The Power of Perspective in The Raven Cycle

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Abstract

Beginning with the discussion of the terms *narration* and *narrative*, the paper asserts the difference between *point of view*, which is defined as "who" tells a story, and *perspective*, which shows "how" a narrator / a character perceives the events making up the story. To show the power of perspective in a literary work, the paper focuses on the young adult novel series *The Raven Cycle* by Maggie Stiefvater. The five main characters – Blue Sargent, Richard Gansey III, Adam Parrish, Ronan Lynch, and Noah Czerny – have been given unique perspectives that are unveiled through their separate character arcs. Blue's perspective is clad with assumptions; Gansey's is a clash between the perceived and the perceiving; Adam's comes to light only when compared to other characters' perspectives; Ronan's is postponed and contrary to expectations; Noah's is absent until the very end of the series.

Keywords: Narration, narrator, point of view, perspective, Maggie Stiefvater, *The Raven Cycle*

Introduction: On Narration, Narrative, Point of View, and Perspective

The term *narrative* is often used in both popular and academic discourses. It is a part of the act of *narration* – an act of telling someone about something involving not only a listener but also a person who tells a narrative, or a narrator. The theoretical interest in narration first appears in Friedrich Spielhagen (1883) and Otto Ludwig's (1891) research on the novel as well as in Charles Bally and Fritz Karpf's examination of narratological issues in the Romance languages and English. Further narratological research can be traced to the works of Käte Friedemann (*Die Rolle des Erzählers in der Epik* 1910), Percy Lubbock (*The Craft of Fiction* 1921), E. M. Forster (*Aspects of the Novel* 1927), Mikhail Bakhtin (*The Dialogic Imagination* 1934-1941), and Henry James (in the prefaces to his novels collected in *The Art of the Novel* 1934). In the mid twentieth century, the major contributions to the examination of narration come from German, American, and Russian narrative theory (René Wellek and Austin Warren's *Theory of Literature* (1949), Eberhard Lämmert's *Forms of Narrative* (1955), F. K. Stanzel's *Narrative Situations in the Novel* (1955), Käte Hamburger's *The Logic of Literature* (1957), Mikhail Bakhtin's *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* (1963), etc.). Influenced by Vladimir Propp's *Morphology of the Folk Tale* (1928), the defining epoch in the study of narration begins as a strand within French structuralism with the works of Claude Bremond, Algirdas Julien Greimas, Tzvetan Todorov, Roland Barthes, and Gérard Genette. It is Gérard Genette who had the greatest impact on the further development of narrative theory with his work *Discours du récit* (1972). Focusing almost entirely on the narrative discourse of the novel, Genette brings together the views of previous researchers and creates a new terminological framework based on binary principles. In recent years, many new research approaches have entered narrative theory including psychoanalytic, feminist, ideological, rhetorical, ethical, formal, and logical.

So far there are two distinct concepts of narration: one proposed by classical narrative theory that bounds narration "to the presence of a mediating authority, the narrator" (Schmid 1) and another one put forward by the structuralist study influenced by Genette that stresses "a feature of what is narrated" (Schmid 2) or "the act of telling" (McIntyre 18). Both concepts, however, have their shortcomings. According to Schmid,

> the classical concept restricts narrativity to the domain of verbal communication, covering only those works containing a narrating authori-

> ty, or mediator, including purely descriptive sketches and travel reports, while excluding all lyric, dramatic, and cinematic texts. The structuralist concept, on the other hand, can apply to a representation in any medium, but excludes representations whose referents do not have a temporal structure and consequently do not contain any changes of state. Thus, drama and lyric poetry are also narrative, in so far as changes of state are portrayed in them. (2)

This resulted in the appearance of a hybrid concept of narration/narrative, combining the views of both theories. Comprehended in such a way, a narrative acquires two meanings (Schmid 2010) – a broad one referring to narrative as "the signifier, statement, discourse or narrative text itself" (Genette 27) and a narrow one asserting that a "narrative is the story that the narrator tells" (Fludernik 4), the "story plus narrator" (Fludernik 4), or "the actual text with all its linguistic idiosyncrasies" (Simpson 29), including strategies such as flashbacks, flash-forwards, temporal fragmentations, etc. The narrow meaning of the term narrative points out several criteria that have to be fulfilled for a text to become a narrative: (1) the existence of a human or human-like character who "will produce a minimal level of narrativity for the play or fiction in which s/he occurs" (Fludernik 6); (2) the "sequences of events" (Fludernik 6), and (3) the temporal location of narration.

The (re)presentation of a possible world in a narrative occurs through a narrator who can be *heterodiegetic* or "absent from the story he tells" or *homodiegetic* or "present as a character in the story he tells" (Genette 244-245). Genette further distinguishes at least two subtypes of homodiegetic narrator:

> one where the narrator is the hero of his narrative (*Gil Bias*) and one where he plays only a secondary role, which almost always turns out to be a role as observer and witness: Lockwood, the anonymous narrator of *Louis Lambert*, Ishmael in *Moby Dick*, Marlow in *Lord Jim*, Carraway in *The Great Gatsby*, Zeitblom in *Doctor Faustus*—not to mention the most illustrious and most representative one of all, the transparent (but inquisitive) Dr. Watson of Conan Doyle. (245)

Regardless of being heterodiegetic or homodiegetic, a narrator fulfils various functions within a narrative. Besides the communicative function, the narrator has a narrative function as "it is s/he, technically speaking, who presents the fictional world" (Fludernik 27). The narrator is also a commentator/expounder

as "s/he explains why events occur, ascribes them to political or social circumstances and conditions, indicates what it is that motivates the characters" (Fludernik 27). Sometimes the narrator functions as a philosopher or a moralist who "articulates universally valid propositions" (Fludernik 27). Lastly, the narrator has a discursive function which includes "directly addressing the narratee, [and] making metanarrative comments about the process of telling the story" (Fludernik 27). These functions are often blurred or combined within a narrative.

Closely related to the concepts of narration, narrative, and narrator are the terms *focalization*, *point of view*, and *perspective*.[1] Focalization refers to "the focus of narration" (Genette 189) and can be zero/unfocalized (the perspective of an omniscient narrator), internal (the fixed, variable or multiple perspective of a narrated character), and external (the perspective of a narrator who is not able to access/does not communicate the characters' consciousnesses) (Schmid 92). Point of view is the way a story gets told: "the mode (or modes) established by an author by means of which the reader is presented with the characters, dialogue, actions, setting, and events which constitute the *narrative* in a work of fiction" (Abrams 231; emphasis Abrams'). Genette, however, chooses not to use the term point of view as the term merges two different facets of narrative that should be studied separately (186). These two aspects of narrative are referred to by Genette as mood and voice. While the aspect of mood is concerned with the question "*Who is the character whose point of view orients the narrative?*" or "*Who sees?*," the aspect of voice is more concerned with the question "*Who is the narrator*?" or "*Who speaks*?" (Genette 186; emphasis Genette's).

The importance of perspective, which refers to "perception, thought, and emotion" of a narrator/characters within the narrative (Rasley 9), lies within the importance of POV as POV is used "to reflect" a "particular purpose and the unique perspective of the characters" (Rasley 42), allowing authors to choose who, or which character, tells the story. Thus, the "POV choices can affect narrative not only because each character has his/her own perspective on what the story's action means but also because all characters might not experience the same events" (Rasley 42). The choice of POV can, up to a point, determine the

[1] Point of view and perspective are the terms that can be used interchangeably. As a rule, they refer to the narrator's point of view or perspective. Yet, we cannot overlook the fact that in a narrative every represented fictive character can possibly have his/her own point of view or perspective. In this paper, the term *perspective* will be used to denote the characters' perspective within *The Raven Cycle*.

theme of the story. For example, the first-person POV "explores questions of persona and identity" (Rasley 25) while the second-person POV "explores the nature of identity construction" (Rasley 25). Whereas the single third-person POV "explores the issues of the interior life" (Rasley 26), the multiple third-person POV, which is prominent in the novel series analysed in this paper, "explores the issue of perspective" (Rasley 26), allowing authors to show how the characters perceive the events within the story.

1. On *The Raven Cycle*

The Raven Cycle (2012-2016) is a young adult series of four novels (*The Raven Boys, The Dream Thieves, Blue Lily, Lily Blue*, and *The Raven King*) written by Maggie Stiefvater. The series falls into the category of urban fantasy as its defining elements are "a city in which supernatural events occur, the presence of prominent characters, . . . [and] the redeployment of previous fantastic and folkloric topoi in unfamiliar contexts" (Irvine 200). The novels thus follow a group of teenagers – Blue Sargent, Richard Gansey III, Ronan Lynch, Adam Parrish, and Noah Czerny – on a quest to locate and wake the mythical Welsh king Glendower who is claimed to be sleeping somewhere in their hometown of Henrietta, Virginia. Besides the above-mentioned elements, this brief plot summary also points out that *The Raven Cycle* belongs to the strain of urban fantasy in which "*fantasy* modifies *urban*" (Irvine 200; emphasis Irvine's): the city "is revealed to be in contact with . . . some magical realm, and the resultant narrative redeploys the tropes and characters of older fairy tales and folklore, forcing them into collisions with a contemporary urban milieu" (Irvine 200-201). In *The Raven Cycle*, the city of Henrietta is in contact with Cabeswater, a magical forest situated on the Henrietta Ley Line, a source of electromagnetic and mystical energy, which is believed to possess a consciousness communicating with the Cabeswater trees, visions, apparitions, and tarot cards.

The novels are predominately character-driven, the personalities and backgrounds of their characters such that, if not for their joined quest, they would not have found each other and strived to reach their goal together. Stiefvater shows instances of their characters clashing and developing throughout each of the four novels, most of which is depicted in the first two novels of the series *The Raven Boys* and *The Dream Thieves*. The conflict between the characters is important as we "intuitively recognize that characters must contrast on some grounds; that is, the juxtaposition of several characters within a single work

is structured on some thematic, psychological, metaphysical, ethical, or social ground" (Punday 55). In this specific fictional instance, the character juxtaposition is in the service of young adult fiction goals – "the triumph of the unified self able to grow, the integration of a self partly determined by society, or the discovery of a self (self-consciousness) that is almost purely socially determined" (Cadden 310), which makes *The Raven Cycle* both the novel of moral, cognitive, or emotional growth (*Bildungsroman*) and of character change (*Entwicklungsroman*).

Written in the multiple third-person POV, *The Raven Cycle* confirms the idea that "reality can only be apprehended through a composite of perceptions—that the reader will figure out what the truth is only by hearing several people's versions of the event and putting them together" (Rasley 185). Stiefvater achieves this through her five main characters: Blue Sargent, Richard Gansey III, Adam Parrish, Ronan Lynch, and, with a little exception of a lack of point of view and consequently perspective, Noah Czerny. Despite striving towards the same goal, the five of them perceive each other in different, often contrasting, ways, which in turn affects the reader's perception of them. Another key point is that, while the reader can gather information from reading the perspectives of each character, the characters themselves take a longer time to learn the truth about each other as "the reader can know more about the 'actual world' (cf. Ryan 1991) than the fictional perceiving subject" (Jesch and Stein 61). This fact sends not only the characters on a journey to learn about each other but also the reader. Each chapter of the cycle is approached from another character's perspective in such a way that the reader picks up bits and pieces about the characters and their stories but never enough to form a full picture until much later in the series. In what follows, we will attempt to analyse three types of perspective occurring in the novel series: (1) the character's perception of himself/herself; (2) how the character is perceived by other characters, and (3) how the reader may perceive the character based on the narrator's / other characters' perception.

2. Blue Sargent's Perspective: Assumptions and Preconceptions

The Raven Boys, the first novel in the cycle, opens with Blue Sargent as a focalizer warning the reader to "stay away from Aglionby boys, because they were bastards" (Stiefvater, *The Raven Boys* 11). At the very beginning, the narrator's voice and focalization function as devices for colouring the reader's character and value judgments of Aglionby boys as they are initially perceived as those

from whom nothing good can be expected. With the novel unfolding, Stiefvater's use of Blue as a focalizer points out some of the cycle's themes including female power, coming to terms with one's otherness, interpersonal relationships, and the interplay of class, power, and money. The last is brought into being by the fact that Blue, like Adam Parrish, comes from a family that is tight on money and is further developed by Blue's realization that her dream – going to a good school for environmental science – will probably never come true because of the capitalist organization and distribution of power and money in American society. Blue's sense of being socially powerless is initially so strong that she develops a specific dislike for Aglionby boys because they come from money. Watching them daily wearing their rich boy uniforms while driving their rich boy cars and spending their time in rich boy ways, Blue pulls the reader into her perspective based on one of the most common clichés about rich people (conceited, self-centred, and self-serving persons with their noses pointing towards the sky because everyone who does not speak in "money" is not worthy of their attention):

> Before her stood the multitasking cell phone Aglionby boy, looking tidy and presidential. His watch looked as if it cost more than her mother's car, and every area of exposed skin was a flattering shade of tan. Blue had never figured out how Aglionby boys managed to tan earlier than locals. It probably had something to do with things like spring break and places like Costa Rica and the Spanish coast. President Cell Phone had probably been closer to a pygmy tyrant than she would ever be. (Stiefvater, *The Raven Boys* 37)

Blue's inferiority complex is not hard to relate to while getting immersed into her perspective; the discrepancy between the rich and the poor permeates all four novels, especially as the graduation comes near and she becomes aware that the kind of future Aglionby boys have will not be the kind of future she would get: "He delivered the nonsensical statement so matter-of-factly that Blue felt abruptly stupid, as if maybe the public school system really was lacking" (Stiefvater, *The Raven Boys* 114).

Blue's set of values and her notions of class, power, and money are challenged for the first time when she meets Adam, a Raven Boy and Gansey's friend. Adam Parrish is presented as the alternative to Blue's Aglionby-boys-as-bastards fixation – a counter perspective to her stereotypical notions on Aglionby boys: "She

didn't know what sort of Aglionby boy wore hand-me-down sweaters. . . . Blue looked at his bike. She didn't know what sort of Aglionby boy rode a bicycle instead of driving a car, either" (Stiefvater, *The Raven Boys* 79). Blue finds him different from Gansey, Ronan, and Noah, and since this part of the novel is focalized through Blue, the reader is made to believe that Adam is different in some way too.

During the first few chapters of Blue's perspective, the reader gets the impression that the raven boys are untouchable, tinged with possibilities, occasionally insufferable, and above all unreachable. Yet, towards the end of the first novel, the reader witnesses Blue being drawn to them as an irreplaceable part of her life. Focalized through Blue, another major idea of the cycle is being introduced – individual and group dynamics in interpersonal relationships. This is the point where Stiefvater excels as she rejects a typical narrative structure of romance consisting of a love triangle (Adam-Blue-Gansey/Kavinsky-Ronan-Adam) and builds a web of relationships based on love, intimacy, passion, friendship, rivalry, and jealousy, which helps the characters grow and change. As the only female member of their private little group, Blue feels out of place not only because of her gender but also because of her family history and background as displayed in her urgency to interrupt their conversations and switch them to something she can also participate in. Their behaviour "seemed very manly and Aglionby to Blue, this calling of one another by last names and bantering about outdoor urinary habits. It also seemed like it could go on for a long time, so she interrupted" (Stiefvater, *The Raven Boys* 114).

Blue's need for validation from the raven boys is prominent in the beginning: "Blue was absurdly pleased that he remembered, and also absurdly pleased that he'd replied to her instead of Gansey, who was now swatting gnats out of his eyes and waiting for her response" (Stiefvater, *The Raven* Boys 114) as she is not aware that Adam, Gansey, Ronan, and Noah have accepted her as an equal and a part of their group from the very first moment they met. Gansey notes that Blue is "the missing piece that he'd been needing all these years, like the search for Glendower wasn't truly underway until she was part of it" (Stiefvater, *The Raven Boys* 122). Noah's relationship with Blue is affectionate, sad, and complicated because she, as a mirror and an amplifier, magnifies him including his ever-less-human parts. Adam and Blue first date, then fight, but eventually work on the things over which they fall apart. Ronan and Blue share the same wit and sharpness. As for Blue, she is "a little in love with all of them. Their magic. Their

quest. Their awfulness and strangeness. Her Raven boys" (Stiefvater, *The Dream Thieves* 12). With each chapter featuring her as a focalizer, she grows in her understanding of herself and her raven boys; she understands that she has found her true place in the world where she can accept and be accepted once she sees past her prejudice and stops seeing them as Aglionby boys, as something foreign and contemptible, but as her friends.

Coming to terms with the raven boys' otherness leads Blue to accept her own otherness. Coming from a psychic family, yet lacking the psychic abilities herself, Blue feels like an outsider in the magic/supernatural realm throughout most of the cycle. This self-imposed otherness centres in Blue's belief that she is just a useful tool – a magnifier (she magnifies other people's psychic powers), different from the rest of her family. Blue's perception of herself changes in *Blue Lily, Lily Blue* when she meets Gwenllian, the entombed Glendower's daughter. In magic/supernatural terms, Gwenllian is a "mirror" (a powerful woman, a witch) and reveals that Blue is a "mirror," as well. Blue's otherness has thus always been a gift she was not aware of and the raven boy quest she takes part in was just a means of finding this gift, i.e. her identity, as well as her place in the world.

Blue's growth is the result of not only the quest and the web of relationships with the raven boys but also of her growing up in a world of powerful women (her mother Maura, her aunt Jimi, her half-aunt Neeve, her cousin Orla, her mother's friends Calla and Persephone), who challenge the socially proscribed gender roles by living in the all-female household, providing for themselves, embracing their difference, and respecting others' views, decisions, and abilities. This community of women bound by family and gender ties determines Blue's reactions, perceptions, and worldviews. The chapters with Blue as a focalizer thus show, in addition to the afore-mentioned facets of her character, her female power and establish her feminist self which (1) refuses to be objectified by men or treated as a "girlfriend" by Adam, (2) appreciates the kinship of 300 Fox Way women more after losing her mother, and (3) helps her to become an independent young woman.

Blue's perspective is a lesson on moving past one's preconceived ideas about somebody before getting to know them properly, about people who do not have to come from the same place in order for their lives to intertwine, about allowing love to enter your life despite the need to protect your heart from the horrors

of being broken, about growing past your insecurities and misgivings, about accepting otherness in yourself and others, about being a woman in a man's world, and about being your true self.

3. Richard Gansey III's Perspective: Self-awareness

The parts of the cycle seen through Gansey's eyes are not often about Gansey, even though his perspective is present in all four novels and his character is set up as the key character in the unfolding events of *The Raven Cycle*. It further builds the credibility of Blue, Ronan, Noah, and Adam and places his quest to awaken the sleeping king, his obsession, in a larger framework and context. Gansey's quest thus becomes larger than a mere plot element; it transforms into one of the dominant motifs of *The Raven Cycle* as it evokes the myth of death and rebirth by following the thematic and narrative structure of the quest romance consisting of three main stages: "the stage of the perilous journey and the preliminary minor adventures; the crucial struggle, usually some kind of battle in which either the hero or his foe, or both, must die; and the exaltation of the hero" (Frye 187). In the cycle, the first stage is embodied by Gansey's extensive research of the mythical Welsh king Glendower and all the adventures he goes through with his friends as they try to find Glendower's resting place somewhere along the Henrietta Ley Line such as Whelk's failed attempt to kill Gansey, Adam's sacrifice of his free will to Cabeswater, the magic forest, to wake the ley lines, the group's experiences within the hollow vision tree, Ronan's dreams and his discovery of the ability to bring objects back from dreams, the Gray Man's hunt for Greywaren (Ronan), the disappearance of Cabeswater, the waking of Gwenllian Glendower, etc. The second stage centres around Gansey's conflicts with the antagonists of the cycle Colin and Piper Greenmantle, his return to the site of his first death, finding Glendower's skeleton, and his second death. The elements of the last stage are reflected in Gansey's resurrection and the purpose of his second death – to secure the future of his friends and loved ones. Secondly, Gansey's quest also signifies the search of the "desiring self for a fulfilment that will deliver it from the anxieties of reality but will still contain that reality" (Frye 193) – the search for his true self.

Gansey's search for his true self is more visible through the perspectives of other characters. Although he perceives himself as a mass of anxieties and insecurities, the perspectives of other characters reveal the grandness in him. For Blue, his grandness is in the way he holds himself – "this . . . was how Gansey

got places — striding" (Stiefvater, *The Raven Boys* 140) – and in the way he behaves – "When Gansey was polite, it made him powerful" (Stiefvater, *The Raven Boys* 79). For Ronan, Gansey is irreplaceable: when he "thought of Gansey, he thought of moving into Monmouth Manufacturing, of nights spent in companionable insomnia, of a summer searching for a king, of Gansey asking the Gray Man for his life. Brothers" (Stiefvater, *The Dream Thieves* 225). For Adam, Gansey is both a flawed person and an awe-inspiring ideal:

> There were two Ganseys: the one who lived inside his skin, and the one Gansey put on in the morning when he slid his wallet into the back pocket of his chinos. The former was troubled and passionate, with no discernible accent to Adam's ears, and the latter bristled with latent power as he greeted people with the slippery, handsome accent of old Virginia money. It was a mystery to Adam how he could not seem to see both versions of Gansey at the same time. (Stiefvater, *The Raven Boys* 28)

At the moments of introspection, Gansey both acknowledges and condemns parts of himself that he does not want others to see:

> Gansey had always felt as if there were two of him: the Gansey who was in control, able to handle any situation, able to talk to anyone, and then, the other, more fragile Gansey, strung out and unsure, embarrassingly earnest, driven by naive longing. That second Gansey loomed inside him now, more than ever, and he didn't like it. (Stiefvater, *The Raven Boys* 153)

These two versions of Gansey are the relatable human parts of him that are easy to understand by the reader. While Blue sees his money and privilege as power, Gansey laments his powerlessness despite his wealth: "You've had it the easiest. What good is all your privilege, you soft, spoiled thing, if you can't stand on your own legs?" (Stiefvater, *The Dream Thieves* 76). This fits into the final and wishful version of Gansey which comes into full view much later in the series:

> Richard Gansey III had forgotten how many times he had been told he was destined for greatness. He was bred for it; nobility and purpose coded in both sides of his pedigree. . . . The Ganseys were courtiers and kings, and when there was no castle to invite them, they built one. He was a king. (Stiefvater, *The Raven King* 9)

The third version of Gansey is reflected in his quest to find the sleeping king, Glendower, the quest in which, as it has already been mentioned, he is meant to

find himself too as "Glendower was more than a historical figure to . . . [him]. He was everything Gansey wished he could be: wise and brave, sure of his path, touched by the supernatural, respected by all, survived by his legacy" (Stiefvater, *The Raven Boys* 29). The emphasis on Gansey's personality traits serves to (1) highlight his true self and (2) to heighten the impact of his character not only on the cycle's other characters but also on the reader, both in terms of closeness of identification and in terms of other characters'/the reader's investment in his personality, nature, and value system.

As mentioned in one of the previous paragraphs, Gansey's perspective builds the credibility of Blue, Adam, Ronan, and Noah. It is like a magnifier helping the reader see the good in Gansey's friends. Or the good he wants the reader to see in them. His blind faith in them is what allows for his confidence and his status as their "king:"

> Even though Ronan was snarling and Noah was sighing and Adam was hesitating, he didn't turn to verify that they were coming. He knew they were. In three different ways, he'd earned them all days or weeks or months before, and when it came to it, they'd all follow him anywhere. (Stiefvater, *The Raven Boys* 32)

His love makes him vulnerable, nothing like the image of a king other characters conjured up for him. He shows his most pitiful, unstable self when the love and care he gives go unrequited:

> He couldn't stand it, all of this inside him. In the end, he was nobody to Adam, he was nobody to Ronan. Adam spit his words back at him and Ronan squandered however many second chances he gave him. Gansey was just a guy with a lot of stuff and a hole inside him that chewed away more of his heart every year. They were always walking away from him. But he never seemed able to walk away from them. (Stiefvater, *The Raven Boys* 184)

Gansey's perspective is thus a lesson in patience, overcoming insecurities, and endless striving for more. It is about how people with the shiniest armour may have holes in it that often feel like they are larger than the person wearing the armour. It is about a king who sacrifices himself for friendship and love.

4. Ronan Lynch's Perspective: Discrepancies

The focalization of a narrative is of crucial importance for the interpretation of value system invoked by a narrative as a whole. In *The Raven Cycle*, Ronan Lynch's arc stands out in this respect. As his perspective is absent from the first novel, this adds a layer of mystery and anticipation to his character but also leaves him to the mercy of other characters' opinions and perceptions of him, as they are the ones telling the reader who Ronan is, whether or not that is the real Ronan. The characters with dominant perspectives, like Blue and Adam, often tiptoe around Ronan at the early stages of their relationship when their understanding of him is not complete. Blue, for example, feels apprehension and a sense of inferiority when near him:

> Blue moved on to Ronan, though she was a little afraid of him. Something about him dripped venom, even though he hadn't spoken. Worst of all, in Blue's opinion, was that there was something about his antagonism that made her want to court his favor, to earn his approval. The approval of someone like him, who clearly cared for no one, seemed like it would be worth more. (Stiefvater, *The Raven Boys* 79)

Ronan's behaviour, from skipping school to his curse-ridden speech and his anger, aggression and violence manifested through his verbal and physical fights[2] – "if it had a social security number, Ronan had fought with it" (Stiefvater, *The Raven Boys* 19), suggests his conflict with the dominant value system. This conflict originates from Ronan's almost fanatic preference for truth – "Ronan always told the truth, and the truth was the most important thing" (Stiefvater, *The Raven King* 67), which is often in opposition to what other characters of the cycle live by or commit themselves to. Thus, he has to create his own value system on the principles of truth, individuality, and justice, or find a community that operates on similar terms, to be his true self. And he eventually finds it with the raven boys and Blue.

From the second novel onwards, when Ronan is given a perspective, the narrative zooms in on who he really is. He neither sees himself as the uncontrollable monster on a rampage nor is he self-centred, nor does he care only about himself. Ronan has been struggling with himself throughout the first novel, but neither the reader nor the other characters know about it until Ronan decides

[2] Much of Ronan's aggression is a result of his coping with his father's violent death.

to let it be known. Essentially, Ronan himself stays the same but the perception of him changes. The reader sees how Ronan cares for Gansey:

> Just then, in that moment, the thought of Gansey leaving for D.C. without him was unbearable. They had been a two-headed creature for so long, Ronan-and-Gansey. He couldn't say it, though. There were a thousand reasons why he couldn't say it. (Stiefvater, *The Dream Thieves* 119)

The reader sees Ronan paying attention to each of the character's individual needs, not with empty words but with actions:

> Adam twisted off the lid. Inside was a colorless lotion that smelled of mist and moss. Replacing the lid with a frown, he turned the container over, looking for more identifying features. On the bottom, Ronan's handwriting labeled it merely: *manibus*. *For your hands*. (Stiefvater, *Blue Lily, Lily Blue* 66; emphasis Stiefvater's)

Ronan and Blue take the longest time to become comfortable with each other, which is somehow strange "because they were different brands of the same impossible stuff" (Stiefvater, *Blue Lily, Lily Blue* 150). Blue, however, is the first one to notice when Ronan grows into the person he is meant to be, someone they do not know yet: "He had changed over the summer, and now Blue felt less unequal in the group. Not because she knew Ronan any better — but because she felt as if maybe Gansey and Adam now knew him less. He challenged them all to learn him again" (Stiefvater, *Blue Lily, Lily Blue* 150).

The new Ronan is Ronan whom both the characters and the reader start to perceive in a different way as he opens and shows his compassion and love through numerous acts of affection and respect for his friends and family.[3] He is not a cold weapon or a merciless storm; he is a boy who loves and dreams, and is not as tough as those who do not know him and paint him as:

> [he] imagined Adam, ever the scientist. Ronan, ferocious and loyal and fragile. "Don't break him, Adam." Adam continued peering out the window. The only tell to the furious working of his mind was the slow twisting together of his fingers. "I'm not an idiot, Gansey." "I'm serious." . . . "He's not as tough as he seems." (Stiefvater, *The Raven King* 138)

[3] For example, Ronan begins to study for his exams to show respect to Adam who kept him from being arrested after he assaulted Adam's father. Ronan also convinces Adam's landlord to accept his money to cover the extra cost of Adam's rent.

From the second novel onwards, Stiefvater also uses Ronan's perspective to introduce into the cycle the motif of coming to terms with one's sexuality. Announced through his troubled relationship with Joseph Kavinsky in *The Dream Thieves*, in *Blue Lily, Lily Blue*, Ronan accepts his secret – his homoerotic desire – because he admits to himself that he is attracted to men, in particular to Adam Parrish. The slow yet intense build of a relationship between Ronan and Adam is thus based on two things – Ronan's afore-mentioned coming out of the closet and Adam's knowing himself as a magician, a man and a human, and intertwined with their love for their friends, their friendship with each other, and their magical/supernatural partnership.

Ronan's perspective is thus a lesson in looking past one's appearance and demeanour, in acknowledging that some people who appear hard to love have the biggest heart of all. It is about confronting one's fears and secrets to do better and be better.

5. Adam Parrish's Perspective: Being "Unknowable"

The focalization of the parts of the cycle through Adam Parrish continues the exploration of themes and motifs already discussed in relation to Blue and Ronan's perspectives such as the interplay of class, power, and money and coming to terms with one's sexuality.[4] It also introduces the new layers of meaning to the cycle through the introduction of the motifs of domestic abuse and the logic/mind-emotion/instinct dichotomy. In Adam Parrish's perspective, Stiefvater intertwines the motif of the interplay of class power and money with the motif of domestic abuse to take the reader on a tumultuous ride starting with Adam's desire to move out of an abusive, poor household and to make it on his own in Aglionby which he attends on a scholarship. Adam's worldview is tinged with the kind of darkness that characters like Gansey and Ronan, and even Blue, cannot fathom. Working multiple jobs to finance his schooling and to succeed on his own, Adam is driven by despair and jealousy to become one of the golden boys he admires. Not only is his desire for success thwarted by his lower social status and the consequent limited access to money and power but also by him being both a victim and a witness of domestic abuse, which he accepts throughout the cycle with passive submissiveness: if he "turned his father in, everything . . . [would have] crashed down around him. If Adam turned him in, his mother

[4] This motif was analyzed in more detail in the chapter on Ronan Lynch's perspective.

would never forgive him. If Adam turned him in, he could never come home again" (Stiefvater, *The Raven Boys* 179).

Growing up in an abusive household strongly influenced Adam's perception of interpersonal relationships, contributed to his trust issues, and left him with a swelled sense of pride, unable to accept kindness for what it is, even if it is given by people who he knows care about him, like Gansey. As he is stubbornly self-reliant and overtly reluctant to rely on others, Adam believes that he has to be the one to save himself and that this should only occur "on his own terms. Not Robert Parrish's. Not Richard Gansey's. On Adam Parrish's terms, or not at all" (Stiefvater, *The Raven Boys* 179). That is why he "trusted his skills on his own. His emotions he trusted on his own. He could hurt no one in an empty room. No one could hurt him" (Stiefvater, *Blue Lily, Lily Blue* 149). Throughout most of the cycle, Adam sees himself as a jagged lonely creature who is only capable of the worst deeds, just like his father. He compares himself to his friends and notes how "appropriate it was that Ronan, left to his own devices, manifested beautiful cars and beautiful birds and tender-hearted brothers, while Adam, when given the power, manifested a filthy string of perverse murders" (Stiefvater, *Blue Lily, Lily Blue* 125).

Adam's perception of himself is that of something "unknowable" (Stiefvater, *Blue Lily, Lily Blue* 149). At first, he does not know himself as he is just driven by analytical thinking. As an analytical thinker, he bases his decisions on logic rather than emotions, which is why he initially doubts Gansey's quest to find Glendower and the Henrietta Ley Line. Adam's thought process founded on the logic/mind-emotion/instinct dichotomy starts to change when he witnesses the supernatural and becomes a part of the supernatural – a powerful magician and a holder of the ley line who trusts both his logic and his instincts. Second, the notion "unknowable" refers to Adam's desperate individualism manifested through his inability to understand the emotional, psychological, and moral dynamics of group identity. Through the long process of personal growth and change, his stubborn and self-reliant individuality is eventually replaced by the part-of-a-friend-and-kin-group identity.

Adam's perception of himself is at odds with the perception other characters have of him. Because he is so caught up in his inner war, Adam does not see that Gansey "wished that he could be him, because Adam was so very real and true in a way that Gansey couldn't ever seem to be" (Stiefvater, *The Raven Boys*

185). He does not see that Blue "wanted him to explain himself" (Stiefvater, *The Dream Thieves* 36) so that she can understand him. He does not see that Ronan cares for him so much that he left "a colorless lotion that smelled of mist and moss" (Stiefvater, *Blue Lily, Lily Blue* 66). Even though Adam's story arc is the most sensitive and the thorniest, the way he deals with his problems and struggles does not induce pity within the reader but rather admiration. Adam himself asserts that "the most important thing . . . has always been free will, the ability to be his own master" (Stiefvater, *The Raven Boys* 207). The world as he sees it may be distorted but he proves himself to be as much of a raven boy as the rest of them and comes to love himself for who he is:

> He left bloody fingerprints on the rock, but there was something satisfying about that. I was here. *I exist. I'm alive, because I bleed. He hadn't stopped being thankful for his body. Hello, Adam Parrish's formerly chapped hands, I'm happy to have you.* (Stiefvater, *Blue Lily, Lily Blue* 156; emphasis Stiefvater's)

His arc comes to a satisfying close when he realizes that the "Adam" everyone sees him as and the "Adam" he wants to be are the same person:

> Was it okay? Adam had turned down so many offers of help from Gansey. Money for school, money for food, money for rent. Pity and charity, Adam had thought. For so long, he'd wanted Gansey to see him as an equal, but it was possible that all this time, the only person who needed to see that was Adam. Now he could see that it wasn't charity Gansey was offering. It was just truth. (Stiefvater, *The Raven King* 148)

Adam's perspective is thus a lesson in accepting kindness, moving on, opening himself to trust his friends and love partners, letting go, becoming a better and surer version of himself and realizing how insignificant pride is in the face of friendship and forgiveness.

6. Noah Czerny's Perspective: The Absence of Perspective

Noah Czerny appears in all four novels; yet, his perspective is only present in a chapter of the final novel. Such a (lack of) perspective accounts for a reader's strong interest in Noah's storyline and his/her tendency to incorporate into his/her life any value-lessons s/he has learned from Noah, most important of which is surely the importance of holding on and being there when you are needed. In the narrative space of *The Raven Cycle,* Noah is perceived as "a little grubby"

(Stiefvater, *The Raven Boys* 30), ever-present, always somewhere in the background, like a camera lens out of focus. The characters closest to him are used to him being this way as they do not question it: "Gansey became aware that Noah was lurking at his elbow, looking strained and urgent. Both were typical for Noah, so Gansey was not immediately troubled. He passed a folded-over packet of bills to the cashier. Noah continued to hover" (Stiefvater, *The Raven Boys* 41).

The descriptions of Noah, handed out by Gansey or Adam, suggest that he "looked less like Noah than the suggestion of Noah" (Stiefvater, *The Raven Boys* 52). Yet, as he is not a focalizer in the cycle, the reader can only guess what is wrong about him while reading the passages that describe him as "pale and insubstantial in the yellow, late-night light of the room behind him; the skin beneath his eyes was darker than anything" (Stiefvater, *The Raven Boys* 52). The next thing the characters and the reader notice is that Noah knows things. Noah knows things that he is not told and things he did not see:

> Noah said, "He sent her flowers."
>
> "How did you know?" Adam demanded, more mortified than curious.
>
> Noah merely smiled in a far-off way. He kicked one of the wooden boards off the plywood, looking triumphant. (Stiefvater, *The Raven Boys* 99)

Noah is often described as "so shy and awkward and invisible that he could be easily ignored or made fun of" (Stiefvater, *The Raven Boys* 124). His presence is soft and unobtrusive; yet, he is unmistakably always there. Near the end of the first novel, the reader learns that he has been dead for seven years:[5]

> But the corpse was long beyond fingerprints. The bones were clean as a museum piece, the flesh long since rotted off, and there were only threads remaining of whatever the person had worn. Picking carefully at leaves, Gansey uncovered the entire skeleton. . . . The skull's cheek was smashed in. She wondered if that was how the person had died. (Stiefvater, *The Raven Boys* 144)

Noah's random absences and presences, his smudgy and pale appearance, and his high intuition and sensitivity are a part of his ghostly existence; he is dead but lingering. From that point onwards, the characters' perception of him adjusts to

[5] Noah was killed by Barrington Whelk in a ritual kind of sacrifice to wake up the ley line seven years before the events of *The Raven Boys* start unfolding.

their new awareness of his deadness and how much of him is with them and how much is gone: "They had always had the sense that the Noah they knew was not the true Noah. It was just disconcerting to hear how much *Noahness* death had stripped. It was impossible not to wonder what Noah would have done with himself if he had lived" (Stiefvater, *The Raven King* 57). As the cycle unfolds, Noah deteriorates continuously into something ghostlier and less human.

With the cycle progressing, it becomes clear why Noah does not get a perspective or why the reader is not allowed to see the events unfold from his perspective – because Noah is dead, and he knows more than the reader and the characters are allowed to know. The technique of postponing the perspective of such a crucial character builds up suspense until his moment finally comes:

> Noah was more interested in the spiritual weight of a minute. . . . Sometimes he got caught on a loop of constantly understanding that he had been murdered, and rage made him smash things in Ronan's room or kick the mint pot off Gansey's desk or punch in a pane of glass on the stairs up to the apartment. Sometimes he got caught in this moment instead. Gansey's death. (Stiefvater, *The Raven King* 215)

Noah sheds light on questions that have been asked multiple times throughout the novels, *how*s and *why*s, and if his perspective had come any sooner than the climax of the series, it would have diminished its importance.

Conclusion

For a story to exist, somebody has to be there to tell it. In a non-fictional world, there are historians who try to piece history together while trying to stay as true to the evidence that supports it. In a fictional world, there are characters, carefully chosen by their authors, who are living and telling the story through their eyes, their perspective. The story in a work of fiction does not have to be credible or in-tune with the non-fictional world or truths, so authors can play with their characters and consequently with their readers. This is where perspective and POV come in play. Perspective is the *how* to the point of view's *who* and they are both equally important in the sum of narration. In *The Raven Cycle*, Maggie Stiefvater wields a large cast of characters, all of whom are as contrasting as day and night, and some of whom are the merely different sides of the same coin. Even though they are all actors in the same play, the characters of *The Raven*

Cycle draw the reader into their own versions of the world, which are the versions of the world they have spun based on their experiences, their differing personalities, their backgrounds, and their relationships. Stiefvater's deliberate choice to tell the story through breadcrumbs given away by an unreliable, ever-growing and ever-developing cast of teenage characters not only adds to the complexity of the narrative but places heavy weight on the shoulders of each character who thinks, feels, and acts and therefore alters their own and the reader's perception of the world. After all, perspectives that are handed to the characters and the readers at the beginning of the story do not have to stay the same throughout the story. That is the point of the story: perspectives evolve, in a positive or negative way, and it is up to the author of the work to take both the reader and the characters on the journey to get to the point where their perceptions align. Maggie Stiefvater's *The Raven Cycle* is an example of how this is done.

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MOĆ PERSPEKTIVE U SERIJALU *RAVEN*

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Nakon uvodnih zapažanja o *pripovijedanju* (engl. *narration*) i *pripovjednom tekstu* (engl. *narrative*), rad pojašnjava razliku između *gledišta* (engl. *point of view*), kojim se definira „tko" pripovijeda priču, i *stajališta* (engl. *perspective*), koje pokazuje „kako" pripovjedač/lik poima događaje koji čine priču. Da bi pokazao moć perspektive u književnom djelu, rad analizira serijal romana za mlade *The Raven Cycle* Maggie Stiefvater. Pet glavnih likova serijala – Blue Sargent, Richard Gansey III, Adam Parrish, Ronan Lynch i Noah Czerny – posjeduje jedinstvena stajališta koja se postupno otkrivaju tijekom serijala. Blueino je stajalište utemeljeno na pretpostavkama; Ganseyjevo na sukobu između shvaćenog i shvaćanja; Adamovo postaje vidljivo jedino u usporedbi sa stajalištima drugih likova; Ronanovo je odgođeno i suprotno očekivanjima; Noahino je neprisutno do samog kraja ciklusa.

Ključne riječi: pripovijedanje, pripovjedni tekst, gledište, stajalište, Maggie Stiefvater, *The Raven Cycle*