

'Explore how Frayn creates the voice of the narrator in chapter one of *Spies*'

Michael Frayn uses a variety of literary devices to create a sense of voice and depth to the main character of his novel *Spies*, with each allowing us to see another facet of the characters' personality. Within the opening chapter, the protagonist's thought processes are clearly defined, and a voice is immediately established by the tone set. As the novel is largely told in first person, we immediately are aware that the novel will be told from Steven's perspective as the protagonist.

One of his methods for creating this almost omniscient atmosphere is a stream of consciousness technique. This creates the effect of the protagonist's inner voice, and allows us to feel that we are witness to not only the character's actions, but also their innermost thoughts and feelings. This allows us greater insight to the character's true personality, allowing us into his innermost thoughts, rather than just how he is perceived through his actions and in dialogue.

"It [the familiar breath of sweetness] must come from one of the garrets. Which one? I can never trace it. And what is it?"

This gives us a strong idea of what the main character is like, before we are even aware of the setting or plot of the novel. The extended sentence length contrasted with short fragmented sentences creates a feeling of run on thought, of an internal struggle to organise his feelings that we are able to plainly see. This conflict is emphasised by the questions he puts to himself that seem rhetorical, yet he attempts to answer.

"I feel... what? A restlessness."

There are many themes touched upon within the opening chapter of *Spies*, some of the most prominent being the issues of memory, and of the complex feelings that are generated whilst growing up. Both of these topics can create great psychological or emotional turmoil that may not be as easily expressed through action or dialogue. In that sense, the exposure to Stephen's thought processes is essential to the plot and character development within the novel. The memory that Stephen recalls at the beginning of the novel appears to be triggered by a simple smell, yet does not appear to be fully understood. This is clearly expressed with the stream of consciousness, allowing the reader to experience some of the frustration of the narrator at being able to only recall these fragments.

"Glimpses of different things flash into my mind, in random sequence, and are gone."

It is also emphasised with the use of ellipses and question phrases, displaying a sense of uncertainty, and self-doubt as well as the fragmented thought processes.

"What about Keir? Himself? Does he ever think about the things that happened that summer?"

"A shower of sparks. A feeling of shame... Someone unseen coughing, saying not to be read..."

Coupled with the issue of memory is the constant conflict of nostalgia and trepidation with regard to his childhood. A number of the adjectives have harsh, negative connotations that tend to indicate an unhappy or disturbed childhood. This is also reinforced by passages in which he claims to be unnerved, or unsettled about these fragmented memories, and the childhood associated with them.

"For a moment, the child again and everything's before me - all the high-teaching, half-understood promise of life."

It is at this stage that the paradox of his homesickness versus his fear is introduced, only serving to reinforce yet again the confusion that the memory has brought forth by causing the narrator to question whether he truly wishes to remember whatever this memory may be, or to attempt to ignore it and remain in his mental comfort zone. This is also indicative of the possible indecisiveness in the character's personality.

*"A longing to be over the woods... and away, away. And yet
as if the same desire I have a kind of homesickness for where I
am. Is that possible?"*

Frayn also switches his narrative style throughout the chapter, for varying effects. In this instance, it indicates a slight shift in perspective, and limits the amount of information that the reader is allowed to access. Partially into chapter one, the narrator switches from a stream of consciousness style to straightforward narrative. This allows the reader to differentiate between the reality of the protagonist's location and environment, and his subconscious. It also allows us to acquire more factual knowledge about the character - his occupation, his family situation, his age. These details would be harder to access from a stream of consciousness alone, as stream of consciousness tends to deal with more of the emotional aspect to the character.

The switch in perspective also allows us to differentiate between the reflective thoughts of the narrator now, who can look upon the past with the benefit of hindsight, and the child-like thoughts of the narrator when he was younger.

It is within this switch in perspective that we are given an example of the protagonist's inner turmoil with regard to his own identity, and the conflict that is created by his feeling of not belonging in society. It also introduces the concept of the narrator's dual nationality and bilingualism.

*"No, no - Was my language speaking English when she told
me that? ... No - she was n't."*

This appears to be a crucial plot point that would have not be raised had the shift in perspective not occurred.

Therefore, all of the shifts in perspective and subtle references to words, memories, and confliction give the sense of relevance to an overall plot thread development. All of these factors combine together to form the distinct voice of the narrator, thus aiding the readability and appeal of the novel as a whole, as well as assisting the progression of the storyline.