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<div align="center">Point of View in the Novel</div>

The publishing industry has shifted its focus to marketing a manuscript rather than an

exceptional voice or talent. One aspect of marketability is point of view, where experimentation

is limited to two viewpoints, first person and third person, especially if an author wants

publication. By examining the novels *Revolutionary Road* by Richard Yates, *The French

Lieutenant's Woman* by John Fowles, and *Cosmicomics* by Italo Calvino, I will show that a

unique point of view can deepen a manuscript if well written. The young writer should not force

his manuscripts into a point of view but instead utilize the best one for his story.

Self-editing for Fiction Writers by Renni Browne and Dave King says, "Some writing books

distinguish as many as twenty-six different flavors of point of view, but there are really only

three basic approaches: first person, third person, and omniscient" (41). Most books on craft

contain a point of view section but do not go beyond this generalization. Even Orson Scott Card

in his craft book *Character & Viewpoint* does not demonstrate anything experimental, but he

does offer some hope for an author interested in experimentation: "What about second person,

or third-person plural, or other possible narrative voices? Well, there's nothing to stop you from

trying" (Card 130). His book is part of a Writer's Digest Books series titled *Elements of Fiction*,

dating from 1988.

James Scott Bell has authored several craft books published by Writer's Digest Books and

appears often in their magazine. His book *Revision and Self-Editing*, part of the *Write Great

Fiction* series, has a chapter dedicated to point of view, and Bell begins with a discussion of the

omniscient viewpoint, saying, "For historical novels and sweeping epics, it can be a very good choice" (61). He gives examples from Dickenson's *Bleak House* as well done omniscient but ends with, "These days, the safest bets are first person and third person" (Bell 63). While some writing books will give a brief description of second person point of view, he says, "By the way, I'm not even going to mention second-person POV, which is as rare as the blue-footed booby. My advice is not to try it at home, or anywhere else for that matter" (Bell 60). This rule limits the young writer, especially when brief moments of second person are used in respected books like *The Hours* by Michael Cunningham.

A newer book in the *Write Great Fiction* series, *Characters, Emotion, & Viewpoint* by Nancy Kress, doesn't discourage experimentation but comments, "You really have to be a Faulkner to get away with [a switch between first and third person], although it does prove yet again that there are not unbreakable rules in writing if a genuine master chooses to break them" (Kress 170). This book was published in 2005. The market had undergone a major change since Card's book seventeen years ago. Now, experimentation is still an option, but only if a young writer is a reincarnation of Faulkner.

An issue of *Writer's Digest* sums up the situation in the workbook section, which focuses on point of view for their spring 2010 issue. After giving a short description of second person point of view, James V. Smith Jr. writes, "But know that most publishing professionals advise against using this tricky approach" (70). This comment can be expanded beyond second person to any unusual point of view. The last thing an author wants to hear is a prospective agent suggesting a book might be hard to market.

Instead of encouraging experimentation, current craft books show it as a negative when considering publication. If a publishing company is afraid a book might not sell due to an

unusual viewpoint, how do they explain the popularity of classic authors who use non-traditional points of view? In an intermediate literature class at a Lycoming College, many of the novels had an experimental element and were written by respected authors. The novels listed previously have unique point of view moments I'd like to explore further.

Revolutionary Road by Richard Yates is written from an omniscient viewpoint, described as a "point of view in which the story is told by an unnamed narrator (a persona of the author) who can dip into the mind and thoughts of any character, though he focuses primarily on no more than two or three, giv[ing] the writer greatest range and freedom" (Gardner 76). The majority of the novel focuses on Frank Wheeler, who is dissatisfied with his life. His wife, April, is trapped as a housewife even though she'd rather occupy herself with a real job, as evidenced by her scheme to move to Paris and become the breadwinner while Frank discovers himself. The point of view hops between the occupants of three households contrasted in the novel—the Wheelers, the Campbells, and the Givings—but, besides Frank, the most time is spent with Shep and his wife, Milly.

Yates controls the omniscient viewpoint in two important ways. First, the reader doesn't spend much time in April's thoughts, and even the scene where she performs an abortion has very little interior monologue. While Frank is the protagonist, the story revolves around his relationship with April. Her dissatisfaction with her housewife station is obvious, largely by her Paris plan, but the monotony and boredom is not shown like with Frank at his job. Instead, the reader observes her, just as in the opening chapters, as if on stage—starting off strong and carrying the show before she loses control.

This is circular to Yates' final chapters. After April dies, the end is narrated mostly by Milly, "who told the story many, many times in the following months, everything worked out as well as

could be expected" (Yates 447). The point of view shifts for the final pages to Mrs. Givings, but

the last lines are regulated to a more minor character: "But from there on Howard Givings heard

only a welcome, thunderous sea of silence. He had turned off his hearing aid" (Yates 463).

This point of view separation develops the theme of community, or lack thereof, as suggested

in the beginning. In an act of omniscience, chapter one begins with a group: "The final dying

sounds of their dress rehearsal left the Laurel Players with nothing to do but stand there, silent

and helpless, blinking out over the footlights of an empty auditorium" (Yates 3). No character is

distinguished from The Players for several pages, but their goal is repeated: "The main thing,

though, was not the play itself but the company—the brave idea of it, the healthy, hopeful sound

of it: the birth of a really good community theater right here, among themselves" (Yates 8).

Frank and April's only true community are the Campbells and the Givings. *Revolutionary Road*

opens with an attempt to create a larger community while the ending narrows specifically to the

Wheelers' friends. Just like on stage, April is viewed from the outside. Milly describes April's

life to the new owners of the Wheelers' house, and Mrs. Givings says, "'Oh, I was very fond of

the Wheelers, but they always were a bit—a bit whimsical for my taste. A bit neurotic'" (Yates

461). Avoiding Frank's viewpoint in the final chapter demonstrates the lack of community as

their neighbors' opinions are spoken aloud. Instead of joining a cohesive group, like the Laurel

Players, Frank and April become separated from their neighbors until they are finally objectified

through gossip.

Yates' skillful use of third person omniscient develops a recurring theme and allows for a

stronger ending than if he had been forced to finish the story in Frank's point of view. He

contrasts his opening omniscient chapters to the ending when the protagonist is absent and seen

through the minor character's point of view. In today's market, could Yates' first chapter have no identified character for several pages? Current writing books would argue no.

When answering a point of view question on his blog, Neil Gaiman stated, "The main rule of writing is that, if you do it with enough assurance and confidence, you're allowed to do whatever you like" (Gaiman). This could be applied to John Fowles' *The French Lieutenant's Woman*. Set in Victorian England, the novel focuses on Charles' battle between freewill and duty in his society. Written in authorial omniscient, Fowles introduces himself to the reader as a recorder of the story in the fourth paragraph and addresses the reader directly throughout the novel as in his description of the town of Lyme: "However, if you had turned northward and landward in 1867, as the man that day did, your prospect would have been harmonious" (Fowles 4). He takes it to the extreme in chapters thirteen and thirty-five. Chapter thirteen begins with the statement, "This story I am telling is all imagination. These characters I create never existed outside my own mind" (Fowles 95). He comments on the writing process, a writer as god, and the themes of his novel—"Time, Progress, Society, Evolution" (Fowles 98).

Life's duality is another theme not listed but represented by contrasting evolution and religion, duty and freewill, and writer and reader. Authorial omniscience adds to the duality by allowing the author to address the reader, often comparing the Victorian era to his modern day, 1969. This causes the novel to transcend the Victorian time period, such as when Fowles discusses how George Morland's paintings of country life were so sentimental: "A suppression of reality, as that in our own Hollywood films of 'real' life. Each age, each guilty age, builds high walls round its Versailles; and personally I hate those walls most when they are made by literature and art" (158). In chapter thirty-five, he pauses the novel to contrast the sexuality of Victorians with that of modern day: "The Victorians chose to be serious about something we

treat rather lightly, and the way they expressed their seriousness was not to *talk openly* about sex, just as part of our way is the very reverse" (Fowles 268).

Fowles goes beyond inserting his opinions by writing himself into the story. In the text, a man enters Charles' train compartment, and too much thought is put into his paragraph-long description to pass him by as a walk-on character. A few paragraphs later, the reader is rewarded by Fowles. "Now the question I am asking, as I stare at Charles, is not quite the same as the two above. But rather, what the devil am I going to do with you?" (Fowles 405). He takes full advantage of the authorial omniscient viewpoint to deepen the duality of his story by contrasting himself as writer and character. In the scene, he questions what Charles will do and how the story will continue. He claims authors tend to fix the endings instead of giving their characters freedom to choose. Fowles decides against this and sees two available endings: "The only way I can take no part in the fight is to show two versions of it. That leaves me with only one problem: I cannot give both versions at once, yet whichever is the second will seem, so strong is the tyranny of the last chapter, the final, the 'real' version" (Fowles 406). He flips a coin to decide which ending will be written first and provides both. As a final act of authorial omniscience, he watches Charles perform the first ending before winding his clock back to restart the scene.

Fowles takes the point of view beyond the definition of authorial omniscient when he writes himself into the novel. Experimentation like this might define the novel as a hard sell in the mind of a young writer and discourage a bold move, but it makes *The French Lieutenant's Woman* unusual. Consistently writing in that point of view may pose a problem, since an author would need to be confident in his talent and opinions to create a strong voice. Recently, HarperCollins published *Stardust* by Neil Gaiman, who deviated from the story for certain chapters in a similar way as *The French Lieutenant's Woman*. While this gives hope for young writers, Gaiman had

established his career before *Stardust*. If this had been his debut, it might not have been so marketable—or so Nancy Kress' Faulkner comment suggests.

While point of view adds a greater depth to *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, it is essential to the enjoyment of *Cosmicomics* by Italo Calvino. *Cosmicomics* doesn't meet the requirements of a novel or a short story collection but falls in between as the chapters form individual stories with a common narrator (except for two chapters). The stories open with a scientific fact, which is disregarded by the main character, Qfwfq, as he explains how it really happened. Most stories have a science fiction setting, often in space, where folkloric themes of creation and new awareness are common.

Each chapter begins with an italicized epigraph, such as in chapter one: *"At one time, according to Sir George H. Darwin, the Moon was very close to the Earth. Then the tides gradually pushed her far away: the tides that the moon herself causes in the Earth's waters, where the Earth slowly looses energy*" (Calvino 3). The main character, Qfwfq, then responds, "How well I know!—*old Qfwfq cried*—the rest of you can't remember, but I can" (Calvino 3). This pattern repeats throughout the book. Each story relates to the epigraph and is told in first person except for the singular third person dialogue tag.

This creates the feeling of an oral storyteller, as if the reader is gathered with the rest of Qfwfq's people, listening to him recite. The stories are like scientific folktales, explaining new beginnings such as creation ("At Daybreak") or the first sign ("A Sign in Space"). Some of the dialogue tags, like "*Qfwfq confirmed*" (Calvino 51) and "*Qfwfq corrected*" (Calvino 97), suggest he is responding to the epigraph. This creates a conversation between Qfwfq and another character—possibly the reader, since he has already identified the reader as a member of the listening crowd through several second person addresses like in "The Spiral": "Now I try to

persuade myself that the two holes I had were a mouth and an anus, and that I therefore already had my bilateral symmetry, just like the trilobites and the rest of you" (Calvino 141).

Two chapters break from this form. While each begins with the scientific epigraph, Qfwfq is absent from the text, which continues in first person. These back-to-back chapters are placed later in the book and, while the voice of the narrator is very similar, Qfwfq's disappearance raises questions. "The Form of Space" describes three individuals falling through space. The narrator and Lieutenant Fenimore are both in love with Ursula, but neither gain her attention or can move toward her due to their falling. In "The Light-years," the narrator becomes concerned that the inhabitants of other planets have observed his negative actions and are passing judgment. He spends light-years writing messages back and forth among the stars until he realizes it doesn't matter in the grand scheme of things.

The connection between the chapters is that the narrator(s) record stories instead of participating in the oral telling, which explains the absent dialogue tag. The first example is in "The Form of Space": "I could seize her by the hair and bend her against a *d* or a *t* just as I write them now, in haste, bent, so you can recline against them" (Calvino 123). The narrator admits to writing the story, and no such lines appear in the oral Qfwfq chapters. "The Light-years" isn't as blatant, but the narrator often mentions his diary: "Even before I checked my diary to see what I had been doing that day, I was seized by a ghastly presentiment" (Calvino 127). If the narrator recorded his daily activities, then this story might be just that—a diary entry. This fluctuation in the point of view structure personalizes the stories more than the oral structure, which is fitting since they contain the most relatable and human themes—jealousy and obsession over others' opinions.

For science fiction to become more than entertainment, Jörg Hienger says,

If I read with an interest in the possible significance of this mock reality and the events taking place there, I am compelled (since the significance can only be brought about through an interplay of text and reader) to utilize my experience in a play of imagination conducted according to a score which is not mine. Reading then becomes a dislocation of parts of my own experience, their rearrangement in another context, and their reassessment in the light of an alien perspective. (169)

One way Calvino accomplishes this in *Cosmicomics* is through the unique viewpoint. He associates the reader with Qfwfq's people and showcases their trivial behavior, so the reader questions his actions. Had Calvino done the "marketable" thing and stuck with a first person point of view, as in "The Form of Space" and "The Light-years," and not included Qfwfq, the power of these scientific folktales would have been undermined.

The publishing market has changed since these novels were printed, the newest being *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, published in 1969. Marketability is a concern for agents and editors, who become less likely to risk a payoff on an unusual book as the industry shrinks due to economic downturns. The current craft books echo this, as well as the *Writer's Digest* magazine, a publication sold in many bookstores and all writing conferences. Young writers, drawn to these beginner publications due to their easy access and conference support, only find rules. Either they are outright discouraged from experimentation with elements such as point of view, or it is suggested that only great writers have license to use non-traditional methods. The market is flooded with manuscripts of first and third person point of view when, as proven by novels like *Revolutionary Road*, *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, and *Cosmicomics*, a unique viewpoint can enhance a novel's themes and make it memorable.

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Parts of a book make up the entirety of the book, including the title, introduction, body, conclusion, and back cover. In order to write a book book in full, you need to have all the moving parts to make it not only good but also effective. Without essential pieces, your book will appear unprofessional and worse: you'll lose the credibility and authority writing a book is so useful for. Parts of a Book You Need for Success. It's not enough to just write and self-publish a book by throwing it up on Amazon or any other publishing site. You have to get the parts of your book right if you want it to sell more, get those 5-star reviews, and place you as an authority figure in your field. Here's how to do that. #1 – Title Page. For obvious reasons, your title is important… The earliest books of the ancient world were written on papyrus and skins of young animals. These books took the form of a long strip, rolled from one cylinder to another. These writings were known to the Romans as volumen from which comes the word volume. Now most countries have their own national libraries. Many old university libraries have rich collections of books: Oxford and Cambridge in England, Harvard and Yale in the United States. Among the great libraries of the world we can name the British Museum Library (The British Library) in London, the Library of Congress in the United States, Bibliotheque Nationale in France, the Beijing Library in China , the State Public Library in Moscow. The world's largest is the US library of Congress. This is part of the Writer's Digest "Write Great Fiction" series. I found Bell's other book in the series, Plot and Structure, to be quite helpful, so I was interested in seeing what this one had to offer. I've already developed my own "system" for revising, basically starting with big issues and working down to the detailed polishing. I imagined this book would be devoted exclusively to revision and editing strategies: how to use critique groups, friends as readers, the mechanics of moving text around or rearranging scenes while maintaining flow, record-keeping strategies, which problems to address first, etc. That's not what it is, for the most part. "Running through the garage, Frank threw his other four self-help editing books in the dumpster." I rest my case. Read more.