

Fictive Narrativism and Multiperspectival Voice in Virginia Woolf's *A Haunted House*: A Narratological Mapping of Speaker Ambiguity and Ghostly Focalization

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Article Details:

Received: 16 April 2026

Revised: 20 April 2026

Accepted: 22 April 2026

Published: 23 April 2026

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Recommended Citation:

Pitchuela N. G. (2026). Fictive Narrativism and Multiperspectival Voice in Virginia Woolf's *A Haunted House*: A Narratological Mapping of Speaker Ambiguity and Ghostly Focalization. *The International Review of Multidisciplinary Research*. 1 (4), 414-421.

<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.19785028>

Index Terms:

virginia woolf, a haunted house, fictive narrativism, multiperspectival voice, ghostly focalization, narratology, ontological boundaries, modernist fiction, unnatural narratology, speaker ambiguity

Abstract. Virginia Woolf's short story "A Haunted House" (1921) is interpreted as a lyrical ghost story contemplating love, memory, and the endurance of the past; however, its arrangement of narrative voice and perspective has not been thoroughly analyzed within systematic narratological frameworks. This study examines narrative techniques of fictive narrativism through multiperspectival voice and ghostly focalization to blur distinctions between life and death, as well as between fact and fiction. By combining Genette's structural narratology with cognitive and unnatural narratology, the study uses a qualitative, text-based design that includes coding of narrative segments for voice type, focalizer, focalization, and ontological status. The analysis delineates four speaking positions: the living first-person narrator, the living couple's "we," the ghostly couple, and a blended or ambiguous "we." The intersection of these positions generates speaker ambiguity at thematic junctures. Internal focalization shifts between living, ghostly, and blended perceivers, with unclear parts coming together around the themes of "treasure," "safe," and shared emotional discovery. The alternation of natural and unnatural perspectives, facilitated by ambiguous segments, creates a "haunted" narrative texture in which readers navigate the boundary between realistic and spectral frames without achieving stabilization of their position. The research concludes that *A Haunted House* embodies haunting as a structural phenomenon in terms of voice and focalization, illustrating the efficacy of integrating structural, cognitive, and unnatural narratology for examining modernist fiction and supernatural literature, particularly in relation to ontological boundaries and interpretive instability.

Introduction

Virginia Woolf is a key figure in modernist studies, not just because she wrote novels about consciousness and inner life, but also because she came up with new ways to tell stories. Studies of important works like *Mrs. Dalloway*, *To the Lighthouse*, and *The Waves* have shown how she plays with stream of consciousness, interior monologue, and group consciousness to break down the barriers between individual minds and create complex patterns of time and perspective. There has been less sustained focus on how these experiments are condensed in her shorter fiction, particularly in brief, seemingly straightforward works such as *A Haunted House*.

A Haunted House, which first came out in *Monday or Tuesday* (1921), is often called a ghost story, but it goes against what people expect from horror and shock. Critics point out that it has a lyrical, almost prose-poem quality, and they say that the repeated phrases "safe, safe, safe" and the images of "treasure buried" create a musical, incantatory effect throughout the few pages. Woolf doesn't scare readers with violent ghosts; instead, she shows a gentle ghostly couple moving through the house, which makes the search for love and emotional fulfillment seem like a never-ending quest. At the same time, critics

point out that the story's narrative voice is very hard to pin down. There is a first-person narrator, a plural "we," ghostly dialogue marked by quotation, and an implied addressee, which creates a collage of voices and points of view that is identify.

The last line of *A Haunted House*, which puts the words of the living narrator in quotation marks that were previously used for ghostly speech, is a good example of how the story systematically shakes up narrative positions. These moments indicate that *haunting* is both a thematic and structural concern; the narrative is "haunted" by the challenge of identifying speakers and observers, as well as by the overlapping of voices. Current readings, however, often capture this complexity impressionistically instead of through thorough narratological examination.

In narratology, Gérard Genette's differentiation between narrative voice and focalization is a fundamental reference for articulating narrative contexts and viewpoints. Genette's framework elucidates the distinctions between narrators (voice) and perceivers (focalizer) within a specific passage, while also delineating critical differences among extradiegetic and intradiegetic narrators, homodiegetic and heterodiegetic positions, as well as zero, internal, and external focalization. However, classical structural narratology is frequently criticized for its insufficient focus on reader processing and on narrators and focalizers that contravene real-world limitations. Cognitive narratology tackles the initial constraint by examining how readers formulate mental representations of storyworlds, assign mental states to agents, and clarify ambiguous references and perspectives. Unnatural narratology addresses the second by theorizing "impossible" or antimimetic narrative situations, such as dead narrators, paradoxical time, and speaking objects.

Even with these tools at hand, there is yet to be a comprehensive study that systematically delineates speaker ambiguity and spectral focalization in *A Haunted House* through a cohesive structural, cognitive, and unconventional narratological framework. Most of the work that has been done on the story's changing voices sees them as stylistic elements that support themes of love, memory, and domestic intimacy. However, it doesn't go so far as to code voice and focalization throughout the text or look at how their distribution creates a haunted ontological texture. This gap is the reason for this study.

Research Questions

The research examines the subsequent inquiries:

1. Voice and Speaking Positions: What unique speaking positions (for example, living first-person narrator, living couple, ghostly couple, blended "we") can be found in *A Haunted House*, and how do pronouns, quotations, and deictic anchoring show them?
2. Focalization and Ambiguity: How is focalization shared between living, ghostly, and mixed perceivers? When do focalizers become unclear or overlap?
3. Ontological Status and Haunting: How do patterns of natural and unnatural focalization, along with ambiguous segments, create an ontological texture that makes the lines between life and death and fact and fiction less clear?

Significance of the Study

The goal of this article is to show how *A Haunted House* uses voice and focalization to create unstable, spectral, or impossible narrative positions, which is what we mean by "fictive narrativism." The study aims to:

- A. Utilize an integrated narratological framework and a systematic coding procedure on a singular, canonical modernist narrative.
- B. Provide a methodologically clear explanation of how Woolf's text creates haunting at the level of narrative structure.
- C. Show how structural, cognitive, and unnatural narratology can be used together in real life.
- D. Present a framework for narratological analysis that can be modified for various ghost stories and modernist narratives, as well as for educational purposes in literature instruction.

Methodology

Research Design

The study utilizes a qualitative, text-based research design rooted in narratological analysis, augmented by systematic coding and basic descriptive statistics. Qualitative close reading is still the most important part, but coding keeps track of changes in voice and focalization in a way that can be repeated. Basic counts and distributions back up claims about patterning. The design is interpretive and descriptive; it seeks to delineate how the narrative constructs multiperspectival voice and spectral focalization, rather than to evaluate hypotheses through inferential statistics.

Corpus and Unit of Study

The corpus consists solely of Virginia Woolf's *A Haunted House* in a credible contemporary scholarly edition. A single text focus enables the meticulous analysis necessary to delineate voice and focalization at the clause or sentence level. The narrative segment is the smallest continuous stretch of text in which the speaker and focalizer are thought to stay stable.

Segmentation is directed by:

- A. Changes in the pronoun or grammatical person (for example, "I" to "we," "we" to "they").
- B. Changes in how quotes and speech/thought are shown (for example, going from narrator report to quoted ghostly dialogue).
- C. Changes in the inferred focalizer, such as going from the living narrator's point of view to the ghost's point of view.

Each segment is assigned a distinct identification number and documented on a coding sheet.

Theoretical Framework

The analytical framework incorporates three components:

1. Structural narratology (Genette). Genette differentiates narrative level (extradiegetic, intradiegetic), narrative situation (homodiegetic versus heterodiegetic), and focalization (zero, internal, external), thereby establishing a taxonomy for articulating voice and perspective. These categories serve to categorize the fundamental narrative context of each segment.
2. Cognitive narratology. Cognitive narratology investigates the mechanisms by which readers create storyworlds and assign mental states and viewpoints, emphasizing processes like schema activation, inference, and theory of mind. It elucidates the identification of focalizers by highlighting the probable interpretations of pronouns, deictics, and contextual cues as indicators of perceived consciousness.
3. Unnatural narratology. Unnatural narratology examines narratives that feature impossible or antimimetic storyworlds, encompassing dead narrators, unattainable vantage points, and paradoxical temporalities. The study, informed by Alber, et al., differentiates between natural and unnatural focalizers by assessing the feasibility of the perspective in the real world, considering our cognitive and physical limitations.

By bringing these strands together, the study systematically describes speaker positions and focalization, explains how readers deal with conflicting or unclear points of view, and classify spectral perspectives as unnatural in a principled way.

The Coding Scheme

A coding scheme makes the theoretical categories work in real life. The following variables are recorded for each narrative segment:

Grammatical person or pronoun: for example, "I," "we," "you," "he/she/they," or "it."

Type of Voice

- A. Living first-person narrator.
- B. Living couple's "we" (clearly human and domestic).
- C. Ghostly couple (a clear spectral voice, often in quotation).
- D. Blended or unclear "we" (could be living, dead, or both).
- E. A voice that is not personal or narrates.

Narrative Level

extradiegetic, intradiegetic, or hypodiegetic, according to Genette.

Speech/Thought Mode:

direct quote, free indirect speech, interior monologue, and narrator report.

Focalizer:

a living narrator, a ghostly couple, a mixed or unclear consciousness, or an outside or "camera" point of view.

Type of Focalization:

none, internal or external.

Ontological Status of the Focalizer:

- A. Natural (realistic view of a living person).
- B. Unnatural/ghostly (dead focalizer, impossible perspective).
- C. Mixed or unclear (ontological status is unknown).

There are four types of ambiguity: speaker ambiguity, focalizer ambiguity, level ambiguity, and none.

The scheme was tested on the first part of the story. During the pilot, there were some cases that were not clear, so the definitions were improved and a codebook with examples for each category was made, following suggestions for strict qualitative coding.

Here are the steps of the method:

1. Close reading and breaking up the text. To find possible changes in voice and focalization, the story was read several times. Then, it was broken up into narrative units based on the criteria above.
2. Descriptive coding. The researcher coded each segment for pronoun, speech mode, and narrative level on the first pass. These are all variables that don't require much thought.
3. Code for analysis. In a second pass, segments were coded for voice type, focalizer, focalization type, ontological status, and ambiguity type, using the theoretical framework and codebook as guides. The researcher marked segments that needed more discussion as problematic.
4. Organizing data. The researcher put coded data into a spreadsheet so that they could be sorted and be counted by category, like all the segments with ghostly focalizers or all the "we" segments that were unclear.
5. Study. Data analysis took place in three steps:
 - A. Descriptive statistics (percentages and frequencies).
 - B. Pattern and sequence analysis (e.g., focalizer clusters and transitions).
 - C. Interpretive analysis using the combined theoretical lens.

To improve reliability, a portion of segments was re-coded after a certain amount of time to check for consistency among coders, and analytic memos were kept to explain coding choices in cases where the meaning was not clear.

Results and Discussion

Results

A. Types of Voices and How to Speak

The coding showed four main speaking positions: a living first-person narrator, a living couple's "we," a ghostly couple, and a mixed or unclear "we." There were also a few impersonal narrative segments. In parts that talk about physical sensations (waking up, lying in bed, hearing sounds), everyday perception, and how people react to things that happen in the house, the voice of the living narrator is the most important. These parts usually use the word "I" in the singular and focus on a living, embodied point of view that is based in the present.

Quotation marks and deictic references to a remembered past and to spatial exploration ("Here we left it," "It's upstairs," "Safe, safe, safe") are the best ways to mark ghostly voice segments. These parts are always coded as the ghostly couple's voice, with the dead pair as the focus. They often show up in patterns that repeat, like a refrain, which helps the story's rhythm. Segments coded as the living couple's "we" are not as many, but they are still important. They show how the narrator and the living partner share consciousness or perception, especially in domestic settings (for example, "We sleep," "We wake," "We hear the ghostly couple"). These segments preserve a natural ontological status while anticipating the more radically integrated applications of "we."

The most interesting category is segments that use a mixed or unclear "we," where the text doesn't give enough clues to tell if the plural voice belongs to the living couple, the ghostly couple, or a single consciousness that includes both. These parts usually happen at the most exciting or important points in the story, like when "the treasure" is found, which is when the main idea about lasting love is made clear. In these instances, the pronoun "we" serves as a narratological pivot, enabling readers to contemplate the existence of a collective subjectivity that surpasses the dichotomy of life and death.

B. Focalization and Uncertain Viewpoints

Internal focalization is the main way the story is told, but it comes from living, ghostly, and mixed focalizers. Parts of the story with internal focalization through the living narrator closely follow how the narrator sees, hears, and feels things, often using verbs like "I hear," "I lay," and "I felt." In contrast, segments with internal focalization through the ghosts focus on moving through space and the ongoing nature of their search, often in the present continuous tense ("They are looking," "They go from room to room"), even though the point of view is posthumous.

Ambiguous focalization happens when feelings and perceptions could belong to either the living narrator or the ghosts, or when the text clearly uses "we" without a clear anchor. These segments do not allow for a single focalizer; instead, they encourage readers to create a combined experiential field. From a cognitive standpoint, these segments necessitate that readers navigate various potential perspective attributions and acknowledge the absence of a singularly correct option. Zero focalization, which is like an all-knowing point of view, is rare. It mostly shows up in short descriptive sentences that summarize the house or the weather without making it clear who is aware of them. External focalization, confined to observable behavior, is inherently limited; Woolf swiftly transitions from tangible events to mental and emotional states. The story exemplifies a modernist inclination towards interiority while concurrently dispersing interiority across various, occasionally ethereal, focal points.

C. Natural and Unnatural Viewpoints

Utilizing the unnatural narratology's differentiation between natural and unnatural narrative contexts, focalizers were classified based on their ontological status. Natural focalizers are alive, human, and cognitively plausible; unnatural focalizers are deceased or otherwise infeasible given real-world constraints; mixed or unclear focalizers exist at the intersection of these categories. Segments in which the living narrator sees and makes sense of events are normal. Parts where the ghosts see, remember, or talk after death are coded as unnatural. The story goes back and forth between these two, but not in a simple way. Instead, there are groups of ghostly internal focalization near passages that stress "treasure" and "safe." This suggests that there is a link between spectral perspective and the main themes of lasting love and emotional security.

Ambiguous segments, which mix or blur living and ghostly points of view, are especially thick around the end of the story, when the mixed "we" finds out that "the treasure" is not material wealth but a feeling of safety and shared love. These segments are labeled as having a mixed or unclear ontological status, but their narrative function is very important: they break down the line between natural and unnatural focalizers, showing in a story form the idea that love lasts beyond individual life.

D. Patterning Throughout the Story

When the segments are looked at in order, a pattern emerges: the story goes from clear positions—like the living narrator watching and the ghosts moving—to more and more overlapping and mixed perspectives as it gets closer to the end. In the early parts, it's easier to tell the difference between "they" (ghosts) and "we" (living couple). In the later parts, however, it's more diligently to tell the difference between "we" and "they."

This pattern backs up the idea that haunting is a developmental event in the story's structure. As voices and points of view slowly come together, the haunting gets stronger over time at the level of narrative form. The last quote from the narrator's speech, which is written in typographical signs that have been linked to ghostly voice, marks the end of this process.

Discussion

A. Fictive Narrativism and Structural Haunting

The results indicate that *A Haunted House* exemplifies fictive narrativism by creating narrative positions that are overtly unstable, composite, or ontologically impossible. Instead of having a stable, homodiegetic narrator who talks about ghostly events, the story gives voice and focus to living, dead, and mixed consciousnesses. It also uses pronoun shifts, quotation patterns, and deictics to signal these changes. Haunting thus becomes an intrinsic characteristic of the narrative structure: the text is haunted by its own incapacity—or reluctance—to establish the identity of the speaker and the observer at any particular moment. Genette's taxonomy of voice and focalization is essential for elucidating this complexity; however, the text's spectral and composite focalizers indicate that traditional classifications of homodiegetic narrator and internal focalization must be augmented when addressing antimimetic or spectral narratives. The narrative incorporates "hetero-ontological" focalization, offering viewpoints that transcend conventional understandings of existence, while being situated within a predominantly realistic domestic context.

B. Cognitive Processing of Unclear or Mixed Points of View

Cognitive narratology elucidates how readers can navigate complexity without experiencing confusion. Readers depend on schemas for domestic life, ghost stories, and lyrical meditation, moving between them as the story gives them hints. In passages featuring ambiguous "we," readers might employ a schema of collective consciousness or group experience, recognizable from other Woolf works, and expand it to encompass spectral participants. They might also think that the ambiguity itself is important, and that the text is about how living and dead people can't be separated in the house. Zunshine's research on theory of mind in fiction indicates that readers are proficient in assigning mental states to various agents and in navigating nested or overlapping perspectives. *A Haunted House* takes advantage of this ability by making readers think about more than one possible attribution at once and not giving them a clear answer. The resultant experience of prolonged uncertainty—absent complete confusion—corresponds with the phenomenology of haunting: one is aware of the presence of "someone," yet their identity and status remain elusive.

C. Unnatural Narratology and Ontological Texture

Unnatural narratology asserts that spectral narrators and focalizers serve as antimimetic constructs that contest real-world limitations, while being interpreted by readers through modified cognitive frameworks. In this way, *A Haunted House* is a great example of ghostly focalization: the ghosts' points of view are mixed in with a modernist prose style that is otherwise realistic. Readers accept these impossible points of view because the story gives them consistent internal cues for how to work, and because ghost stories are a genre that people are used to.

The switching back and forth between natural and unnatural points of view creates what could be called a "haunted ontological texture." The story's world is not just a copy of the real world or a completely magical one; instead, it has ghostly

points of view that can't be fit into just one ontological register. This texture supports the idea that the house is a place where the lines between life and death are thin, and where love and memory flow across those lines.

D. Consequences for Woolf Studies and Education

The analysis demonstrates that even a brief, anthologized story such as "A Haunted House" encapsulates essential elements of her narrative experimentation. The compression of multiperspectival voice, the amalgamation of consciousnesses, and the formalization of haunting at the structural level echo techniques found in the novels, albeit in a more concentrated manner. The study indicates that greater emphasis ought to be placed on Woolf's short fiction as a testing ground for her narrative innovations.

The coding-oriented approach can be used in the classroom. Students can be asked to mark changes in pronouns, quotations, and the apparent focalizer in *A Haunted House*. After that, they can compare their coding choices to a simpler version of the study's scheme. This exercise clarifies narratological terminology and assists students in expressing how voice and focalization influence their interpretation of haunting, love, and memory within the narrative.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study contends that Virginia Woolf's *A Haunted House* utilizes fictive narrativism through multiperspectival voice and ghostly focalization, thereby manifesting haunting at the narrative structure level. The analysis utilized an integrated framework derived from Genette's structural narratology, cognitive narratology, and unnatural narratology, employing a systematic coding scheme for narrative segments. It identified four primary speaking positions and recorded the distribution of natural, unnatural, and ambiguous focalizers.

The arrangement of these positions throughout the story shows that the voices and points of view are coming together more and more, leading to a mixed "we" and a final quote that blurs the lines between living and dead, narrator and character, and fact and fiction. The story's haunted ontological texture comes not only from the ghosts that are characters, but also from the way the narrative form itself becomes ghostly and unstable.

Methodologically, the study illustrates the efficacy of integrating close reading with structured coding and basic descriptive statistics in literary analysis. Theoretically, it demonstrates the productive integration of structural, cognitive, and unconventional narratology to analyze modernist and supernatural narratives. Subsequent research may utilize this methodology on additional Woolf texts or a more extensive collection of ghost stories, potentially integrating empirical reader-response techniques to enhance comprehension of how readers interpret ambiguous and spectral viewpoints.

Haunting is a structural feature, not just a theme. The unstable, mixed "we" and changing focalization show that love, memory, and presence cross the line between life and death at the level of form. Even very short works like *A Haunted House* can be seen as small laboratories where Woolf tried out new ideas about consciousness and point of view, not as "minor" works. Classical narratological categories (homodiegetic narrator, internal focalization) must be broadened to encompass spectral, mixed, or "hetero-ontological" focalizers in ghostly or antimimetic narratives. Integrating structural, cognitive, and non-natural narratology proves beneficial for modernist and supernatural texts, as it elucidates how implausible perspectives can be coherently interpreted by readers. Readers can endure and even relish extended ambiguity regarding "who is seeing/speaking," employing schemas related to ghost stories, domestic life, and collective consciousness; this reflects the phenomenology of haunting (an indistinct yet persistent presence). The research indicates that ambiguity in perspective is not a defect but a purposeful strategy that instructs readers to manage various potential attributions simultaneously. Woolf scholarship can benefit from a greater focus on her short fiction as venues where spectrality, multiperspectival voice, and modernist interiority are intricately condensed. In the classroom, a coding activity that tracks pronoun shifts and focalizers can make abstract narratological ideas more concrete and help students explain how narrative form changes how we think about love, memory, and haunting.

Acknowledgements

The author wants to thank the people and organizations that helped with this study. The author is solely responsible for any remaining errors or omissions.

Funding

This research received no external funding from any public, commercial, or not-for-profit funding agency, and no organization provided financial support for the conduct of the study, authorship, or publication of this article.

Competing Interests Statement

The author declares that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this article.

Data Availability Statement

The data for this study comprise the complete text of Virginia Woolf's "A Haunted House" (in a modern scholarly edition) and a researcher-generated coding sheet of narrative segments (voice, focalization, and associated variables). The main text can be found in the editions listed in the reference list. The coding sheet and summary frequency tables can be obtained from the corresponding author upon a reasonable request.

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Appendices

No appendices are attached to this study.