



## Focalizer and Narrative Voice in Fatos Kongoli's Prose

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**Abstract:** Fatos Kongoli is one of those writers of Albanian literature who became famous with a series of novels published after the 90s. With his prose, Albanian literature is enriched more in the thematic and artistic plan, but also in the narrative plane. This study aims to address some narrative aspects of some representative novels of the author, published after the fall of communism in Albania. The study focuses on two narratological aspects, that of the focalizer and the narrative voice, both of which are present in the novels of this author. The study focuses on the presence of the point of view and narrative voice within the narrative world of the author, whose prose is distinguished for narratives of different events, different characters who narrate different events of a life with different existential and hallucinatory crises. Characters are presented through numerous descriptions in the narrative plane of focalization and narrative voice. In the novels of this author, the forms of the narrative are specific, where many characters speak and we have a plurality of narrative voices, which represent a kind of polyphony in the narrative. Through internal focalization in the narrative, Kongoli presents the inner side of the characters, given that Kongoli's narrative delves into the dark recesses of the individual being, tracing the characters's psychology and childish memory. Focalizer and narrative voice are narrative elements that are present in the novels of this author, so the study aims to delve into these issues and give a clearer picture of the narrative discourse of one of the most important contemporary authors of Albanian literature.

**Keywords:** Kongoli; narratology; focalizer; narrative voice; prose; characters

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## 1. Introduction

Kongoli is one of the most productive writers of Albanian literature after the 90s. His novels are united by the common spirit of the characters, the psychological world of the individual and the childhood memory that plays an important role in the fate of the protagonists.

On the narrative plane, Fatos Kongoli's prose is rich in various narrative techniques. The story is organized in different narrative planes. It is very present narrative in the first person where the characters narrate closely the inner experiences of their world. The presence of the characters also brings the narrative voices, which are often manifested in Kongoli. Some characters turn into narrative voices making the narrative a polyphony. In terms of focalization, it mainly emerges as internal focalization as the interior is reflected, the gaze is focused on the inner side of the characters of the story.

## 2. Focalizer

In narratology the term focalizer refers to the point of view within the narrative. Focalizer is the bearer of perspective within the narrative, it implies what a character sees within the narrative world. Mieke Bal in her study<sup>1</sup> illustrates focalism with the example of a drawing in which she depicts a man in a meditative state, a cat imitating him and some mice who laugh at the cat's action. Here the focalizer is the one who sees this drawing, he sees the rats who see the cat who sees the man, whom Bal has named Arjuna. So, in focalization, the main role is played by the sense of sight, the eye. Genette distinguishes three main types of focalizer: zero, internal and external focalization. "*In the inner focus, the focal point corresponds to a character who thus becomes the fictitious "subject" of all perceptions, including those relating to him personally as an object: the narrative can then tell us everything that this character perceives and everything he thinks (he never does, either because he refuses to give unimportant information, or because he deliberately omits this or that important information)*" (Genette, 2014, p. 58).

Zero focalization is the type of focalizer that knows more than any character within the narrative. Internal focalizer means that the narrator knows as much as the characters know, but what distinguishes this type of focalization is that the inner feelings and thoughts of the character are given through the inner perspective. Carrying the perspective of the narrator who enters the character's mind and reads his thoughts, feelings and experiences relates to the type of internal focalization. The opposite of this focalization is the external or external one where the characters are seen from the outside, but not inside, their inner feelings are not revealed, their mind is not "read". Kongoli's novels are dominated by the type of internal focalization through which the inner feelings of the characters are revealed. Kongoli uses this

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<sup>1</sup> Mieke Bal, *Narratology*. Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1985.

type of focalization to reflect the interior of his characters. Since the very nature of the events and the protagonists is related to the psychological realm, this type of focalization becomes somewhat imposing to use, as through it, the reader discovers the hidden thoughts and feelings of the characters in certain situations. Internal focalization reveals the inner parts of the character, what a certain character thinks, feels at a certain moment within the narrative. The point of view is closer to the character.

*"He was finally convinced that he would not sleep that night. He had tried to lose, to free himself even for a few moments from the nightmare that was squeezing his heart, and perhaps without realizing it he had fallen asleep. "But he felt overwhelmed, with the impression that something disgusting was circulating through his body with his blood."* (Kongoli, 2007, p. 5)

Unlike internal focalization, the external one focuses on the external representational perspective of the character. In this type of focalism, the perspective does not focus on the inside of the character, but only on the outer aspects. Here is an example:

*"A little later, in a downtown bar, I learned that the elixir was nothing but fern mixed with ice-cold lemonade. Hector returned several glasses in a row. It was hot and he was covered in sweat. I was stunned by Hector's ability to easily swallow a number of glasses that anyone else would have flattened out in time. He was standing straight, his hand and eyelashes were not shaking, only his eyes were red and his tongue was thick. He made the medicine for his eyes with the sunglasses, which he put inside the bar, even though the day was breaking...."* (Kongoli, 2007, p.150).

In Kongoli's novels, since there are many characters who also become narrators and tell their stories, consequently they also gain the status of the point of view holder. While internal and external focalization belong to the character, zero focalization belongs to the narrator. We have zero focalization when the narrator knows more than the character and this is where the difference between the zero focalizer and the external one lies, since both focus on the external aspect, but the difference lies in the narrator's knowledge about the character.

*"The hands of the clock marked six forty-five. In all likelihood, the son would not come. He found the reason to allow himself to order the second cognac, which the waitress, with an almost ugly face, but with some very beautiful legs, brought to her without delay."* (Kongoli, 2009, pp. 7-8).

We also have cases of focalization when the first-person narrator recounts how he views the world through the eyes of a child. A concrete example is the case of Krist Tarapi in the novel "Dog skin".

*"In the beginning, the first beautiful face of the world appeared to me in the shape of a mother. My mother was a very beautiful woman, working in a kindergarten, as kindergartens were called at that time. She took me with her every morning, kept me in her group and in*

*the afternoon, when we got home, I always complained to her, she only petted the other children, especially a boy from the neighborhood where we lived, whom he told he loved very much. Two letters were embroidered on his white apron, the only ones I learned to know before entering school: N.T” (Kongoli, 2006, p. 30).*

## 2.1. Narrative Voice

Narratologists also talk about another narrative element known as narrative voice. This means what we mean by the voice that speaks within the narrative. While the focalizer relates to the perspective of who sees, the narrative voice represents who speaks within the narrative world. “*Within the narrative we have many voices that make up the polyphony of the novel. Speakers: implicated author, narrator and characters. The textual voice and the intratextual voice are of the narrator and of the characters; while the extra-textual voice is the voice of the author. However, a general tonality dominates*” (Apolloni, 2012, p.113)

The narrative voice is the voice that narrates. In Kongoli’s novels this voice appears mainly in the first person. There are a lot of voices as we encounter different characters who narrate and at the same time turn into narrative voices that narrate about certain events. In “Dog Skin” we easily identify the voice of the protagonist in the first person, that of Krist Tarapi, who tells his story.

“*My name is Krist Tarapi. My name reminded people of Christ, and as we know, once upon a time, not far away, Christ was a declared enemy character.*”(Kongoli, 2006, p. 6).

The same can be found in the novel “Corpse”.

“*This is how my childhood runs to the end, starting on December 7, 1946, when I came to life in the most absurd way, the fifth after four predecessors, without any opportunity to find out what prompted my parents to take on a being like i. Moreover to give me a common name, Celebration. I have nothing against this name. Celebrate enjoy it. But I fail to find a connection between me and the name Festim. It does not appear to me that it is the name of a grandfather, or a great-grandfather, or a close or distant cousin, dead or still alive, in whose honor I am called that*” (Kongoli, 2007, p. 55-56).

The narrative in this case continues in a linear line, the narrative voice does not mix with other voices. It is clear that the narrator-character speaks, who is the main protagonist of the story and at the same time the voice of the first person in the novel.

In many cases in Kongoli’s novels, the narrator interrupts the narrative, leaving it to another character, who turns into a first-person narrative voice by telling different stories from his own life. In this novel, there are also voices that manifest to Festim in the form of visions, hallucinations and that weigh down his brain, pushing him towards madness. Here the real world and the beyond are intertwined. Here's how the voice of this imaginary being appears in his brain.

*“The shadow of the graveyard gleamed.” I did not ask you if you were fit or out of shape. I do not care, as I do not care about tomorrow’s exam. Hypocrite! Instead of asking me why I became like this, you want to evict me. To take away from me the only pleasure of these nights when I come and slap the truth in the face. Open your ears! I come from there, from the world beyond... “ (Kongoli, 2007, p. 200-201).*

Until the last two sentences we have only one narrative voice, that of the shadow of the graveyard, the imaginary voice in the mind of Festim. Then the story goes to the third person narrator and the voice no longer belongs to the same person. At the end of the novel, we also have the voice of Rudolf, Festim's friend, who narrates to him in the form of a monologue.

*“I have been, always present in your life, your protector in silence, and if I now decide to break the silence, I am bound by circumstances. I know you well, brother, kinder than anyone else in the world, no one but me is able to prove how honest you are, how reasonable. Of course, like all beings, you have hidden pockets of the soul, which I also know, but that does not matter. The important thing is that now you feel lonely, with a severe spiritual crisis. You try to find the reasons for this crisis, but you do not find them” (Kongoli, 2007, p. 315).*

Rudolf's voice is evident and does not interfere with other voices. It flows naturally, in a constant line focusing on a certain topic. We also distinguish many voices in the novel “Ivory Dragon” where we have episodes when the characters become first-person narrators. This is what happens to Nazif, Tamba, Fengu, friends of the protagonist of this novel, Genci Skampa.

*“I’m sorry to state that I only partially agree with my friend Nazif and openly contradict him when he calls this restaurant disgusting. This is how the Indonesian Tamba started his reply and continued: “Nothing can start where we left it, but even if they leave me here for another thousand years, I would not be upset” (Kongoli, 2009, p. 237).*

Tamba's story continues until it ends at a point when the breakup is made by the main narrator, Genci, who takes over the story. While the narrator is narrating and this narrative voice is interrupted by being replaced by the voice of another character in the event, we have what Todorov calls “insertion”, the telling of a new story after a pre-narrated story ends. *“The appearance of a new character necessarily brings the interruption of the previous story in order to tell us a new story, the one that justifies “here I am now” of the new character. A second story is included in the first; this proceeding is called interpolation” (Todorov, 2000, pp. 30-31).*

Such a case is the case of the tenth chapter in the novel “Dog skin” where the story begins and ends with the narrative voice of Lori, who becomes a character-story. She tells the story and events from her life occupying an important place in the fabled course of this novel. It becomes a first-person narrative voice. This chapter includes pages 137-162 of this novel, which means approximately twenty-five pages of Lori's narrative. She tells story after story gradually passing through the most important stages and events of her life because now she is confessing before Krist like the confession before a priest.

*“You undertook to become my priest. So be it! I agree to confess in your house, as in a temple. My story will be more of a story, one that people no longer want to hear, that spoil their mood. You asked me about the medallion and I have to say that he has a story. With this I do not want to spoil your mood. The medallion belonged to my mother. She herself inherited it from her mother and today, neither one nor the other are anymore. There is nothing special here, to arouse interest. Neither the death of my mother's father nor that of my father arouses interest. “People don't cut their heads off anymore”* (Kongoli, 2006, pp. 137-138).

*“The presence of narrative people is the most prominent form of insertion”* (Todorov, 2000, p. 31). This multiplicity of voices in Kongoli's novels testifies to the role of narrative components as well as the play with voices that the author knows how to use through various narrative techniques.

### 3. Conclusion

As can be seen, Kongoli is an author of Albanian literature, who enriches this literature with narrative techniques. The study concludes that focalizer and narrative voice, two of the narrative components, are highly encountered in Kongoli's novels. We conclude that in the novels we have many narrative voices and the focalizer is mainly internal. The plan of sight and voice are present and have a large space within the narrative as the characters function as such, narrating events through which they are witnesses and members of those events themselves.

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