

Uses of Narrative Point of View in *As I Lay Dying* and *O Pioneers!*

Narrative point of view refers to the position of the narrator in relation to the story that one is narrating. As such, when evaluating the point of view of the narrator, one focuses on the relationship between the narrator and the characters in the story. There are three major points of view that narrators can adopt while narrating a story. These are first-person, second-person, and third-person point of views. Either of the foregoing points of views have different effect on the understanding and believability of the characters or the story being told, as is evident from *O Pioneers!* and *As I Lay Dying* novels.

As I lay dying is a narrative by William Faulkner who uses multiple narrators and different techniques to convey a message from different points of view. Through the narratives from the fifteen different characters in the novel, it is important to understand the different aspects of being as well as the existential metaphysics of daily life experiences. The fifteen characters and fifty-nine chapters in the book create vivid memories that validate the saying that beauty is in the eyes of the beholder. Through the different narrators, the author tries to convey the meaning of burdens but it is clear that different characters consider burdens from different perspectives such as love, hate, right, wrong, good, responsibility, and duty. From the book, it is clear that what constitutes burden is not obvious and varies from one person to the next. Most of the narrators use the first person's point of view, which means that their communication is more personal and one can explore the feelings and the thoughts of every narrator.

An example of the first person's point of view is Cora's perspective regarding the character of Darl and Jewel. According to Cora, Darl is heaven-sent while Jewel is a burden. She observes thus, "I always said Darl was different from those others. I always said he was the only one of them that had his mother's nature, had any natural affection. Not that Jewel..." (Faulkner n. pag). Clearly, she considers the measure of what she refers to as 'natural affection' as something that she has to infer from the way a person behaves. In this regard, she considers Darl as Addie's savior. Cora also emerges as a very religious person and one learns this from the language she uses in

her narration. She says, "I have tried to live right in the sight of God and man, for the honor and comfort of my Christian husband and the love and respect of my Christian children" (n. pag). By using her own perspective in reference to God and Christianity while describing her husband and children, she reveals her deep religious convictions to her audience. Ultimately, the way Cora compares Darl and Jewel shows that she believes that in order not to be a burden one has to be as close to a loved one as possible. As such, she is besides Addie until the very last point of her death because she does not want to be a burden to Addie.

Accordingly, Addie uses the first person point of view when he considers Darl a burden and Jewel her salvation. She also reveals that people consider Darl as queer but talks fondly about Jewel. One instance that shows Addie's deep affection for Jewel is when she says, "He is my cross and he will be my salvation. He will save me from, the water and from the fire. Even though I have laid down my life, he will save me" (n. pag). Further, Dell fears Darl because he considers him perceptive and feels that Jewel hates him as competition for the love of their mother. From the narration by Dell, it is obvious that he considers Darl's perceptiveness as the burden. Accordingly, Anse believes that he is doing the right thing but the neighbors do not understand his motivations. It is important to note that emotions and motives are not the only things that grab one's attention in the novel. When the foregoing characters are narrating how they perceive each other, they use the first person's point of view to show that what they state is exactly what they feel. Incorporating the first person's point of view makes the expressions of the characters more believable because one is able to interact with each character at a personal level.

However, the first person's point of view that the author uses where sections are overlapping is something that also creates some level of uncertainty such that one is not able to get the whole story until the very end. For instance, it is not possible to know what exactly caused the fire that burned down the Gillespie barn until after reading several sections that follow. This makes it hard to understand whether the events are actually happening or whether they are only happening in the mind of the narrator, or whether the narrator is narrating about events that occurred in the past. For instance, it

is not clear whether Addie is narrating after her death, in which case she would be narrating about the events that occurred prior to her demise, or whether some omniscient narrator with perceptive power is conveying her narration of the things that are happening. One of the phrases that are not clear whether Addie narrates about past or present events is when she states, "I could just remember how my father used to say that the reason for living was to get ready to stay dead a long time . . . , I would hate my father for having ever planted me" (n. pag). Another incident that brings confusion as to the occurrence of the events being narrated is Darl's narration of the death of Addie even though he is no longer present. The question that arises is whether a narrator can witness an event even if they are not present or whether there is a way that a narrator who is no longer present can imagine things that are happening and narrate the events with the same level of subjectivity as narrators who are witnessing events first hand.

O Pioneers! Narrative Point of View

The narrator in the novel *O Pioneers!* by Willa Cather makes use of the third person limited point of view where perspective is based on a single character, Alexandra Bergson. The third person-limited point of view requires the narrator to follow the main character closely such that all the audience sees and experiences is what the main character presents. The novel is about the difficult relationship that exists between Bergson and the society. It is important to note that the main character in third person limited point of view knows a lot but not everything about the other characters. As such, through Bergson, the extent to which one can learn about characters in the novel is limited. For instance, in reference to Bergson's life the narrator states, "Her personal life, her own realization of herself, was almost a subconscious existence; like an underground river that came to the surface only here and there . . ." (3.2.1). Although the narrator likens Bergson's feelings to an underground river, in reality there is no revelation as to what forms the contents of the 'underground river' so that one can have a deeper understanding of the main character. As long as the narrator does not reveal the contents of the river, it is clear that the audience does not get to know the full extent of Bergson's feelings and desires.

There are other instances that the narrator explores the feelings and desires of other characters but fails to disclose enough to enable the audience to have extensive knowledge about the characters. However, one cannot lay the entire blame of the failure to disclose more about characters on the narrator because he also seems to have limited information about the characters. As such, it is important to note that using the third person limited technique in the novel helps to limit the access that an audience has to the characters in the novel and this allows the narrator to hide personal information about the characters.

With regard to the foregoing, while the novel *As I lay dying* uses first person point of view, the narrator in *O Pioneers!* uses third person limited point of view. The main difference between the two points of view is that the first person point of view enables the audience to have a deeper understanding of the characters while the third person limited only allows the audience partial information about the personal life of the characters. As such, in *As I lay dying*, one is able to interact with the characters more closely because the audience gets the opportunity to get into the head of the characters thereby developing a direct link. Accordingly, one gets to experience the full range of emotions from different characters when reading the novel and the plot is more believable in the first person point of view. In contrast, the limitations that the third person limited point of view creates in *O Pioneers!* make it difficult for one to create a direct link with the main character, which makes the plot less believable.

Work Cited

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