

But Lord, the infinite possibilities of self-deception—the difficulty of disentangling the countless strands of emotion and calling each by its proper name—of separating business from pleasure. At times, whatever he might say, he was surely lost in a cloud of unknowing; but at least it was a peaceful cloud at present, and sailing through a milky sea towards a possible though unlikely ecstasy at an indefinite remove was, if not the fullness of life, then something like its shadow.

—*H.M.S. SURPRISE*, Patrick O'Brien

It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune must be in want of a wife. However little known the feelings or views of such a man may be on his first entering a neighbourhood, this truth is so well fixed in the minds of the surrounding families, that he is considered the rightful property of some one or other of their daughters.

"My dear Mr. Bennet," said his lady to him one day, "have you heard that Netherfield Park is let at last?" Mr. Bennet replied that he had not.

"But it is," returned she; "for Mrs. Long has just been here, and she told me all about it." Mr. Bennet made no answer. "Do you not want to know who has taken it?" cried his wife impatiently.

"You want to tell me, and I have no objection to hearing it."

This was invitation enough.

—*PRIDE AND PREJUDICE*, Jane Austen

Point of view can be used to establish, maintain, and alter a reader's perception of people and events, and thus is a powerful narrative tool. It is not restricted to the first-person mode of telling a tale. The two quotations above display point of view, even though both are written in a third-person narrative mode. Point of view is simply the perspective from which the story is being viewed. Point of view may be:

*subjective* OR *objective*                      and also                      *omniscient* OR *limited*

A truly **objective** point of view is neutral: It does not offer a particular person's perspective but instead reveals the facts of the story without describing (or hinting at) the characters' thoughts or feelings. Truly objective POVs are rare, particularly in modern novels. Even writing that purports to be objective is suspect: The narrator may simply be unreliable. In the **subjective** point of view, the narrative describes one or more character's feelings and thoughts. Shifting from one subjective viewpoint to another cannot be random, however. It must be accomplished through transitional devices—whether language, or page breaks, chapter breaks, even a change in typeface. The author must be clear whose POV the story is being viewed from at each point in the telling of the tale, and then must make this clear on the page.

An **omniscient** narrator has all-knowledge of all things all the time—people, places, events. A **limited** narrator is restricted to the perspective of a particular character; the limited narrator can only relate what the particular character knows, when the

character knows it. A limited narrator cannot reveal story points or truths unknown to the focal character.

Most of us write in ***third-person omniscient, with a subjective point of view***. Not all of us, all the time—but this is the most common narrative mode.

The subjective point of view allows the writer to parcel out clues to the state of mind of the characters; it may reveal their emotions or beliefs; it helps shape the reader's perception of information and the world being explored. It may radically alter a reader's feelings for a character or their belief or disbelief of stated facts—and thus it may alter the meaning of the story and the tone of the piece. Point of view may be used to enhance suspense, direct readers' attention, or conversely, distract them and throw them off the trail.

There is no essential difference between the material of comedy and tragedy. All depends on the point of view of the dramatist, which, by clever emphasis, he tries to make the point of view of his audience. —George Pierce Baker, *Drama: Lectures on the Harvard Classics 1909-1914*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press)

A novel directs the reader's contemplation of it...every novel, then, is a guided meditation on a common thing, common both in the sense of "mundane" and in the sense of "shared"...It is hard to overestimate the importance of this quality of commonness to the nature of the novel. It enables a reader to relax with a novel as with another person, and also to feel as though the novelist might have something to say of relevance to the reader's own common life. —Jane Smiley, *Thirteen Ways of Looking at the Novel* (New York: Anchor, 2006)

"You see, I'm trying in all my stories to get the *feeling* of the actual life across—not to just depict life..." --Ernest Hemingway, letter to his father

Even scientific knowledge, if there is anything to it, is not a random observation of random objects; for the critical objectivity of significant knowledge is attained as a practice only philosophically in inner action. —Karl Jaspers, *On My Philosophy* (Plume, 1975)

The intelligent novel-reader, unlike the inquisitive one who just runs his eye over a new fact, mentally picks it up. He sees it from two points of view: isolated, and related to the other facts that he has read on previous pages. Probably he does not understand it, but he does not expect to do so yet awhile. The facts in a highly organized novel (like *The Egoist*) are often of the nature of cross-correspondences and the ideal spectator cannot expect to view them properly until he is sitting up on a hill at the end. —E.M. Forster, ASPECTS OF THE NOVEL