

moving accidents and might mutations and strange encounters

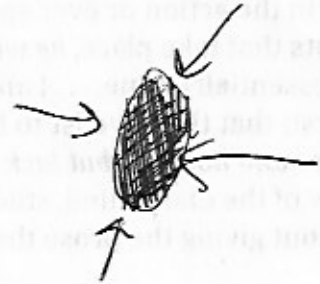
"... the safest arena for the play of moving accidents and mighty mutations and strange encounters, or whatever odd matters, is the field, as I may call it, rather of their second than of their first exhibition. By which, to avoid obscurity, I mean nothing more cryptic than I feel myself show them best by showing almost exclusively the way they are felt, by recognizing as their main interest some impression strongly made by them and intensely received. We but too probably break down, I have ever reasoned, when we attempt the prodigy, the appeal to mystification, in itself; with its 'objective' side too emphasized the report will practically run thin. We want it clear, goodness knows, but we also want it thick, and we get the thickness in the human consciousness that entertains and records, that amplifies and interprets it. That indeed, when the question is (to repeat) of the 'supernatural,' constitutes the only thickness we do get; here prodigies, when they come straight, come with an effect imperiled; they keep all their character, on the other hand, by looming through some other history --the indispensable history of somebody's normal reaction to something."

--Henry James

Here are the quotes from the class, along with a Dickinson poem that I won't have the nerve to read, although it seems to get at the inevitably knotted-up heart of POV:

Perception of an object costs
Precise the Object's loss--
Perception in itself a Gain
Replying to it's price

The Object absolute, is naught--
Perception sets it fair
And then upbraids a Perfectness
That situates so far



And a Beatles quote:

He's a real nowhere Man,
Sitting in his Nowhere Land,
Making all his nowhere plans
For nobody.
Doesn't have a point of view,
Knows not where he's going to . . .

And then the actual quotes (typos and spelling errors are all mine):

It is not the strongest of the species that survives, nor the most intelligent, but the one most responsive to change. --Charles Darwin

Point of view is an instrument --one of intensification; it acts, it behaves, it is temperamental. . . . the writer must accurately choose, combine, superimpose upon, blot out, shake up, alter the outside world for one absolute purpose, the good of the story. . . . the spirit of things is what is sought. No blur of inexactness, no cloud of vagueness, is allowable in good writing; from the first *seeing* to the last putting down, there must be *steady lucidity* and uncompromised purpose.

One of the most important things the writer comes to see for himself is that point of view is an instrument, not an end in itself, that is useful as a glass, and not as a mirror to reflect a dear and pensive face. Conscientiously used, point of view will discover, explore, see through --it may sometimes divine and prophesy. Misused, it turns opaque almost at once and gets in the way of the story.

. . . point of view is hardly a single, unalterable vision, but a *profound and developing* one of great complexity. The vision itself moves in and out of its material, shuttle-fashion, instead of being simply turned on, like a telescope on the moon. --Eudora Welty

Eye of the
Story

Point
in Fiction

I am beginning to agree with Stegner, that it (POV) truly is the most important problem in writing. The book I have been doing on the lane is a third person work, but something was lacking; I was not free to impose my perception and bizarre eye on the god-author who is supposed to be viewing the scene, so I tried something that will be extremely difficult to pull off, and to my knowledge has never been tried before —*the narrator is going to be a character*. He will not take part in the action or ever speak as I but he will be a character to be influenced by the events that take place, *he will have a position and personality*, and a character that is not essentially mine. . . . I am swinging around to an idea that I objected strongly to at first; that the novelist to be at last true and free must be a diarist *they have power and honesty, but lack something I plan to try to add —control*. I need to take the spew of the diary mind, study it for a drift, and re-work it to emphasize this drift without giving the prose the appearance of being reworked. --Ken Kesey

"It seems probable that if we were never bewildered there would never be a story to tell about us; we should partake of the superior nature of the all-knowing immortals whose annals are dreadfully dull . . ." [We kill off POV by being] "too divinely, too priggishly clever." --Henry James

★ "In fiction, to understand everything is to get nowhere." --Randall Jarrell

"I confess I never see the leading interest of any human hazard but in a consciousness (*on the part of the moved and moving creature*) subject to fine intensification and wide enlargement."

"The great chroniclers have clearly always been aware of this; they have at least always either placed a mind of some sort —*the sense of a reflecting and coloring medium*—in possession of the general adventure (when the latter has not been purely epic . . ." --Henry James

"Children see only one side of any question and because of their powerlessness see this with hysterical clarity." --Frank O'Connor

★ Tell all the truth but tell it slant —
Success in Circuit lies . . . --Emily Dickinson

"The moment we love an image, it cannot remain the copy of a fact." --Gaston Bachelard

"Part of the genius of this book is that Welch uses a style that Franz Kafka would call "transparent; that is, a simple description of events and a taut poeticism that never tries to impress the reader. the consciousness, the eye, the beholder and observer, is present and absent. His inner life is revealed through what he chooses to notice. Still, because Welch rarely allows his protagonist to show an emotional reaction to what occurs in his life, this novel is sometimes misunderstood as a work about alienation. To me, the absence of personal affect in the narrator is more about the modesty of his despair." --Louise Erdrich

"To make a portrait, is this not to see a human being like a landscape, and is there any landscape devoid of figures, which is not filled with what it has to tell us about the painter who has seen it?" --*Rilke*

"Perception is provisional, it gropes, considers, hypothesizes -therefore description itself is problematic."

"To some degree, the art of description is the art of perception; what is required, in order to say what you see, is enhanced attention to that looking, and the more you look, the more information you get. . . . the resulting visual journey can feel intricate indeed; it makes us see the world before us as composed not of discrete things that don't touch, but as a continuous realm of interconnected lines."

"Description is an ART to the degree that it gives us not just the world but the inner life of the witness."

"Descriptions actually describe consciousness, the mind playing over the world of matter, finding there a glass various and lustrous enough to reflect back the complexities of the self that's doing the looking."

"The more accurate and sensory the apparent evocation of things, the more we have the sense of someone there doing the looking, a sensibility at work. It's as if the harder the eyes and the verbal faculties work to render the look of things the more we see that gaze itself. . ." --*Mark Doty*