down in the chair next to hers.

"A letter of recommendation would be a good idea," she confirmed, even though this invasion of her personal space was making her uncomfortable.

"A letter would be great." It really would be. It certainly couldn't hurt.

"We both know you're special, Hazel."

Okay? But, once again, no. She wasn't special. She was okay. Smart enough, talented enough. Smart enough to be fully aware that she wasn't particularly extraordinary. Hazel had never felt extraordinary.. [...]

Sweat stuck Hazel's thighs to the chair.

"I have one last question for you before I let you go. Can you keep a secret?"

he asked, his voice reduced to a conspiratorial whisper.

"Of course," said Hazel. She knew how to do that. She was, in fact, a great keeper of secrets.

"Here's the thing—"

"Yes?"

The principal crept closer to her. "Here's the thing."

He reached out, brushing her thigh. And then his fingers began to creep back and forth. Deliberately. Pathologically.

He was touching her—and it was disgusting—and he was an adult, and he was her principal, and she wanted to scream. Instead, Hazel froze, seized by a kind of catatonic horror.

White lifted her chin with his fingers and stared into her eyes. "Every year, I choose a student to have sex with. This year I choose you." (8-16 Berger Gross)

Using Genette's distinction, in this fragment "who speaks" never changes; we have an extradiegetic third-person narrator, yet, "who sees" is progressively restricted to Hazel, and the narrator's discourse absorbs her hesitations and judgments "Some adults just talk"; "Oh."; "Okay? But, once again, no." The result is a figural effect; Hazel's consciousness seems to take over the prose while the narrating instance remains authorial and in control of the access.

Finally, when the harassment occurs and Hazel recognizes what is happening, internal focalization becomes fully embodied; there is a physical discomfort "Sweat stuck Hazel's thighs to the chair" and in the immediacy of perception "He was touching her... she wanted to scream. Instead, Hazel froze...". This is not a switch to another narrating voice, but an authorial narrator simulating closeness by filtering the event through Hazel's perception.

Now that we have clarified that *Hazel Says No* is governed by a stable authorial narrator (rather than a strong rotation of voices), we can move on to the novel's key thematic core: the harassment as a focalized object that is repeatedly reframed as the perspective changes.

In Bal's terms focalized objects can also be abstract or event-like (Fludernik 103); here the focalized object is an event. I will therefore take four excerpts from the book to show how the same focalized event (the harassment and its ripple effects) changes meaning depending on the perspective. The perspective shifts are real and important, but they operate within one authorial discourse, which is why the Multi-Pov frame in this novel is best understood as apparent rather than "strong" in the sense used for the other two novels.

In this first fragment Hazel comes back to school after she told her parents what happened:

She wasn't going to let her future be derailed because some guy had asked her to have sex. That kind of thing happened to girls every day. This time it was a middle-aged man, her principal. So what? She didn't need to process or analyze the "trauma" of that half hour spent in a pervert's office. It would have been better if it had never happened, but the next best option was to never have to think or talk about it again. She didn't need a psychologist or a new school. Hazel was FINE. [...]

Her plan: grit her teeth for the rest of the school year and leave Maine.

Once she had passed through the double doors and entered the building, paranoia took over. She couldn't shake the feeling that the boys were watching her quite explicitly. [...]

She had gotten a little lost, walking down an empty hallway, looking for the science wing, and now she was late and doing her best to find her way through the unfamiliar corridors when she saw him. White. He was walking down the hallway like he was the mayor, the favorite teacher, and the best dad, all rolled into one. It happened in slow motion, and it was like skidding on a highway in the middle of

an ice storm, veering toward the center line. He saw her. She saw that he had seen her. Without meaning to, she stopped dead in her tracks. She couldn't walk. She couldn't speak. She couldn't think. Hazel wanted to scream or call for help or run out of the building, but all those options seemed impossible given her state of paralysis, which had started in her mind and moved to her body.

«Hazel», said the principal, nodding in her direction as he continued on his way. As if nothing had happened between them. As if what he had said and done to her in his office was nothing, as if she was nothing, as if there was nothing extraordinary to admit or atone for.” (Berger Gross 83-85)

With Hazel the focalized event of the harassment is translated above all into a bodily and cognitive experience; the event is not something stays in the past, but a trigger that returns inside everyday school space and breaks agency. Hazel tries to minimize the event and keep moving forward, yet as soon as she re-enters the school building, paranoia takes over and the school becomes hostile; the object is experienced as a constant internal alarm rather than a single external fact. When she sees White, the text renders the trauma as total inhibition “She couldn’t walk. She couldn’t speak. She couldn’t think”, while White’s behavior rewrites the event through denial “as if nothing had happened between them”. In Bal’s terms, then, what Hazel feels is not only White but an invisible cluster of fear, shame, and powerlessness that reorganizes perception; the school becomes a space read through the lens of what happened, and Hazel’s body is the medium through which the focalized object keeps re-appearing.

In Ch.14, “Wounded people wound other people,” the focalization shifts to Claire:

It was Saturday morning, and Claire was missing New York. Gus was somewhere in the house, working. The kids were asleep. She needed to do something productive. [...] With that, she walked barefoot out onto the side porch. [...]

The word was there, scrawled in red spray paint on the sidewalk in front of the path leading to their door. SLUT.

“We probably shouldn't touch it,” Gus commented.

“Why not?”

“It would be like tampering with evidence.”

“Evidence! What about Hazel? And Wolf? We can't let them know, can we?”

Gus sat down on the front porch, took off his glasses, and rubbed his eyes. “I haven't slept since Monday night. I can't stop thinking about White. Or the fact that I might get fired.”

“Can we focus? Someone just wrote ‘slut’ all over our driveway.”

“I'm going to have nightmares about this week for the rest of my life,” Gus muttered. Claire licked her finger and began to scratch away the word SLUT.

“It'll take a lot more than a little spit,” Gus said. «We should call the police.”

“It's spray paint,” Claire said. “It's not a bomb. We're not calling the police.”

“How can we not? You called it a hate crime.”

“It is a hate crime. I'm not saying it isn't. I'm saying I don't want any of our kids to know about it.”

“They're smart kids,” Gus replied. “they'll find out eventually.” [...]

“We should get out of the state,” Claire said, turning around. “Out of the country! Drive to Canada.” [...]

“We really should report this,” Gus said.

“I don't get it. You want to stay and you really want to report this?”

“Yes! I want to fix this!”

“The only thing that will convince me to stay is cleaning this stuff up,” Claire said.

She really meant it.

“Okay.”

“Do you promise you won't call the police?”

“I won't call the police.”

“Thank you.” Claire exhaled. Paint was something she could handle.

(Berger Gross 92-97)

With Claire the event is reframed as a family and community threat. The harassment set changes from the principal's office into the domestic sphere as stigma and social violence; the spray-painted slur on the sidewalk becomes a material sign of what the event has turned into in Riverburg. Claire's reaction is protective, she wants to erase the word before the children see it, and she treats “cleaning this up” as the only condition for staying. Her language and actions show that, for her, the harassment represents the invasion of private life by public judgment and her impulse is containment (hide it from the kids, handle it at home) or escape “Out of the country! Drive to Canada”.

The same excerpt also shows what the harassment becomes for Gus; he filters the event through procedural and institutional categories (evidence, reporting, police, consequences) and through the pressure of maintaining control. His first response is to preserve the scene “tampering with evidence” and to call the police, and he links the harassment to exhaustion and professional risk “I can't stop thinking about White. Or the fact that I might get fired”. In other words, for Gus, is not only the harm done to Hazel, but the collapse of order that follows legal procedures, institutional reputations, and the fear of losing his own position while trying to protect his family.

This filter becomes even more evident when the focus is on him in Chapter 11, “Gus Gets Erased”:

Gus felt down. The terrible and infuriating affair with the principal had eaten away at him, along with his concern for Hazel, and left him completely exhausted; he had hardly slept at all that night.

Now he had to put all that aside. Claire could criticize him all she wanted for going back to work that morning. She had quit her job. Someone had to earn a living.

Teaching his first class of the first semester would take all of his energy. Teaching was a performance. The first day was like opening night at the theater. He would be panned or praised. His reputation on campus would be made or broken. Gus had to be brilliant. (Berger Gross 68)

Gus calls the harassment “the terrible and infuriating affair” that has “eaten away at him,” but the narration immediately moves to the logic of performance and institutional judgment “Teaching was a performance”. The focalized event is therefore experienced through a double pressure: private crisis at home and public/institutional evaluation at work. This is one reason the perspective shifts in *Hazel Says No* feel less like distinct voices and more like an authorial narrator reallocating attention to different “domains” of consequence (home, school, work, town).

With Wolf, the object of harassment is transformed once again, Ch.16 “Wolf throws in the towel”:

Unlike the rest of his family, Wolf would continue to live his life. He had a semi-secure spot at the lunch table next to a popular person, and a starring role in the school play. It wasn't that he was exactly happy. Being a normal kid took hard work. And being thrust into the spotlight and getting a part in the school play put a lot of pressure on him. However, every Monday, Wolf was almost relieved to be able to go back to class. He wanted to worry about himself for once. Because he was tired of thinking about his sister and Principal White. He was tired of

pretending he didn't know about the spray-painted graffiti. He was sick of keeping track of ALL THE THINGS WOLF WASN'T ALLOWED TO KNOW. Most of all, even though he cared about his sister, he was sick of his parents treating Hazel like she was the most important person in the world just because she had had a terrible first day of school. (101-102).

With Wolf the harassment becomes an event that invades childhood routine and forces a child to manage adult knowledge and social backlash. Wolf tries to keep a “semi-secure” place in the cafeteria and to stay focused on school life (friends, the play), yet the event keeps intruding as pressure and responsibility; he must act normal while living inside a network of things he is not supposed to know, say, or fully understand. The key point is that, for Wolf, the harassment is focalized less as the original scene and more as its afterlife (visibility, stress, and the feeling that ordinary adolescence is no longer protected). This reframing is powerful, but it still happens under the same authorial narration.

This is one reason the perspective shifts in *Hazel Says No* feel less like distinct voices and more like an authorial narrator reallocating attention to different “domains” of consequence (home, school, work, town).

In conclusion, *Hazel Says No* is better described as authorial narration with variable internal focalization than as a “strong” Multi-Pov novel. Perspective shifts are clearly signaled and they do reframe the harassment as a focalized object (Hazel’s embodied paralysis; Claire’s domestic exposure; Gus’s procedural control and reputational risk; Wolf’s threatened normality). Yet “who speaks” does not rotate, and the narrating discourse remains broadly coherent across perspectives. Compared to *Blue Sisters*, where the stable narrator is consistently returned to distinct mental styles, and to *Kala*, where multiperspectivity is structurally anchored in voice rotation and recomposition, *Hazel Says No* uses perspective mainly as an authorial

device to guide the reader through different zones of consequence rather than as a fully developed Multi-Pov architecture.

### **3.7 Is the choice to use Multi-Pov functional for these novels?**

The question of whether Multi-Pov is functional for *Blue Sisters*, *Kala*, and *Hazel Says No* can be answered only by returning to the criteria established earlier in this thesis; multi-focalization is functional when it enlarges the range of interiority available to the reader, modulates information in a way that effects such as suspense or surprise, and avoids the main structural risks of fragmentation and disorientation by providing clear cues of perspective and a coherent overall design.

Read through this lens, the three novels do not use Multi-Pov as a decorative alternation of chapters, but as a way of engineering the relation between “who speaks” and “who sees” in three distinct ways. *Blue Sisters* keeps the narrating voice stable while varying focalization to place the reader inside different narrative minds; *Kala* Multi-Pov is built through a rotation of narrators (Mush, Helen, Joe) and this produces suspense through the unequal distribution of knowledge, and *Hazel Says No* uses variable focalization under a stable authorial discourse so that the same triggering event is repeatedly reframed across different consciousnesses and social positions.

In *Blue Sisters*, the choice to use Multi-Pov is functional because it puts the theoretical distinction between voice and access to work in a very controlled way. The novel keeps a stable narrating instance (heterodiegetic) while distributing focalization across the three sisters in an orderly rotation, so that “who speaks?” remains constant even as “who sees?” changes. This structure solves one of the technical problems of multiperspectival narration, i.e. how to enter different consciousnesses without either fragmenting the text into unrelated voices. The prologue briefly foregrounds an authorial narration that frames the sisters from above; once the

numbered chapters begin, the narrative settles into variable internal focalization and repeatedly places the reader inside three distinct “narrative minds,” in Cohn’s sense. The crucial point is that the narrator’s discourse mimics each sister’s perceptual and emotional register so the reader is not simply told about Lucky, Bonnie, or Avery but is made to inhabit their mental processes. Yet this immersion does not eliminate narratorial distance; the mediating voice remains external and can occasionally intrude to connect strands, manage transitions, or briefly widen the frame without breaking the figural effect. In Genette’s terms, it exploits the combinatory nature of voice and focalization to obtain a double effect, i.e. psychological intimacy plus structural control. This is why Multi-Pov in *Blue Sisters* is not a redundant rotation but the mechanism through which the novel distributes information and interiority while keeping coherence.

In *Kala*, the choice to use Multi-Pov is functional because the novel’s narrative tension is generated by the rotation of three voices rather than by a simple omniscient withholding of information. The story can only move forward through recomposition; each new section does not merely add facts but recontextualizes what the reader thought they knew, turning interpretation into an active process of assembling fragments. In this sense, suspense in *Kala* does not arise from the omission of useful information but from the structure of Multi-Pov itself; by distributing knowledge unevenly and cutting between narrators when knowledge is close but incomplete, the novel converts the characters’ limited perceptions into the reader’s cognitive anticipation.

*Hazel Says No* complicates the question of functionality because its multiperspectival effect is best understood as apparent. The novel is told by a stable heterodiegetic, extradiegetic narrator while perspective is regulated through variable internal focalization. The chapter titles act as an orienting device that signals the focalizer in advance and reduces disorientation, but this paratext can also produce a misleading expectation of fully rotating narrating voices. Yet, the perspective shifts are functional because they transform the

harassment into a dynamic focalized object whose meaning changes according to the focalizer's position. The novel's technique therefore does not primarily aim to differentiate narrating voices, but to map how one event reorganizes multiple lives and interpretive frames. In short, *Hazel Says No* is more accurately described as authorial narration using multi-focalization as a guided reframing device; within that design, the use of Multi-Pov is functional because each shift yields a distinct recontextualization rather than redundant repetition

Across the three novels, then, the choice to use Multi-Pov is functional overall because each text makes focalization "do work," but it does so through different solutions to the same narratological problem: how to distribute interior access and information while containing fragmentation through structural cues and a coherent design. Where Multi-Pov would become a failure is precisely where perspectives are insufficiently differentiated or where alternation produces redundancy; in these three cases, the technique remains an organizing principle matched to each novel's narrative aims, whether through voice/access engineering (*Blue Sisters*), recomposition-driven suspense (*Kala*), or authorially guided refocalization (*Hazel Says No*).

#### **4. *All That Lies Ahead*, a novel by Anna Zambonin**

*All That Lies Ahead* is an ongoing coming-of-age project centered on four women in their late twenties/early thirties, Olivia, Yerin, Emmeline, and Isobel, whose friendship becomes the space where private crises are processed, negotiated, and sometimes resisted. Rather than building the plot around a single "event," the novel organizes itself around a shared threshold: the moment in which aspirations, relationships, and bodily limits stop being abstract and start demanding decisions. This is why the story's dramatic energy often comes from ordinary scenes (work routines, friendship dynamics, domestic spaces) that suddenly reveal what each character cannot postpone anymore.

Olivia, Yerin, Emmeline, and Isobel met at Boston University and went through those formative years together.

It was at university that Olivia also met the man who could be the love of her life, Peter, but both have always been too cowardly to embark on a serious relationship. So, after spending just one night together on graduation day, they mutually agreed that there could be nothing between them, that starting a relationship would ruin their friendship, and both recognized that they were not people born to commit to a relationship. Years later, Olivia and Peter met at an alumni reunion and, after an evening reminiscing about old times, ended up in each other's arms. Olivia left before sunrise without explanation and has no regrets.

However, something is changing in Olivia's life; her closest friends all have successful careers, while she is still stuck in the job she found after college, and no one seems to take her dream of becoming a writer seriously. Olivia feels lost and cannot understand or achieve what she wants from life. Olivia is used to running away when things start to get complicated or too serious; she has never had stable relationships and has never sought them out because during her childhood she never had a place she could call home, as her parents, due to their work, always made her move from city to city. Olivia has no idea who she is, having always had to reinvent herself to adapt to new contexts, but above all, she thinks that nothing in life is stable. She hides this fragility behind an extroverted and lively personality, feeling the need to mold herself to please others because she thinks that this way, sooner or later, someone will love her.

Just as she is experiencing this identity crisis, Peter comes back into her life, and Olivia has to decide if and how to welcome him back into her heart, as she is aware that before you can be happy with someone else, you have to be happy with yourself.

Yerin has almost completed her specialization in pediatrics and does not know where she will work next year, although she would like to stay in New York, close to her friends, the only people she has ever allowed herself to love. Yerin is the daughter of a single mother who became

an empty shell after her father abandoned them. Yerin had to grow up quickly, and even though she knows in her heart that family is not synonymous with “mother, father, and children,” she has always wanted family stability. Nevertheless, she does not trust men and is convinced that if she ever decides to start a family, she will do so on her own.

She is a woman who appears cold and detached, almost icy, and people must be very patient to break through her defenses, as her friends have been.

One of her colleagues, James, understands this and patiently waits for the moment when Yerin will realize that theirs is love and not just a physical relationship.

However, Yerin will find herself dealing with something bigger than herself; she’ll get pregnant and will have to decide whether to free James from this burden without ever revealing her condition to him, or to accept the help that this man seems ready to give her. Yerin, however, has never been good at asking for help; she has always managed on her own in life, first helping her mother and then obtaining a scholarship to university. She will have to understand that sometimes in life it is right to rely on others when things seem too complicated.

Emmeline is an academic who has studied history her entire life, like her mother, and is about to complete her PhD, which could secure her a professorship at Columbia. However, even though Emmeline loves her work, what she really dreams of is a simple life shared with the love of her life, Miriam. Emmeline met Miriam at university, and they have been together ever since. Emmeline does not have a strong personality and often fails to assert her ideas, especially in her relationship. Miriam, also an academic, but in chemistry, seems frustrated that her partner will get the professorship before her and therefore spends most of her time at work, arguing that Emmeline will never understand her dedication, as she is facilitated by her mother's position. At the beginning of the story, Emmeline and Miriam appear to be in crisis, but Miriam, to smooth things over, asks Emmeline to marry her, and Emmeline accepts.

Nevertheless, Emmeline still does not seem happy. She feels neglected and wonders if she has been neglecting herself for so many years to satisfy her partner. Emmeline is unable to open to her best friends, knowing that if she did, it would confirm what they had always thought, namely that Miriam did not want an equal relationship but someone who would put herself aside for her. When their relationship inevitably ends, Emmeline will have to figure out who she is without someone by her side and understand that love is not total devotion to the other person. Isobel is a professional ballet dancer. Her dream is to join the American Ballet Theater, but now, at the age of thirty, she is losing all hope. After college, she earned a living as a dance teacher, and even though she loves what she does, she feels that if she doesn't fulfill her dream, all her years of sacrifice will have been in vain. Isobel suffered from anorexia during her career, which has left her unsure whether she will ever be able to have children. Nevertheless, Isobel is not upset, as she never aspired to be a mother.

Her life is shaken by two events: a long-time teacher at the American Ballet Theater offers her position, as she is about to retire, but Isobel is determined to refuse the offer, and she meets Percival, a seemingly reserved and thoughtful but very confident man. Although Isobel falls in love with him, she knows she can never give him what he wants, a family, so she does everything she can to push him away. Percival, however, helps her understand that sometimes in life we don't always get what we set out to achieve and that we can also try to be happy with what we have.

I decided to structure *All That Lies Ahead* using the Multi-Pov technique because I believe that in real life people often have different interpretations and versions of the same issues or events, and that this only enriches human experiences. I therefore start from the assumption that for me, as the author, there is never a single truth or a single way of facing the challenges that life presents us with. Through the minds of Olivia, Yerin, Isobel, and Emmeline, I want to demonstrate just that.

My goal as an author is to combine an authorial narration with Multi-Pov like Mellors did with her novel, but instead of using a single event like she did (Nicky's death) I want to cover the challenges that women can face in early adulthood.

Because the novel is currently being developed and published in installments on Substack, the next chapter will focus on selected sections already available, using them as a case study to test, within an original work, the same narratological tools adopted for the contemporary novels discussed in Chapter 3.

#### **4.1 Substack, the platform for emerging authors**

As I mentioned, my book is self-published on Substack, for this reason I find necessary to dwell for a moment on what Substack is and why is important for emerging authors, journalists or anyone who wants to experiment with writing.

Substack is a subscription-based publishing platform that lets creators distribute writing (and other media) directly to readers, typically through posts that can be delivered by email and read on a publication page, with optional paid subscriptions. In March 2025, Substack has surpassed 5 million paid subscriptions, marking significant growth from 4 million just four months prior. The platform supports over 50,000 paid publications, with total active subscriptions (including free) exceeding 35 million.

Within contemporary literary culture, Substack has increasingly been discussed not only as a technical outlet for self-publishing but as an environment that can reshape how fiction is produced and received. In "Is the Next Great American Novel Being Published on Substack?", Peter C. Baker describes Substack as a space where both established writers and aspiring or emerging writers can experiment with long-form storytelling outside traditional publishing gatekeepers, often leaning into forms that feel more provisional or in-progress than the finished object typically associated with the novel. The article's central interest is less the "platform" in

the abstract than the way platform conditions create a specific reading situation: publication unfolds in installments, readers may encounter the work alongside commentary and recommendation dynamics, and the author's continuity of output becomes part of the work's public life.

Personally, I have noticed that Substack offers the opportunity to create a community loyal to the content created, unlike other social media platforms where content is consumed at such a speed that it's almost impossible to notice who is producing what. For an emerging writer or aspiring writer, this is very important. Having regular readers who are familiar with your work and can comment on it and give you interesting ideas allows you to adjust your work but also to experiment.

For this thesis, Substack is relevant not only as a tool of self-publishing but as a context that encourages serial narration: my work is released in segments that can be individually readable while still contributing to a longer narrative arc. This structure can shape pacing, chapter boundaries, and the management of focalization; issues that become central in the analysis of *All That Lies Ahead's* Multi-Pov design.

## **4.2 *All That Lies Ahead* and the Use of Multi POV**

In *All That Lies Ahead*, the story is told by a heterodiegetic third-person narrator. Still, the narrator rarely adopts an all-knowing stance: information is filtered through variable internal focalization, so perceptions and feelings are anchored in one character at a time. The effect is that the reader stays close to distinct "centers of consciousness" (to use Cohn's vocabulary) without switching into first person.

One practical problem of a serial, Multi-POV project is orientation.

Because installments may be read days or weeks apart, each chapter needs to reopen the story with clear coordinates. For this reason, I label chapters with place + date + focalizer (e.g.

“Chapter 2 / New York, Williamsburg, March 2025 / Yerin”), so the change of focalization is signaled before the scene begins.

These headings are more than paratext; they work as an orienting system that limits one typical risk of multiperspectival narration, i.e. disorientation, while preserving the benefits of fragmentation. In serial format, the label becomes a stable point of re-entry; it does not simply announce “it’s Yerin turn,” but invites the reader back into a shared world at a precise time and place.

In other words, segmentation is part of the technique. Multi-Pov here is not only a rotation of characters, but a way of packaging each installment as a single unit with a clear focal center, so interior access can expand without the overall arc dissolving into scattered pieces.

Within that structure, the narratorial voice remains stable, i.e. heterodiegetic third person, but is continually adjusted to each focalizer’s mental style. In describing this, I draw on Cohn’s modes of consciousness representation and on Stanzel’s distinction between figural and authorial orientations. Most passages stay predominantly figural, i.e. close to the character’s inner logic through consonant psycho-narration and occasional slides toward narrated monologue, while brief authorial inflections (compact summaries or interpretive labels) surface only momentarily and never become full omniscience.

To demonstrate all this, I believe it is useful to close read some parts of the first four chapters. In Chapter 1 (Emmeline), the prose turns inward, shaped by self-interrogation and anxious evaluation:

Miriam didn't come home that night. She had told Emmeline she would spend the night at the university to check on some culture. [...]

Lying in their bed, Emmeline felt shame grip her stomach. Why wasn't she like Miriam? Why did she love her job but couldn't love it as much as she loved her girlfriend or as she might love a family?

Emmeline had dedicated her life to studying history; she knew that change, whether negative or positive, took time. Miriam had never had the patience or perseverance to wait for it; she was terrified by the idea of not having enough time.

Emmeline was content with what they had.

No, she wouldn't let her negative thoughts prevail. She touched the ring on her finger to remind herself that she and Miriam had put aside their differences to build something together. They would get married, both get tenured positions, buy a house in the suburbs where Peggy could play, and live happily ever after.

Yet she couldn't shake the feeling that she would have to be different to be loved.

(Zambonin 7-8)

In this segment, the narrator enters directly into Emmeline's affective conflict "Lying in their bed, Emmeline felt shame grip her stomach" and lets the paragraph unfold as a sequence of questions that echo her own looping thought: "Why wasn't she like Miriam? Why did she love her job but couldn't love it as much as she loved her girlfriend or as she might love a family ...?"

Even when the narration offers brief contextual cues (Emmeline's historical sense of time and change), it remains tethered to her need to justify herself. What emerges is a consonant form of psycho-narration in Cohn's sense: the narrator does not report doubts from the outside, but recreates their emotion (shame, comparison, projection) until the reassuring fantasy: "They would get married ... and live happily ever after") is immediately undercut by "Yet...".

Put in Genette's terms, the voice stays the same, but focalization does the work; interiority is staged through an anxious, internally oriented perspective rather than through a shift of narratorial position.

Chapter 2 (Yerin) changes pace, the same narrator becomes sharper, faster, and more scenic:

“James! James, you must get up!” Yerin shook the man in her bed roughly, but all she got in response was a grunt.

“James, get up!” Yerin repeated, getting out of bed. She looked at the alarm clock; it was already nine in the morning, her shift would start in an hour, and she still wasn't dressed [...]

“If you don't get moving, I'm going without you,” James said, grabbing Yerin and dragging her back to bed.

“Let's call in sick,” he said between kisses, and Yerin had to resort to self-control to avoid falling into temptation.

The apartment was incredibly quiet. [...]

They had shared that apartment in Williamsburg since they had finished Boston College and moved to New York; Yerin and Emmeline to continue their studies, Isobel to pursue a career as a dancer, and Olivia to work.

Emmeline had never lived with them; she and Miriam had moved in together right away. Over the years, that apartment had undergone various transformations; at first, it was nothing more than the home of three young adults who kept white wine, face masks, and oat milk in the refrigerator. Tattered posters hung on the walls with phrases like “This Place Is For Dancing,” and they had picked up the sofa for free from a shady guy in New Jersey.

Today, they could proudly claim ownership not only of a sofa they had bought in a store, but also of three beds and a kitchen, but the masks were still in the refrigerator.

Yerin moved quickly around the kitchen, making coffee and stuffing a few bars into her bag. [...]

Yerin almost immediately regretted not letting James convince her to stay in bed.

The sky threatened rain, and they had both forgotten their umbrellas. [...]

Yerin watched James walking toward the entrance of New York Presbyterian Hospital. He kept his hands in his pockets and his shoulders hunched.

She had met him on her first day of residency; it was impossible not to notice him. [...] Yerin couldn't imagine that everything James did was to impress her and not to prove that he was better. James had realized that Yerin was brilliant as soon as he laid eyes on her.

During the first year of his residency, he hadn't had the courage to approach her, thinking that someone like her would surely reject him, so he had studied her and patiently gotten closer and closer to her. (Zambonin 9-12)

Time pressure drives this opening “James! James, you must get up!”, matching sharp temperament. When the chapter pauses to sketch the apartment and the group’s shared history, that information is still filtered through her practical attention to the space, so exposition feels like an extension of her vigilance rather than a detached summary. At the same time, the narrator occasionally allows slightly interpretive phrasing, for instance “self-control”, or marks Yerin’s limits, “she couldn't imagine...” James’s motives, guiding the reader toward a gap between what she registers and what may remain hidden to her. These moments make the mediating voice briefly perceptible, but the focalization remains primarily internal.

The opening of Chapter 3 (Isobel) retunes the discourse again:

It was the first day of spring, and spring always brought good news, right? Isobel thought as she refreshed her email for the umpteenth time.

She couldn't sit still with excitement, so she moved from the sofa to the kitchen counter.

Isobel had been practicing ballet since she was five years old. She had earned a degree in dramatic arts from Boston College, encouraged by her parents who wanted her to have a plan B in case she didn't make it big, which had always

annoyed her because she had lost precious years in which she could have made the most of her potential.

She was tired, tired of chasing a dream that seemed less and less clear as time went by. The following year she would turn thirty, and you could count on one hand the number of dancers who had made it big at that age.

“You're wearing out the floor,” Isobel jumped at Yerin's voice. She realized she was pacing back and forth, from the refrigerator to the shelf where they kept the cups. [...]

The phone rang in the other room and Isobel ran to answer it, spilling green tea on the counter.

It was the American Ballet Theatre. She had had the number memorized for years. She took a deep breath and answered.

“Isobel, dear, this is Thomas from the American Ballet Theatre.” Isobel greeted him politely. “Let me say that we loved your performance, you moved like silk carried by the wind.” Isobel was holding her breath. “Nevertheless, we have decided to continue with a professional who is already part of our company.”

The feeling she experienced was like an arrow piercing her chest.” (Zambonin 13)

The opening reads like a small ritual of hope and waiting “It was the first day of spring...”, “Isobel thought as she refreshed her email for the umpteenth time”. Restless gestures (refreshing, pacing, shifting between sofa and counter) translate inner tension into action, and the thematic axis (ambition and the fear of running out of time) is established from within Isobel’s mindset rather than as external explanation. When the refusal arrives, it lands as a bodily image “like an arrow piercing her chest”, signalling a register that leans on aesthetic intensity and somatic perception.

Chapter 4 (Olivia), by contrast, sounds more observational and ironic, saturated with contemporary cues, making focalization guided by a quick, performative intelligence:

The place looked comfortable; the ceiling beams were made of dark wood, as was all the furniture. The armchair she was about to sit in was covered in green velvet, and next to it was a small table with a box of tissues on top. Olivia laughed softly. She continued to scan the study until her gaze fell on the bookcase behind the solid wood desk. She approached it and ran her fingertips over the spines of the books, which were mostly novels and not boring self-help essays. She felt heartened. She was still stroking the books when she heard the door open and quickly withdrew her hand.

Dr. Miller had a sweet, comforting face. She must have been around fifty years old and wore her hair pulled back with a pencil. Even the way she dressed conveyed tranquility; she wore loose, soft, petrol-colored pants and a white turtleneck, her glasses dangling from her neck.

“I'm sorry!” stammered Olivia, “I was curious.”

“Don't worry, Miss Hughes,” she said with a smile.

“You've already learned my name.”

“I always learn my patients' names before I meet them. Please, have a seat,” she said, pointing to the velvet armchair. [...]

They had spent the rest of the session talking about Olivia's family. The doctor had decided to start from the beginning, and Olivia didn't mind that she had taken control of the conversation. [...]

She went into Variety, a café near her house, and ordered a latte for herself, an Americano for Yerin, and a chai latte for Izy. As she picked up her order, she thought it had been a terrible idea to schedule her therapist appointment in the morning. She

made a mental note to reschedule it for the late afternoon, so she could at least sleep and give her brain a break.

Her phone rang. A guy at the counter heard the Game of Thrones theme song and winked at her. Olivia ignored him. Perhaps she was the only person in 2025 who still had a ringtone on her cell phone. She saw the name on the screen and, torn between pleasure and annoyance, ignored the call. A message immediately appeared. She ignored that too and put her phone back in her back jeans pocket.”

(Zambonin 21-23)

Olivia’s first scene shows clearly how a stable third-person voice can still feel character oriented. The setting could be described neutrally, yet selection immediately follows her attention: she scans the therapist’s room, and details such as the velvet armchair and the tissue box operate less as décor than as emotional triggers. Vulnerability is registered but instantly processed through humour “Olivia laughed softly”, a mental style distinct from Emmeline’s recursive shame or Yerin’s pragmatism.

The bookshelf sharpens this effect. Olivia reads the titles as a cultural test, and reassurance comes from her own parameters: the relief at finding “novels” rather than “boring self-help essays.” The focalized object, then, is not simply “books,” but a genre distinction that functions as self-definition.

The same habit returns in the café sequence, structured around recognizable contemporary signals (the ringtone, the stranger’s reaction). Olivia’s response is filtered through rapid social judgement and self-positioning “Perhaps she was the only person in 2025 who still had a ringtone”. In Cohn’s terms, the mode stays largely consonant, with brief evaluative turns that get close to narrated monologue.

Olivia’s chapter therefore suggests that differentiation across focalizers depends less on grammar than on what the narrative treats as important.

Across these openings, Multi-POV in *All That Lies Ahead* is produced through discursive modulation: one narratorial voice, repeatedly adjusted in rhythm, evaluation, and imagery to fit each consciousness.

Building on this, the question is not only how focalization is performed, but what these focalizations build together. Since the project is still in progress, what follows is necessarily a provisional account based on the installments published so far.

My aim is to distribute the novel's core concerns across a shared pressure-field (identity, work, stability, love, and motherhood) so that each focalizer selects, weights, and interprets that field differently. In Bal's terms, the focalized object is less a single event than a cluster of themes and affects that becomes legible through comparison.

Even within the installments currently available, Chapter 7 (Isobel) offers an illustration of this diffuse focalized field:

Isobel had never paid attention to the baby products aisle at Whole Foods; it was all pastel colors and smiling animals. She suppressed a shudder.

"The nappies are on sale," said Olivia.

Isobel turned to her and realized that her friend was looking at the aisle with the same puzzled expression.

Olivia picked up the nappies and put them in the trolley.

"What are you doing?" Isobel asked her.

"I'm buying nappies," Olivia replied as if stating the obvious.

"The baby isn't due for months."

"But they're on sale, and these things cost a fortune, so it's better to stock up now, isn't it?"

"Who says Yerin will be living with us when the baby is born?"

“She hasn't said anything to James yet, and I doubt she'll continue this relationship, if you can call it that,” said Olivia, pushing the trolley towards another aisle. Isobel couldn't help but agree with her.

They both looked at their shopping and tilted their heads in unison: two bottles of white wine, some Tampax, an avocado, some retinol masks, a few vegetables, some frozen pizzas, a glass jar labelled “for heartburn” and nappies.

“Our trolley is screaming, I'M THIRTY YEARS OLD AND I DON'T KNOW WHAT TO DO WITH MY LIFE,” said Olivia, and they both laughed. [...]

Olivia paused: “Do you think I made the right choice? Keeping the baby?”

She knew why Olivia was asking her that question at that precise moment. They were alone; they hadn't dared to talk about it with Yerin at home.

Isobel and Olivia had never hidden their doubts about motherhood from their friends, but now that one of them was about to become a mother, it seemed disrespectful to voice those doubts in front of her.

Yerin had never openly said she wanted children, but she had always adored them, so everyone expected that one way or another she would have them.

Emmeline wanted a family and had never made a secret of it.

Olivia didn't feel ready yet and argued that she might never be, essentially applying her usual practice of postponing the issue. Isobel believed that if her friend found the right person, she might be convinced.

As for her, she didn't want any. She loved children, but she was well aware that they were an impediment to her goals, so she considered it fortunate that she couldn't have any.

She had discovered it a few years earlier. She was dating a guy named Daniel and had missed her period. She imagined that the condom had broken and that they hadn't noticed.

The test came back negative, but being an anxious person, she booked a doctor's appointment. It turned out that there was little chance of her getting pregnant. Isobel didn't have the courage to ask him if the cause was the way she had treated her body as a teenager. She accepted that reality and it was as if a great social burden had been lifted from her shoulders. It wasn't her fault as a woman, but her body that had betrayed her. A perfect excuse and an easier version to tell. (Zambonin 40-41)

The scene begins with an ordinary errand (grocery shopping), but tension quickly shifts from logistics to existential positioning. The cart becomes a compressed sign of adult ambivalence “I’M THIRTY YEARS OLD AND I DON’T KNOW WHAT TO DO WITH MY LIFE”, and Olivia’s question “Do you think I made the right choice? Keeping the baby?” opens a comparative inventory of stances toward motherhood that goes beyond a simple pregnancy plot. Anchored in Isobel’s focalization, the passage sketches diverging orientations toward the same threshold: Emmeline’s explicit desire for a family, Olivia’s reflex of postponement, Yerin’s tacit alignment with children, and Isobel’s own refusal tied to constraint, and past anxiety.

Because the novel is unfinished, this mapping can still be revised by later chapters; however, the installments already show Multi-Pov working less as a way to add information and more as a comparative structure for reading one life-threshold through four distinct perspectives.

## 5. Conclusion

This thesis sought to investigate Multi-Pov narration as a structural choice, not simply as a stylistic preference.

Rather than dealing with Multi-Pov as a generic label, I focused on what this technique does to a narrative; how it shapes access to characters' minds, how it controls information, how it can build suspense, and what risks it creates in terms of coherence and reader's comprehension. The study was structured as a comparative analysis of three novels that use Multi-Pov in different ways, *Blue Sisters*, *Kala*, and *Hazel Says No*, with my creative project *All That Lies Ahead* working as a final case study that tries to rely on Multi-Pov structure.

Across the thesis, two questions arose; the first was whether Multi-Pov is functional in the three novels, and why. The analysis suggests that Multi-Pov is functional when it has a clear logic, i.e. when the rotation of perspectives is necessary, readable, and tied to specific narrative effects. In *Blue Sisters*, the technique is effective because it produces a strong sense of proximity to each sister's mind. The narrative voice adapts in ways that make the reader feel less like they are being told about Lucky, Bonnie, or Avery, and more like they are inhabiting their minds. In *Kala*, Multi-Pov supports suspense mainly through structure; the alternation of narrators organizes what the reader can know, when they can know it, and how suspense is built through delays and shifts. *Hazel Says No*, instead, highlights a key limitation; the presence of different character perspectives does not automatically create a strong Multi-Pov system. When the narrative control remains largely uniform, multi-perspectivity can feel more like a frame than a fully developed strategy.

This leads directly to the second question: why choose Multi-Pov when an author could rely on an authorial narration? The answer that emerges from this thesis is that Multi-Pov can change the kind of reading experience a text offers. An authorial narrator can explain, guide, and evaluate with a single organizing voice; Multi-Pov, when it works, makes the reader reconstruct meaning through partial viewpoints, gaps, and contrasts between perspectives. In that sense, it is not only a different way of telling the same story, but a different way of making the story take shape for the reader.

The limits of this work are linked to scope; the corpus is intentionally selective, and the analysis focuses mainly on narratological effects (especially focalization and voice). Other researches could extend the comparison to other genres and media, or examine more closely the relationship between Multi-Pov and contemporary reading contexts. Still, the main conclusion remains stable; Multi-Pov is a powerful tool, but it is also demanding. It succeeds when the plurality of perspectives creates real differences and supports a coherent design; it becomes weaker when the rotation is superficial or when fragmentation is not balanced by a clear narrative structure.

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