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**RESEARCH ARTICLE**

## First-Person Point of View in Contrast to Globalisation in Somerset Maugham's 'Mr. Know-All'

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**ABSTRACT**

This paper discusses the first-person point of view in Maugham's 'Mr Know-All'. It particularly analyses the narrator's position in relation to the story told in this short story, with the intention of disclosing the latter's prejudice against Mr Kelada, the protagonist, and consequently, its hindrance to globalisation. It thus underlines the fact that this protagonist and other travellers are different colours, but one person on this ship epitomises globalisation. The general attitude of readers is that they are inclined to easily believe the narrator while forgetting that fiction is the work of a teler, a teller, but, first and foremost, a liar. The audience, whether it is disconnected from the setting or not, also tends to forget that "travellers from afar can lie with impunity". In fact, the nameless narrator in Maugham's short story has a persona that leaves a lot to be desired. He is prejudiced against Mr Kelada, known as Mr Know-All, as will be evidenced by the scrutiny of his diction. This paper finally purports to show that those who proclaim globalisation loudly are not ready to live together.

**KEYWORDS**

*narrator, persona, point of view, diction, contrast, globalisation*

**Résumé**

Cet article traite du point de vue à la première personne dans "Mr Know-All" de Maugham. Il analyse en particulier la position du narrateur par rapport à l'histoire racontée dans cette nouvelle, avec l'intention de révéler le préjugé de ce dernier contre M. Kelada, le protagoniste, et par conséquent, son frein à la mondialisation. Il souligne ainsi le fait que ce protagoniste et d'autres voyageurs sont de couleurs différentes, mais un seul peuple sur ce navire incarnant la mondialisation. L'attitude générale des lecteurs est qu'ils sont enclins à croire facilement le narrateur en oubliant que la fiction est l'œuvre d'un conteur, mais avant tout d'un menteur. Le public, déconnecté ou non du décor, a aussi tendance à oublier qu'« à beau mentir qui vient de loin ». En fait, le narrateur anonyme de la nouvelle de Maugham a un personnage qui laisse beaucoup à désirer. Il a des préjugés contre M. Kelada connu sous le nom de M. Know-All, comme en témoignera l'examen minutieux de sa diction. Cet article prétend enfin montrer que ceux qui proclament haut et fort la mondialisation ne sont pas prêts à vivre ensemble.

**Mots clés**

*narrateur, personnage, point de vue, diction, contraste, mondialisation*

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**ARTICLE INFORMATION**

**ACCEPTED:** 14 October 2022

**PUBLISHED:** 22 October 2022

**DOI:** 10.32996/ijllt.2022.5.10.18

**1. Introduction**

The first-person point of view is a significant element in Somerset Maugham's 'Mr. Know-All', which has not yet been analysed in all its substance and form. Also, the little spotlight has been turned on the man and his work. This first-person narrator tells the story, sees everything and is part and parcel of the plot. This paper aims to review this narrator's point of view and thus demonstrate that everything seen through his lenses hampers life in symbiosis. This point of view has a tremendous influence on the work inasmuch as most of the story is viewed from this standpoint.

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Prior to showing how the first-person point of view hinders the process of interaction and integration among people worldwide, this work will analyse the narrator's prejudice against Mr Kelada, his closest travelling companion and other passengers on the ship. It thus examines, as Forshaw (2017, p.1) argues in the introduction of his thesis, "how a narrator can be both untrustworthy and fallible at different times in the narrative, sliding between genuinely misreading events, and deliberately lying to the reader." Readers are, in general, inclined to easily believe the narrator while forgetting that fiction is the work of a teler, a teller, but, first and foremost, a liar. Whether they are disconnected from the setting or not, readers tend to also forget that "travellers from afar can lie with impunity".

Synoptically, the narrator, meets Mr Kelada as the story opens; he is more active and involved at this outset. He observes, comments and judges Mr Kelada as he sees him through his own eyes. Since he is influenced by his prejudiced British society, his judgments are subjective. In the second part involving the necklace examination, the narrator is less involved. He is like an observer who writes down what he hears objectively. After the chain examination is over, the narrator becomes subjective again. In the third and last part, the narrator discovers Mr Kelada's true character. As a result, at the close of the story, he undergoes a change realising that people should not be judged by their appearances but by their actions and character.

The comment below about point of view is from Al-Alami (2019), for whom the point of view can refer to two things: a point of view in a discussion is an opinion; the way one judges an issue. In the narrative, however, a point of view is the narrator's position in the description of characters and events. Simpson (2010, p. 294) thinks that point of view embraces the angle of narrating in fiction. Point of view is important because it *filters* everything in a narrative. It determines the amount of information the narrator shares with the reader. It can also influence the degree to which the reader can identify with the protagonist (Al-Alami, 2016; 2013).

Shen (2010) believes that both first-person and third-person types of narration employ different methods. For example, the pronoun 'I' can be used in first-person narration to refer to either an observer or the protagonist. Shen proceeds to emphasize that it is extremely important to gain awareness of two dichotomies relating to the point of view. These are an *internal* point of view which embodies the viewing position inside the story, versus an *external* point of view, which embodies the viewing position outside the story.

Additionally, one should be able to differentiate between the *outside* view, which entails observing a character's behaviour, versus the *inside* view, which entails penetrating into a character's thoughts and feelings. In Simpson's opinion (2010; 1993), the point of view in a narrative can be as limited as that of the first-person narrator or as wide as that of the third-person omniscient. Clark (2007) explains that point of view can be deployed for different purposes. Point of view can be deployed to represent an ideological framework or a visual perspective of a story. In addition, it can be deployed to describe different types of relationships within a story's contexts.

In Maugham's 'Mr Know-All', different points of view are used, but the most used is the first person 'I', sometimes 'We'. Tom Dooley (2017, p.135), "All first-person narratives contain more than one point of view: the writing "I" is necessarily distinguished from the "I" written about." In the present case, the question is about the writing "I".

In 'A Study of Gricean of Theory of Implicature and Nonverbal Implicature in Somerset Maugham's Mr Know-All', Govindarajulu and Krishnamurthy (2017) state that Somerset Maugham's writings in general and short stories, in particular, did not receive the critical attention they deserve before they attempt to use Grice's Cooperative Principle and the four Maxims of Conversation, together with Nonverbal Communication, to understand the linguistic meaning of words in Maugham's short story, 'Mr. Know All' when implications are intended. The authors rightly recognise the lack of abundant criticism of Maugham's short stories, including 'Mr. Know-All', albeit published in the wake of World War I.

Notwithstanding this fact, some online and unpublished analyses like Utev's and Motzkin's...can be highlighted. In 'Stylistic Analysis of Somerset Maugham's 'Mr. Know-All' (2017), Utev gives his point of view according to which Mr Kelada is the protagonist and the narrator, the foil, the so-called contrast figure. He thinks that Mr Kelada, known as Mr Know-All, only reflects the good and the bad features of the protagonist and that, in this story, the foil reflects more negative than positive traits.

One of the points raised by Motzkin (2017) in his analysis of Maugham's 'Mr. Know-All is the point of view, a point on which Motzkin does not say much apart from emphasizing the narrator as an active character with subjective judgements and a less involved character with objective judgements as the story moves.

Kurraz's paper 'Plot-Subplot and Characterization in Somerset Maugham's *Mr Know All*: A New Critical Review' published in 2015, aims to study Maugham's 'Mr. Know-All' from the perspective of New Criticism (Russian Formalism), mainly highlighting the elements of the plot/subplot and the characterization, two of the most important elements of the short story. The study emphasizes

the significance of thematic, aesthetic, and structural analysis of the text, pinpointing the dominant themes in the story. The paper also analyses the interconnectedness of such components to serve the thematic essence of the story in the context of the plot that the writer formulates in order to present his characters and themes. The paper pays special attention to the analysis of the major characters and ideas, specifically Mr Kelada and his struggle with the narrator-character on the basis of prejudice, racism and ethnicity. Moreover, the paper analyses the narrator-character who transforms from a character of hatred and racism to a balanced character of love towards Mr Kelada, suggesting the nature of the contemporary human self in its volatility and transformations.

The point of view that is the most used by Maugham in his short story 'Mr. Know-All' is the first person 'I', sometimes 'We'. Yet, how does the narrator consider Mr Kelada and his other travelling companions, and how does this aspect of his character affect globalisation?

The nameless narrator in Maugham's short story is badly perceived by the author's readership since he is wrongly prejudiced against Mr Kelada as well as other people. Such a person would certainly have consequences that are not limited to space and time but that would sharply contrast with the interdependence of the world's cultures and populations.

The analysis of the first-person point of view needs to be carried out with a look at such approaches as sociological, moral, and psychological, owing to the fact that our opinions and behaviour are often shaped by the society we live in and its manners. Yet, for this particular case, an emphasis is laid on the formalistic approach given that such elements of style as a point of view, diction, and phraseology...feature prominently in this analysis.

## **2. The Defects of First-Person Point of View**

The study of the first-person point of view requires a look at such terms as degrees of knowledge, attitude or judgement, and reliability thereof; When it comes to looking at the narrator's persona in Maugham's 'Mr. Know-All', one soon realises that the narrator is first prejudiced against Mr Kelada. The first sentence of the story is so expressive that the narrator is prepared to dislike Max Kelada even before he knew him. How can we dislike people we have never known if this is not a century-old racial feud? For an author to rely on this type of point of view is to rely on their weakness.

According to Abrams (1999, pp. 233-234), "First-person point of view (...) insofar as it is consistently carried out, limits the matter of the narrative to what the first-person narrator knows, experiences, infers, or can find out by talking to other characters." This is the case of Maugham's 'Mr. Know-All', a story in which the narrator ostensibly wants to appear omniscient, but factually is, not as many aspects of his target escape him. He is rather a limited narrator. Even if he were omniscient, he would not escape the fact, according to "the omniscient narrator can turn out limited and even biased in mid-discourse" (Sternberg & Yacobi, 2015, p.425).

The mouth often speaks out of the abundance of the mind. The saviour-*être* and *savoir-faire* may have failed Mr Kelada, but not knowledge as such. Knowledge being power, gave him a kind of authority over his travelling companions. This may have been the root of all the annoyance. The true omniscient character is thus Mr Kelada and not the narrator, who is fallible from the outset. Olson (2003, p.101) points to the limitations of the homodiegetic narrator, expanding on her argument, "fallible narrators do not reliably report on narrative events either because they are mistaken about their judgments or perceptions or are biased [and] because their sources of information are both biased and incomplete."

Regarding the degree of this narrator's attitude or judgement, it is obvious from all the preceding indications that his depiction of the protagonist is biased throughout the story, with a small exception at the end. Fludernik (2009, pp.152-153) maintains, "It can be assumed that first-person narrators are both inherently limited in their perspective and potentially untrustworthy: they have an agenda when telling their stories, which could come into conflict with a true representation of what happened."

The degree of reliability in the narration of 'Mr. Know-All' is too low. The narration is obviously unreliable. The concept 'unreliable narrator' originated from Booth's *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (1961); in the 1983 second edition of this book, the author (pp.158- 59) explains, "I have called a narrator reliable when he speaks for or acts in accordance with the norms of the work (which is to say the implied author's norms), unreliable when he does not." In fact, while reading this short story, our suspicions are soon aroused, and we are certain that Maugham has created a narrator who cannot be trusted, and a kind of interaction between him and us is established without the narrator's knowledge. Kurraz (2015, pp.494-495) notes:

The first-person narrator is the sole presenter of central characters from his subjective point of view. Consequently, readers fall victim to his points of view and get influenced by the perspectives he expresses. In this sense, this type of narrator cannot be reasonably reliable or neutral. It is until the ending paragraph that readers get the chance to realize the real characterization of Mr Kelada, among others.

Culler (1997, p.90) thinks, "Unreliable narration can result from limitations of point of view—when we gain a sense that the consciousness through which focalization occurs is unable or unwilling to understand the events as competent story-readers would." This allegation is partly supported by Martin (1986, p.142), as his claims seem to rehabilitate first-person narrators:

Any first-person narrative ... may prove unreliable because it issues from a speaking or writing self-addressing, someone. This is the condition of discourse, in which, as we know, the possibility of speaking the truth creates the possibility of misunderstanding, misperceiving, and lying, whereas "we cannot question the reliability of third-person narrators."

He gives the impression of clearing first-person narrators of all suspicion, but Maugham's short story is clear enough that the blame has to be put on the narrator for his extravagant description of Mr Kelada.

From all this, notice can be given that the use of the first-person point of view is mostly defective. "The I is hateful", a dictum by Blaise Pascal from the *Pensées*, can summarise all this argument. This address from Pascal to Miton can be used for the narrator in Maugham's 'Mr. Know-All' likening this narrator to Miton, "Self is hateful. You, Miton, conceal it; you do not for that reason destroy it; you are, then, always hateful" (1901, p.64).

### 3. Diction and Phraseology Revealing the Narrator's Prejudicial Attitude

According to *The Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory* (1998, p.679), "Diction denotes the vocabulary used by a writer." The vocabulary used by the narrator in 'Mr. Know-All' refers, as usual, to a wide array of positive and negative associations that most words naturally carry with them. However, it clearly appears that the narrator's portrayal of Mr Kelada mostly carries negative connotations. His diction for the main character is inappropriate and leaves much to be desired about his own persona, as evidenced in his enumeration of four adjectives expressing Mr Kelada's traits. He lets us know that Mr Kelada "was hearty, jovial, loquacious, and argumentative" (Maugham, *MKA*, p.320).

It is crystal clear that there is nothing negative about Mr Kelada's traits in the narrator's use of these adjectives, which all carry with them positive meanings. He acts as the foil to Mr Kelada, believing to act like an angel, but his choice of words reveals his prejudicial attitude. To start with, the four adjectives can be grouped into two categories, the first two expressing Mr Kelada's feelings, and the last two, his linguistic attitude. There is nothing wrong in being hearty and jovial, as the Bible in 1 Thessalonians 5.16 recommends us to. Mr Kelada's feelings express his positive state of mind. One can, indeed, be talkative and unconvincing. Mr Kelada's loquaciousness is, however, justified by his rhetorical arguments. Similar to 'argumentative', but carrying negative connotations, are adjectives such as 'quarrelsome, disputatious, bickering, litigious, polemical, aggressive, etc., which Mr Kelada was not.

According to the Theory of the Four senses of humour as developed by Hippocrates, based on the works of Aristotle, it is incredible to conceive such a hearty and jovial character as Mr Kelada developing all these humours at the same time, that is displaying joy and anger at a time. That is why, as readers, we wonder if it was really, as the narrator claims, "an affront to his [Mr. Kelada's] overweening vanity that you should disagree with him" (*Loc.cit.*). In accordance with this medical theory of humours, one realises that the word 'affront' is awkwardly used since Mr Kelada, though not a British citizen by nature, certainly knew how to behave by keeping his composure when the debate gets intense, which is characteristic of the British phlegm.

In the same vein of showing how inappropriate the narrator's choice of words to discredit Mr Kelada is, he unconsciously says, "Mr Kelada was chatty. He talked of New York and of San Francisco. He discussed plays, pictures, and politics. He was patriotic." In fact, he should not have used 'chatty' but 'jabbering', which often connotes an incomprehensible way of talking lacking logic. Kurraz (2015, pp.492-493) has his viewpoint about Mr Kelada's supposed loquacity:

Mr Kelada expresses his annoyance from the narrator's point of view by mechanism of being too talky. Also, this is ironically significant because others on the ship believe that Mr Kelada isn't so annoying. Thus, events and actions exponentially succeed in revealing Mr Kelada as an enigmatic major character.

Mr Kelada is likely to be critically acclaimed and characterised as a world citizen since he was born under a wandering star and is not a xenophobe. Even though this is not clearly stated in the narrator's words, it can be inferred that Mr Kelada talked favourably of New York and of San Francisco. This obviously means that he was patriotic beyond his country of citizenship.

The *Cambridge Dictionary* defines phraseology as the way in which language is used, especially in the choice of words and expressions. The narrator in 'Mr. Know-All' uses figurative language to ridicule the protagonist. In doing so, he, however, makes a fool of himself. In fact, reading Maugham's short story, one can underline a figure of extreme exaggeration, like hyperbole. Mr Kelada "ran everything (...) was everywhere and always" (*Loc.cit.*). Yet, the narrator does not really do this for rhetorical effect. He also uses a figure of contrast or opposition, like an oxymoron alleging that Mr Kelada "was certainly the best-hated man in the

ship" (*Loc.cit.*). The superlative 'best' in this oxymoronic phrase expresses the degree of the aversion of the narrator for Max Kelada, not certainly for everybody on the ship. In all likelihood, Mr Kelada does not deserve this portrayal as he appears to be everybody's laughingstock in the sole eyes and pen of the narrator.

Another figure of contrast, like irony, would make sense if it were rightly used. When the narrator says that they called Mr Kelada "Mr Know-All, even to his face" and that "He took it as a compliment" (*Loc.cit.*), he certainly believes that this is sarcastically used to bite the protagonist. This has, indeed, to be taken as a compliment because, by the end of the story, over the pearl issue, Mr Kelada demonstrates that he is really Mr Know-All for his sound knowledge of Mrs Ramsay's real pearls.

The expression "I did not at all like Mr Kelada" is repeated thrice in the story. Every time the narrator states this, he does not give enough reasons to substantiate his point of view. It is quite clear that this statement is unfounded and not grounded in facts.

#### **4. Racism and Refusal of Human Cohabitation**

When a narrator monopolises at all costs a stereotyped speech and wants to get people to believe them, they may ipso facto develop racism and run counter to globalisation. Such is the flaw of the so-called 'omniscient narrator', as used in Maugham's 'Mr. Know-All'. In this short story, the narrator's racism goes beyond expected limits as the opening sentence foreshadows everything about his behaviour towards his immediate travelling companion, Mr Kelada, and the rest of the voyagers. When the narrator says, "I was prepared to dislike Max Kelada even before I knew him." (*Ibid.*, p.318), many people believe that this comes from his great displeasure with Mr Kelada's personal effects, which is a mistake. In fact, there is no technique like flashback or foreshadowing used by the author to uphold this opinion. The storytelling, however, follows a certain chronology as the passive voice used in the sentence suggests that there is an outside agent or force that is exercised on him; he only undergoes the action.

This rather suggests a long-termed training in racism that the narrator had to put into practice with whoever is culturally different from him. Mr Kelada is thus one of the few victims of this racism. Such a claim as "I should have looked upon it with less dismay if my fellow passenger's name had been Smith or Brown" (*Loc.cit.*) cannot be taken for granted. In actual fact, beyond his dislike for Mr Kelada, for the narrator, "It was bad enough to share a cabin for fourteen days with anyone" (*Loc.cit.*). In 'anyone', there is neither a nation nor a colour limit. The travelling conditions sometimes cause intense pains, but travellers have to bear those ephemeral ills, which was not to be the case for the narrator.

The narrator's hatred first contrasts with patriotism because it lacks reciprocity. The love Mr Kelada has for him as his fellow-countryman is not returned. In Mr Kelada's words, "I was jolly glad when I heard you were English. I'm all for us English slicking together when we're abroad if you understand what I mean" (*Loc.cit.*); we understand the speaker's sense of unlimited patriotism.

There are such places as homes, pubs and clubs that are dear to the British people. Such a particular setting as the ship on which they travel cannot entail the use of home and pub but that of the club. Unfortunately, the narrator is not a bird of the same feather as Mr Kelada to be or flock together with him. He is rather a bird of bad omen as he was prepared from the very start to dislike his companion. His description of the protagonist obviously betrays both like (Mr Kelada's) and dislike (his), "I am Mr Kelada," he added, with a smile that showed a row of flashing teeth, and sat down" (*Loc.cit.*). It is a biased description, coloured with abuses that undermine Mr Know-All's reputation.

What is worthy of note in Maugham's 'Mr. Know-All' is that he tried to shed light on globalisation, which is first a term for the international exchange of economic resources. Here, the author indirectly castigates the Western World, which likes the resources of the so-called 'Third World' but dislikes their owners. This conversational exchange between the two characters brings evidence:

"Whisky and soda or a dry martini, you have only to say the word."

From each of his hip pockets, he fished a flask and laid it on the table before me. I chose the martini and called the steward; he ordered a tumbler of ice and a couple of glasses.

"A very good cocktail," I said. (*Ibid.*, p.319)

Mr Kelada embodies both different cultures. As a British, he helps readers understand that Britishness is still a 'hard issue'. The British people, though united under one joint-Sovereign, have been quarrelling over different issues. The recent case of the referendum during which Scotland almost exited the United Kingdom may be taken as an example. In fact, the relationships between Europe, symbolised by the narrator, and Mr Kelada, who embodies the Asian countries, have not always been fair. The rejection of the Turkish application for membership to the European Union, to mention only this country, is a patent fact. In fact,

As a Levantine (a term the narrator uses derogatorily), Mr Kelada may have been from present-day Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Israel, Palestine or Turkey. With all these countries, one can see the impact of the narrator's racism. The narrator's statement, "(...) when I was told the name of my companion my heart sank. It suggested closed portholes and the night air rigidly excluded" (*Ibid.*, 318), is meaningless in comparison with his detrimental attitude. Mr Kelada is rather open, but he is withdrawn.

The first-person narrator, as used in Maugham's Mr Know-All, is highly opinionated; but unfortunately, his opinions are all full of racism and a hindrance to human cohabitation. Hence, Govindarajulu and Krishnamurthy (2017, p.156) note that Mr Kelada was "successful in exposing the prejudices of the society and highlighting the significance of the saying "Don't judge a book by its cover".

## 5. Conclusion

This paper analysed the first-person point of view on the premise that this kind of narrator, especially in Maugham's Mr Know-All, is prejudiced against Mr Kelada and his other travelling companions and how this persona affects globalisation. Obviously, from the foregoing comment, we come to realise that the narrator in Maugham's short story is badly perceived by the author's readership since his views and methods are detrimental to Mr Kelada as well as to other people. Such a person would certainly, as it were aforementioned, have consequences that are not limited in space and time but that would sharply contrast with the interdependence of the world's cultures and populations.

As the story closes, the kind of confession made by this narrator that he did not entirely dislike Mr Kelada, a character for whom he openly expresses his dislike three times in the long run of the story, simply means that prejudice arises because it is human nature to stereotype new people we meet on the basis of race or how they look before we get to know them. The moral lessons first-person narrators have to commit to their memories can best be summed up in the proverbs, "Appearances lie", "Do not judge a book by its cover"; and Matthew 7: 1-5 (Do not judge, or you too will be judged..."

**Funding:** This research received no external funding.

**Conflicts of Interest:** The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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