

A GLOSSARY OF PERSONS

Here's a quick breakdown:

First person: The story told from the perspective of an "I," generally—but not always!—the novel's protagonist. Sometimes you'll have a story told from the perspective of a peripheral character; in this case the novel begins to resemble a third-person narrative—most of the story is about other characters the narrator observes. This can be something to play with: how "close" to the center of the novel the narrator is; how much the novel is his story at all. F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* utilizes a first-person perspective quite beautifully. His narrator, Nick Carraway, is, in some senses, telling the story of another man (Jay Gatsby) rather than his own, and his fixation with Gatsby, the fact that he is so invested in Gatsby's story, lends the novel a great deal of emotional weight.

First-person plural: This is a risky but exciting point of view, employed in any story told from the perspective of a collective "we." The narrator, in essence, is the consciousness of a community rather than simply one of its members. This perspective can begin to resemble a roving third-person; the "we" usually talks about each character individually, but narrates the actions of the group in communal terms.

Second Person: This perspective is a bit more common for short stories than novels. It involves addressing the entire story to "you," a person sometimes specified and sometimes left unidentified. "You" might be another character, a general audience, or even the reader himself. You might see the second person as a framing device that is submerged into what otherwise functions as a first-person narrative. Marilynne Robinson's *Gilead*, for example, is told as a series of letters from a dying man to his young son. The "you" address is used, and deepens the emotional impact of the novel, but most of the story is told from the father's first-person perspective.

Close third-person: People describe this perspective as something akin to "looking over a character's shoulder." The character is referred to in the third-person, as "he" or "she," but the narrator has access to many of his/her inner thoughts and feelings. This perspective can feel pretty close to first-person. A **roving third-person** moves from shoulder to shoulder through the course of the novel, gaining access to different characters at different moments.

Distant third-person: This perspective involves a narrator located further away from the characters, describing them as an observer might—in terms of what they do or say—rather than narrating what is happening inside their minds. The distant third-person perspective often allows for a more "epic" scope—like Edward P. Jones' *The Known World*, from the last lesson, whose narrator can describe an entire community over many years. This narrative perspective is sometimes referred to as "omniscient third-person."