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l (1959); J. Arthos, *The*
(1949); M. H. Abrams,
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, *The Language Poets Use*
pages 15, 75, 350.

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See Introduction to *The Critical Works of Thomas Rymer*, ed. Curt A. Zimansky (1956); M. A. Quinlan, *Poetic Justice in the Drama* (1912); Martha C. Nussbaum, *Poetic Justice: The Literary Imagination and Public Life* (1995).

poetic license: John Dryden in the late seventeenth century defined poetic license as “the liberty which poets have assumed to themselves, in all ages, of speaking things in verse which are beyond the severity of prose.” In its most common use the term is confined to *poetic diction* alone, to justify the poet’s departure from the rules and conventions of standard spoken and written prose in matters such as syntax, word order, the use of archaic or newly coined words, and the conventional use of *eye-rhymes* (wind-bind, daughter-laughter). The degree and kinds of linguistic freedom assumed by poets have varied according to the conventions of each age, but in every case the justification of the freedom lies in the success of the effect. The sustained opening sentence of Milton’s *Paradise Lost* (1667), for example, departs radically, but with eminent success, from the colloquial language of his time in the choice and order of words, in idiom and figurative construction, and in syntax, to achieve a distinction of language and grandeur of announcement commensurate with Milton’s high subject and the tradition of the epic form.

In a broader sense “poetic license” is applied not only to diction, but to all the ways in which poets and other literary authors are held to be free to violate, for special effects, the ordinary norms not only of common discourse but also of literal and historical truth, including the devices of meter and rhyme, the recourse to literary *conventions*, and the representation of fictional characters and events. In *1 Henry IV*, for example, Shakespeare follows Samuel Daniel’s history in verse of the Wars of the Roses by making the valiant Hotspur much younger than he was in fact, in order to serve as a more effective *foil* to the apparently dissolute Prince Hal. A special case is **anachronism**—the placing of an event or person or thing outside of its historical era. Shakespeare described his Cleopatra as wearing Elizabethan corsets; and in *Julius Caesar*, which is set in ancient Rome, he introduced a clock that strikes the hour. The term “poetic license” is sometimes extended to a poet’s violation of fact from ignorance, as well as by design. It need not diminish our enjoyment of the work that Shakespeare attributed a seacoast to landlocked Bohemia in *The Winter’s Tale*, or that Keats, in writing “On First Looking into Chapman’s Homer” (1816), mistakenly made Cortez instead of Balboa the discoverer of the Pacific Ocean.

See Geoffrey N. Leech, *A Linguistic Guide to English Poetry* (1969), chapter 3, “Varieties of Poetic License.” For the view by *Russian Formalists* that varieties of poetic license are used to freshen our perceptions both of literary language and of the world it represents, see Victor Erlich, *Russian Formalism* (1965).

poetry happenings: 243.

poetry slam: 243.

point of view: Point of view signifies the way a story gets told—the mode (or modes) established by an author by means of which the reader is presented with

the characters, dialogue, actions, setting, and events which constitute the *narrative* in a work of fiction. The question of point of view has always been a practical concern of the novelist, and there have been scattered observations on the matter in critical writings since the emergence of the modern *novel* in the eighteenth century. Henry James' prefaces to his various novels, however—collected as *The Art of the Novel* in 1934—and Percy Lubbock's *The Craft of Fiction* (1926), which codified and expanded upon James' comments, made point of view one of the most prominent and persistent concerns in modern treatments of the art of prose fiction.

Authors have developed many different ways to present a story, and many single works exhibit a diversity of methods. The simplified classification below, however, is widely recognized and can serve as a preliminary frame of reference for analyzing traditional types of narration and for determining the predominant type in mixed narrative modes. It deals first with by far the most widely used modes, first-person and third-person narration. It establishes a broad distinction between these two modes, then divides third-person narratives into subclasses according to the degree and kind of freedom or limitation which the author assumes in getting the story across to the reader. It then goes on to deal briefly with the rarely used mode of second-person narration.

In a **third-person narrative**, the **narrator** is someone outside the story proper who refers to all the characters in the story by name, or as "he," "she," "they." Thus Jane Austen's *Emma* begins: "Emma Woodhouse, handsome, clever, and rich, with a comfortable home and happy disposition, seemed to unite some of the best blessings of existence; and had lived nearly twenty-one years in the world with very little to distress or vex her." In a **first-person narrative**, the narrator speaks as "I," and is to a greater or lesser degree a participant in the story, or else is the *protagonist* of the story. J. D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye* (1951), an instance of the latter type, begins: "If you really want to hear about it, the first thing you'll really want to know is where I was born, and what my lousy childhood was like, and how my parents were occupied and all before they had me, and all that David Copperfield kind of crap. . . ."

I. Third-person points of view

- A. **The omniscient point of view.** This is a common term for the many and varied works of fiction written in accord with the *convention* that the narrator knows everything that needs to be known about the agents, actions, and events, and has privileged access to the characters' thoughts, feelings, and motives; also that the narrator is free to move at will in time and place, to shift from character to character, and to report (or conceal) their speech, doings, and states of consciousness.

Within this mode, the **intrusive narrator** is one who not only reports, but also comments on and evaluates the actions and motives of the characters, and sometimes expresses personal views about human life. Most works are written according to the convention that the omniscient narrator's reports and judgments are to be taken as **authoritative** by the reader, and so serve to establish what counts as the true facts and values within the fictional

which constitute the *narrative* has always been a practical observation on the matter of a *novel* in the eighteenth century—collected as *The Art of Fiction* (1926), which codifies as a point of view one of the most important of the art of prose fiction. To present a story, and many simplified classifications below, within a preliminary frame of reference determining the predominant point of view by far the most widely used in fiction establishes a broad distinction between two classes of narratives into subclasses according to the action which the author assumes to deal briefly with the

is someone outside the story by name, or as “he,” “she,” “Woodhouse, handsome, clever, and comely, seemed to unite some of the qualities of nearly twenty-one years in the life of a **first-person narrative**, the character of the degree a participant in the story, as in *The Catcher in the Rye* (1951), “I want to hear about it, the first time, and what my lousy childhood and all before they had me.

A common term for the many and the *convention* that the narrator reports about the agents, actions, and characters’ thoughts, feelings, and what will in time and place, to report (or conceal) their speech.

The **narrator** is one who not only reports actions and motives of the characters about human life. Most works of fiction at the omniscient narrator’s reports are **authoritative** by the reader, and so that its acts and values within the fictional

world. This is the fashion in which many of the greatest novelists have written, including Henry Fielding, Jane Austen, Charles Dickens, William Makepeace Thackeray, George Eliot, Thomas Hardy, Fyodor Dostoevsky, and Leo Tolstoy. (In Fielding’s *Tom Jones* and Tolstoy’s *War and Peace*, 1869, the intrusive narrator goes so far as to interpolate commentary, or short essays suggested by the subject matter of the novels.) On the other hand, the omniscient narrator may choose to be **unintrusive** (alternative terms are **impersonal** or **objective**). Flaubert in *Madame Bovary* (1857), for example, for the most part describes, reports, or “shows” the action in dramatic scenes without introducing his own comments or judgments. More radical instances of the unintrusive narrator, who gives up even the privilege of access to inner feelings and motives, are to be found in a number of Ernest Hemingway’s short stories; for example, “The Killers” and “A Clean, Well-Lighted Place.” (See *showing and telling*, under *character*.) For an extreme use of impersonal representation, see the comment on Robbe-Grillet’s *Jealousy*, under *novel*.

Gérard Genette subtilized in various ways the analysis of third-person point of view. For example, he distinguishes between **focus of narration** (who tells the story) and **focus of character** (who perceives what is narrated in one or another section of the story). In Henry James’ *What Maisie Knew*, for example, the focus of narration is an adult who tells the story, but his focus is on events as they are perceived and interpreted by the character Maisie, a child. Both the focus of narration and the focus of character (that is, of perception) in a single story may shift rapidly from the narrator to a character in the story, and from one character to another. In *To the Lighthouse*, Virginia Woolf shifts the focus of character in turn to each of the principal participants in the story; and Hemingway’s *short story*, “The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber,” is a third-person narrative in which the focus of perception is, in various passages, the narrator, the hunter Wilson, Mrs. Macomber, Mr. Macomber, and even, briefly, the hunted lion. See Gérard Genette, *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method* (1972, trans. 1980). For an analysis of the grammatical shift in pronouns, indicators of time and place, and the tenses of verbs as the focus and the mode of narration shifts within a story, see *free indirect discourse*, under *narration, grammar of*.

- B. **The limited point of view.** The narrator tells the story in the third person, but stays inside the confines of what is perceived, thought, remembered, and felt by a single character (or at most by very few characters) within the story. Henry James, who refined this narrative mode, described such a selected character as his “focus,” or “mirror,” or “center of consciousness.” In a number of James’ later works all the events and actions are represented as they unfold before, and filter to the reader through, the particular perceptions, awareness, and responses of only one character; for example, Strether in *The Ambassadors* (1903). A short and artfully sustained example of this limited point of view in narration is Katherine Mansfield’s story “Bliss” (1920). Later writers developed this technique into *stream-of-consciousness* narration, in which we are presented with outer perceptions only as they impinge on the

continuous current of thought, memory, feelings, and associations which constitute a particular observer's total awareness. The limitation of point of view represented both by James' "center of consciousness" narration and by the "stream-of-consciousness" narration sometimes used by James Joyce, Virginia Woolf, William Faulkner, and others, is often said to exemplify the "self-effacing author," or "objective narration," more effectively than does the use of an unintrusive but omniscient narrator. In the latter instance, it is said, the reader remains aware that someone, or some outside voice, is telling us about what is going on; the alternative mode, in which the point of view is limited to the consciousness of a character within the story itself, gives readers the illusion of experiencing events that evolve before their own eyes. For a revealing analysis, however, of the way even an author who restricts the narrative center of consciousness to a single character nonetheless communicates authorial judgments on people and events, and also controls the judgments evoked from the reader, see Ian Watt, "The First Paragraph of *The Ambassadors: An Explication*," reprinted in David Lodge, ed., *Twentieth Century Literary Criticism: A Reader* (1972). See also *persona, tone, and voice*.

II. First-person points of view

This mode, insofar as it is consistently carried out, limits the matter of the narrative to what the first-person narrator knows, experiences, infers, or finds out by talking to other characters. We distinguish between the narrative "I" who is only a fortuitous witness and auditor of the matters he relates (Marlow in *Heart of Darkness* and other works by Joseph Conrad); or who is a participant, but only a minor or peripheral one, in the story (Ishmael in Herman Melville's *Moby-Dick*, Nick in F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*); or who is himself or herself the central character in the story (Daniel Defoe's *Moll Flanders*, Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* and *Villette*, Charles Dickens' *Great Expectations*, Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, J. D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye*). Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* manifests a complex narrative mode in which the protagonist is the first-person narrator, whose *focus of character* is on the perceptions of a third party—white America—to whose eyes the protagonist, because he is black, is "invisible." For a special type of first-person narrative, see *epistolary novel*, under *novel*.

III. Second-person points of view

This name has been given to a mode in which the story gets told solely, or at least primarily, as an address by the narrator to someone he calls by the second-person pronoun "you," who is represented as experiencing that which is narrated. This form of narration occurred in occasional passages of traditional fiction, but has been exploited in a sustained way only since the latter part of the twentieth century and then only rarely; the effect is of a virtuoso performance. The French novelist Michel Butor in *La Modification* (1957, trans. as *Second Thoughts* in 1981), the Italian novelist Italo Calvino in *If on a Winter's Night a Traveler* (trans. 1981), and the American novelist Jay McInerney in *Bright Lights, Big City* (1984), all tell their story with "you" as the *narratee*. McInerney's *Bright Lights, Big City*, for example, begins:

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vareness. The limitation of point of
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sometimes used by James Joyce,
others, is often said to exemplify the
narration," more effectively than does
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people and events, and also controls
see Ian Watt, "The First Paragraph"
reprinted in David Lodge, ed.,
Reader (1972). See also *persona*, *tone*,

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u" as the *narratee*. McInerney's *Bright*

You are not the kind of guy who would be at a place like this at this time of the morning. But here you are, and you cannot say that the terrain is entirely unfamiliar, though the details are fuzzy. You are at a nightclub talking to a girl with a shaved head. The club is either Heartbreak or the Lizard Lounge.

This second person may turn out to be a specific fictional character, or the reader of the story, or even the narrator himself or herself, or not clearly or consistently the one or the other; and the story may unfold by shifting between telling the narratee what he or she is now doing, has done in the past, or will or is commanded to do in the future. Italo Calvino uses the form to achieve a complex and comic form of *involved fiction*, by involving "you," the reader, in the fabrication of the narrative itself. His novel opens:

You are about to begin reading Italo Calvino's new novel, *If on a winter's night a traveler*. Relax. Concentrate. . . . Best to close the door, the TV is always on in the next room. Tell the others right away, "No, I don't want to watch TV!" . . . Or if you prefer, don't say anything; just hope they'll leave you alone.

Refer to Bruce Morrisette, "Narrative 'You' in Contemporary Literature," *Comparative Literature Studies*, Vol. 2 (1965); Brian Richardson; "The Poetics and Politics of Second-Person Narrative," *Genre*, Vol. 24 (1991); Monika Fludernick, "Second-Person Narrative as a Test Case for Narratology," *Style*, Vol. 28 (1994); and "Second-Person Narrative: A Bibliography," *Style*, Vol. 28 (1994).

Two other frequently discussed narrative tactics are relevant to a consideration of points of view:

The **self-conscious narrator** shatters any illusion that he or she is telling something that has actually happened by revealing to the reader that the narration is a work of fictional art, or by flaunting the discrepancies between its patent fictionality and the reality it seems to represent. This can be done either seriously (Henry Fielding's narrator in *Tom Jones* and Marcel in Marcel Proust's *Remembrance of Things Past*, 1913–27) or for primarily comic purposes (Tristram in Laurence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*, 1759–67, and the narrator of Lord Byron's versified *Don Juan*, 1819–24), or for purposes which are both serious and comic (Thomas Carlyle's *Sartor Resartus*, 1833–34). See Robert Alter, *Partial Magic: The Novel as a Self-Conscious Genre* (1975), and refer to *romantic irony*, under the entry *irony*.

One variety of self-conscious narrative exploited in recent prose fiction is called the **self-reflexive novel**, or the *involved novel*, which incorporates into its narration reference to the process of composing the fictional story itself. An early modern version, André Gide's *The Counterfeiters* (1926), is also one of the most intricate. As the critic Harry Levin summarized its self-involution: it is "the diary of a novelist who is writing a novel [to be called *The Counterfeiters*] about a

novelist who is keeping a diary about the novel he is writing"; the nest of Chinese boxes was further multiplied by Gide's publication, also in 1926, of his own *Journal of The Counterfeiters*, kept while he was composing the novel. Vladimir Nabokov is an ingenious exploiter of involuted fiction; for example, in *Pale Fire* (1962). See *metafiction* under the entry *novel*.

We ordinarily accept what a narrator tells us as authoritative. The **fallible** or **unreliable narrator**, on the other hand, is one whose perception, interpretation, and evaluation of the matters he or she narrates do not coincide with the opinions and norms implied by the author, which the author expects the alert reader to share. (See the commentary on reliable and unreliable narrators in Wayne C. Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, rev. 1983.) Henry James made repeated use of the narrator whose excessive innocence, or oversophistication, or moral obtuseness, makes him a flawed and distorting "center of consciousness" in the work; the result is an elaborate structure of ironies. (See *irony*.) Examples of James' use of a fallible narrator are his short stories "The Aspern Papers" and "The Liar." *The Sacred Fount* and *The Turn of the Screw* are works by James in which, according to some critics, the clues for correcting the views of the fallible narrator are inadequate, so that what we are meant to take as factual within the story, and the evaluations intended by the author, remain problematic. See, for example, the remarkably diverse critical interpretations collected in *A Casebook on Henry James' "The Turn of the Screw,"* ed. Gerald Willen (1960), and in *The Turn of the Screw* (2d ed.) ed. Deborah Esch and Jonathan Warren (1999). The critic Tzvetan Todorov, on the other hand, has classified *The Turn of the Screw* as an instance of **fantastic literature**, which he defines as deliberately designed by the author to leave the reader in a state of uncertainty whether the events are to be explained by reference to natural causes (as hallucinations caused by the protagonist's repressed sexuality) or to supernatural causes. See Todorov's *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre* (trans. Richard Howard, 1973); also Eric S. Rabkin, *The Fantastic in Literature* (1976).

Drastic experimentation in recent prose fiction has complicated in many ways traditional renderings of point of view, not only in second-person, but also in first- and third-person narratives; see *fiction*; *persona*, *tone*, and *voice*; and *postmodernism*. On point of view, in addition to the writings mentioned above, refer to Norman Friedman, "Point of View in Fiction," *PMLA*, Vol. 70 (1955); Leon Edel, *The Modern Psychological Novel* (rev. 1964), chapters 3-4; Wayne C. Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (rev. 1983); Franz Stanzel, *A Theory of Narrative* (1979, trans. 1984); Susan Lanser, *The Narrative Act: Point of View in Fiction* (1981); Wallace Martin, *Recent Theories of Narrative* (1986). For references to *point of view* in other entries, see pages 57, 82, 209, 228, 231, 259.

political readings: 222.

polyphonic: 267.

popular ballad: 21.

portmanteau word (pörtmān tō'): 12: 71, 295.