Refracted: Multiple Perspective Narration in Short Fiction

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Abstract

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This thesis seeks to critically examine the mechanics and purposes of shifting narratorial perspectives within prose writing. To better inform the collection of short stories I am currently working on, I have written this critical thesis to explore how short fiction makes meaning through multiperspectivity or perspectival plurality. I study the craftwork of transferring points of view and perspective throughout the short story and how the transfers create (dis)connections within the narrative (between characters and themes) and outside the narrative (between the reader and text). I also look beyond, or perhaps before, the effect on the reader to interrogate how and why an author's use of multiple (or layered) points of view is successful for their varied intents and purposes. I examine exemplary short stories by Alice Munro, Clarice Lispector, Nana Kwame Adjei-Brenyah, and Edwidge Danticat as well as research and critical essays on perspectivism and narratology. Throughout this thesis, I consider my own creative pieces to better define how the interactions of point of view, the gradations of narrative distance, and the privileging of specific voices speak to the nature of a multiperspective story.

INTRODUCTION

Pressed beneath the glass of the frame, my sister catches a rainbow. She is six years old, lying belly-down on the worn rug beneath our dining table, propping herself up on one hand, reaching out with the other. Dad is crouched nearby, aiming the camera, asking his little girl to smile, but Rachel won't turn her head, not yet. She watches her palm, cups her blurry beam of color. As the camera flashes, a tiny crystal ornament above spins.

While a photo reflects a moment, a written scene refracts it, bends perspectives and perceptions so we can hold different wavelengths in our hands. I love photos. I treasure the reflections they hold. But, as a writer and a human, I am concerned with my ability to refract rather than reflect. I've written several stories in multiple perspective narration and I've read countless more. Shifting a single story between different perspectives is a sort of refraction, a separation of narration into discernible and discrete points of view. Whether to connect disparate parts or fundamentally change perception, multiperspectivity (also termed 'perspective plurality') is an invitation to continually interrogate positions within and to the story. Slipping between characters is not a higher power at work, granting unlimited and unchecked access to the reader, presenting them with their very own rainbow. It is acting as the glass ornament, passing the single ray of sunlight.

As narration transitions between different characters, I find that the techniques of point of view are put to work so that characters bump into or resonate with each other, lose or find themselves in one another. The narrative position tests how to operate within, between, and against their separate perspectives. In addition to the rotating or alternating between characters' perspectives, these shifts include the contraction and dilation of narrative distance, some of

which, “keep us entirely outside the characters; some allow us to be simultaneously outside and inside; and others take us all the way inside…point of view is more a matter of where the language is coming from than it is of person. The points of view that keep us outside a character require the narrator to use *his* language, not his character's, whereas the points of view that allow us to be inside a character require the narrator to use the *character's* language, at least some of the time” (Jauss). The opening and closing of distance between a characters’ perspective and the writer’s narrative voice, when used within multiperspective work, lends to a style or rhythm of vacillation. Depending on how close the narration is to one character’s perspective, the switch to another can be abrupt, confusing, or a moment for breath. However, if the multiperspective work has retained the ability to zoom in and zoom out with a sort of control or pattern or delineation, the multitude of perspectives in a single work might be jumbled or claustrophobic or seamlessly cohesive. Point of view is a tool to be used to get at these different perspectives and manipulate the way they come across the page, the way the reader interacts with them. Then there are the stories that take advantage of point of view the way they would a Swiss army knife. There are so many uses in first, second, and all of the thirds. In a multiple perspective story, it’s fitting that point of view (at its most basic, a pronoun choice) can be amplified, shifted, adapted for the particular perspective. Because multiperspective short fiction hinges on the fracturing of a single perspective, perhaps there is nothing more natural than breaking from the static or stable point(s) of view to fragment or layer ways of storytelling.

Within multiperspectivity, the author is tasked to, “[revise, re-evaluate, and re-contextualize]. Multiperspective narrative structures are therefore never semantically empty, but always contribute to the overall meaning of the text” (Handbook of Narratology). By examining

how different authors use this narration in their short fiction, I hope this thesis serves as grounds for how the technique can elevate the conflicts and characters within my own short fiction.

If multiperspectivity is "restricted to cases where points of view interact in salient and significant ways…" (Hartner), I define those moments of interaction and understand why the bringing together of disparate POVs is important for the core of the story. I also recognize moments within a story that avoid or resist interaction. To get to the root of the matter, I bring in (to the best of my ability and understanding) the author's purposes for and reasoning behind multiperspectivity. Because perspective is under a great deal of scrutiny in this craft technique, the author's own perspectives and experience are ripe for analysis.

THE FAMILIAL: ROTATING THIRD-PERSON POV

In the last few years, I have been interested in writing stories with a rotating third-person narrator. I have also been writing about familial spaces and relationships, which might explain my preference in narration techniques. Rotating third point of view allows me to weave together a group of character perspectives, to link the individuals by narration, to hold them close. It also allows for the opposite: to reveal how the segmented perspectives do not create a whole. I think of it as peeking through different windows of a house. It creates the allusion of understanding, of putting together the pieces to create some unity, but is actually a fragmented whole. A writer can use narration, particularly the third-person omniscient narrator, to provide the connective tissue. However, I'm most interested in stories that veer away from the idea of unity and focus on what's lost, who's privileged, where the story strikes a balance between character perspective and where it does not. As I seek this out in my own writing, I look to authors Alice Munro and Clarice Lispector, who both use rotating third-person narrative structure in the two exemplary stories, "Labour Day Dinner" and "Happy Birthday". I am specifically interested in how the craftwork of transferring points of view throughout a familial unit creates meaning, interactions, and (dis)connections.

In his introduction to *The Best American Short Stories 2012*, Tom Perrotta wrote that the use of multiperspectivity in contemporary short stories, "owes a lot to Munro's formal daring, her insistence on smuggling the full range of novelistic technique into the writing of her short fiction" (Perrotta). To more fully capture Munro's adept handling of point of view and narration, Kyle McCarthy addressed this quote and argued that it did not apply to George Saunders' "Tenth of December", featured in the 2012 anthology, which alternates between two characters'

perspectives: "…it is not, as Perrotta claims, indebted to Munro. Munro does not change perspective simply to show two sides of the same dilemma. Her characters are not tethered to the main conflict, but rather adjacent to it […] The logic governing the multiple perspectives of a Munro tale is not as simple as a 'he-said, she-said' split screen. Rather, the characters in a Munro story all live at perpendicular angles to each other" (McCarthy). Multiperspectivity, while commonly used in the novel, is scaled very differently within short fiction. Particularly in rotating third POV stories, the narration technique gives way to a ground that is slippery beneath readers' feet, warning them to never get too comfortable within one perspective. Additionally, multiperspective fiction has the potential to both create a tether between characters as well as reject and complicate such connections.

Alice Munro's use of rotating third-person POV throughout "Labour Day Dinner" weaves through the voices and interiorities of the characters to depict unresolved tensions and difficult relationships. While the rotating third-person POV works well as a mechanism for getting beneath the surface of a family to uncoil (or further tangle) the strains between each person, this story does more. On their way home from the dinner, the family is nearly hit by an oncoming car, and—in a jarring switch of narrative voice—Munro distances perspective from the characters and shifts instead to omniscient narration. In Ryan Melsom's article, "Roberta's Raspberry Bombe and Critical Indifference in Alice Munro's 'Labor Day Dinner', he considers how Munro's POV usage is mirrored in Roberta's understanding of 'indifference' as a means towards connection in her relationship with George, who she believes loves her only when she is aloof. Melsom writes,

> "The "edge" subtly and figuratively straddles and marks the shift between the clearly focalized, identifiable narrative voice and the omniscient, unfamiliar one: the movement

> from Roberta's so-called "indifference" to George, to a truly indifferent narrative voice. In a sense, the "edge of in*difference*" (emphasis added) can also be taken literally, as a switch from a coherent, relatively focused narrative, to an *undifferentiated* moment, where another narrative — that of the young men in the ghost car — intersects Roberta's with an equal and jarring force. In other words, the story itself may become indifferent to its main characters..." (Melsom).

Throughout, Munro has harnessed rotating third for each of the characters in this family so that we, the readers, have been invited to empathize with their narrative voices. The shift into a distant, omniscient point of view to narrate the moment of near-death is an insistence on the very indifference and distancing that each of the characters have been testing against one another. Just when we feel closest to the characters and the night is coming to an end, we will lose them entirely. Our horror and fear for their fate is compounded by removing our access to their interiorities—we have somehow lost them already through the indifference of the voice.

This "edge" is what so many multiperspective, rotating point of view stories teeter on. It's a balancing act that isn't supposed to feel neat and tidy. The work is in the trepidation of that which waits on the other side, on who or what is weaving together these perspectives and why. Rotating perspective is a sense of power (not to be confused with a higher power). The power is in how the narration manifests the conflicts and tensions between the characters, giving way to a reader experience that mimics that of the characters. Stories that I believe work particularly well use this form of POV to underpin the danger and tension within multiperspectivity. In entering multiple characters' minds and experiencing the world through their perspective, we know we are not gods. We know we cannot gain equilibrium and power of the story through a diversity of perspectives. An author's use of multiple POV hinges less on their development of a 'whole' and

more on their idea that we can never reach such a thing. As Kyle McCarthy writes, "Life doesn't hang together very well, but most writers write as if it does. […] …Munro, master of the short story, does not believe in these kinds of stories. She shifts her angles and time periods in order to illuminate all the ghosts that crowd every story, all the other beginnings and endings that cry out for legitimacy." In my own work that attempts rotating POVs, I try to create some thread or reflecting point that each of the characters can reach out to and, if only for a moment, create a reverberation through their perspectives. However, I defy the expectation that these moments tie together the story. In "Family Dinner", each character joins the same table to say the same prayer and, at this point, the third-person point of view rotates into each of their perspectives. However, the scene resolves by privileging Gillian, the character who is in danger.

> "Like a small circle of falling dominoes, each person grabs the hand next to them. Mr. Grillick smiles at the young girl to his left, holding out his hand, palm upturned. Gillian holds her hand over his lightly, quivering, until he presses his fingers around hers and closes the space. They begin. *"Our father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name."* He was always too close, before. Gillian didn't, in fact, like him. Her mother told her she did, so she tried. Mom had explained that Mr. Grillick was a lonely man, that he wanted children of his own. Well, if he wanted them so badly, he should just go out and get married. *"Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on Earth as it is in heaven."* Gillian winces sharply as Rob, sitting on her left, clamps his palm suddenly around her fingers so they tangle and crack, like a boa strangling a mouse. Gillian had snapped her head in the direction of her mother, but she was looking at Saul, his head bent so low that the ceiling lamp shined off his bald spot…Sometimes, when Gillian wanted to get up from sitting on

> Mr. Grillick's lap, he wouldn't let her. He would hold her down, keep her planted on his thighs. Gillian wanted so badly to feel the muscles in her legs moving and the bottoms of her feet hit the ground…On her left, Rob has stopped squeezing. Gillian returns her focus to the hidden underside of her right wrist, stroked slowly and *rhythmically* by Mr. Grillick's large, dry thumb…Everyone is silent before "*Amen"* because this is the time for personal prayer. Gillian quickly glances around the table—first at Rob, staring sullenly down into his lap. Then, Saul's shiny bald circle, a bead of sweat trickling slowly down. Her mother, frowning slightly, her closed eyelids powdered in a shimmery beige. Finally, Mr. Grillick, his head bowed but still watching her from the corner of his eye."

By privileging her perspective throughout the remainder of the scene, the narration makes explicit the invasion by Mr. Grillick. While reader's might have guessed at this already, the rotating third-person POV has been avoiding the invasion and past violence throughout the story, mimicking the family dynamics—particularly Gillian's mother, who refuses to acknowledge the abuse. "Family Diner" details the illusion of family intimacy through narrative techniques. Rotating third-person POV allows the writer to privilege specific character perspectives at opportune moments throughout the story, giving way to insights. On the other hand, the shifting to and away from characters keeps readers on an "edge", to use the earlier term. There is an abundance of potential conflicts and tensions which, in some ways, is my aim at depicting a 'full life'. However, I'm more interested in the ability of rotating third to dilate and contract the narrative distance, to be—at one moment—the mother closing her eyes and—at another—the glimpse.

In Clarice Lispector's short story "Happy Birthday," a family gathers, less than willingly, to celebrate the 89th birthday of Dona Anita, the matriarch. From the first line ("The family began arriving in waves"), Lispector sets off a narration reverberating through several points of view. The story draws attention to its narrative structure by narrowing and widening the distance between the narration and the characters' interiority. We see it through naming, a significant distancing tool within the story. Family members are referred to as "the ones from Olaria" or "from Ipanema" and only Dona Anita's children are explicitly named. In fact, we wouldn't have the main character's name if it wasn't for the presence of a neighbor, who only referred to her as such because she could not call her "Mother" or "Grandmother." Within character consciousness, she is most often referred to as "the birthday girl," further stripping away her identity—especially significant as we enter her consciousness and find that she refers to herself in such a way, too. The naming is a technique for Lispector to impose the workings of this family and their distance from one another. It is a strategy to uncover this woman's dissatisfaction with her life, the infantilizing of a matriarch, and it is woven carefully by the rotating narration—she is either a girl or an old woman to her family, to the narrator, and so she is limited in how to refer to herself in her own consciousness.

In a surprising change of focus towards the end of the story, the narration settles into Cordelia's perspective, a favorite daughter-in-law of Dona Anita. Through an isolation between the perspectives of the family and the mother, the story somehow connects these two women, passing knowledge between them:

> "But no one could have guessed what she was thinking. And for those who looked at her once more from the doorway, the birthday girl was only what she appeared to be: seated at the head of the filthy table, her hand clenched on the tablecloth as though grasping a

> scepter, and with that muteness that was her last word. Fist clenched on the table, never again would she be only what she was thinking. Her appearance had finally surpassed her and, going beyond her, was serenely becoming gigantic. Cordélia stared at her in alarm. The mute and severe fist on the table was telling the unhappy daughter-in-law she irremediably loved perhaps for the last time: You must know. You must know. That life is short. That life is short." (Lispector)

Lispector first cleaves apart interiority and exteriority, gesturing towards both how the story has been working in terms of inside/outside narration and, more largely, the implications of the limitations of or own perspectives and the limitations we place on others. Once she has created these distinctions, she breaks the rule, shifts the narration to become a joining of minds through the physical fist on the table. Constantly under pressure in multiperspective stories is not just character's perspective, but the perception of each other's perspectives. When authors put these stories together, it moves beyond access to each of the characters' minds for a fuller story. Like Lispector's, these stories highlight the struggle of how our reality is often encumbered and limited by the inability to do so. There is compassion, yes, but there is also condemnation on us all, the hierarchies within our own homes, family dinners as occasions for calculations or consolidations of power, and birthdays assigning value as opposed to marking time.

In my short story, "Family Dinner", the use of rotating POV hinges upon what is missed. Though we dip into each of the family members' perspective, I spend much of the time in the POV of Heather and her son, Rob, as they navigate their difficult relationship. Gillian, Heather's daughter, however, is the story's true focal point. She is in danger, and that danger is missed by all. When it is picked up on, it is ignored, not only by the characters but by the narrative structure which is intended to imitate the community voice.

My work in this story has been to thread the slight misses into the shifting around and away from Gillian and Peter, the man who preys on her. Rather than using the rotating POV to create the family's eventual knowledge of their failure, the continuous switching between perspectives is meant to be the failure itself—not only for the family, but for the reader, as well. Things are missed, whether intentional or not. Potential awareness is squashed by the dive into interiority and then avoidance, and family members pull away before the moment nearing recognition. When Heather shows Peter a picture of her daughter, he reaches for it, "[gripping] one end of the frame, tilting it slightly. At this angle, her daughter's bare legs look too thin and pale in the over-sized soccer shorts. Her shoulders slope forward, like she is folding in on herself. With the dogs sitting on their haunches at each side of her, Gillian's wiry frame is delicate, fragile, dwarfed by beasts." After this line, POV shifts to Heather's son ("On the second floor, Rob has walked into his little sister's room"), and the narrative structure becomes complicit in the moving away or resistance to knowledge.

This avoidance through multiperspectivity is important because I want this story to be everything a family might wish for—a glimpse into everyone's heads—only to demonstrate that certain perspectives and individuals still benefit from their privileging. In "Labour Day Dinner", Munro writes much of the story using the close third POV dipping into each family members' consciousness to reveal their fears and dreams, only to end with both Roberta's and the narrator's push towards indifference and distance, interrogating whether intimacy truly results in closeness. In "Birthday", Lispector's narration takes to task the phrase, "walking a mile in someone else's shoes." The story walks through the event in everyone's shoes only to navigate the ways in which hierarchies are established, people are (de)prioritized, and outside perspectives are often merged with one's perception of self. What benefit is brought through the communal perspective

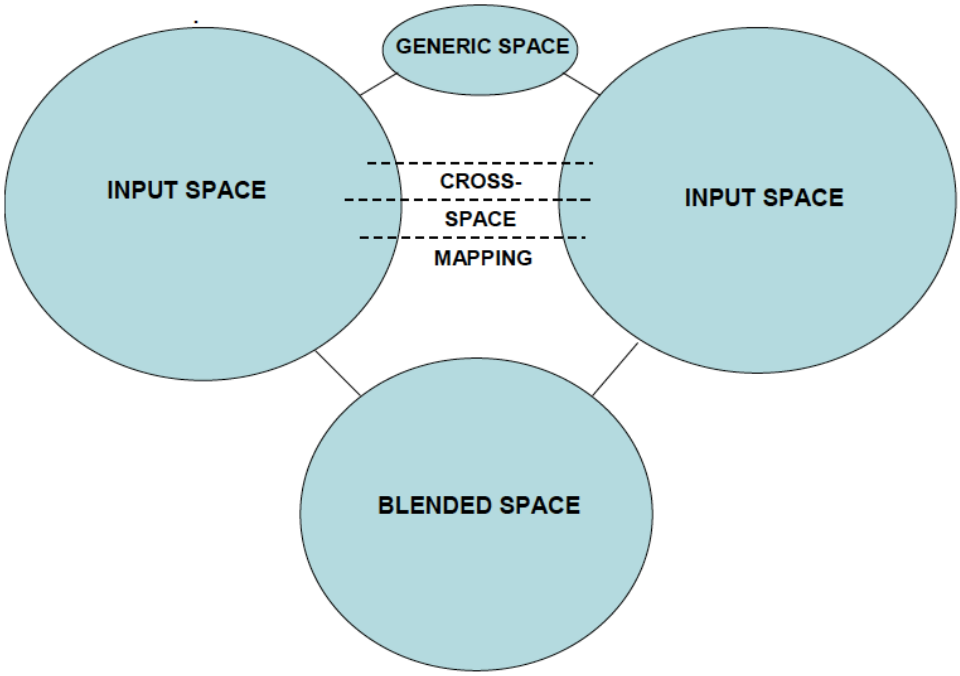
of this family? Dona Anita's survival is through her resistance to the internalization of others' perspectives. In "Family Dinner", each family member is opened up for their POV, and all of them refuse and even obliterate potentialities for awareness and healing, opting to instead keep secrets as one. In this family, ignorance--as modus operandi--has atrophied recognition. I build multiperspectivity through rotating close third POV to create complicity by characters and, more largely, within the intimate family structures I write about.

Multiperspective narration, particularly in the rotating third, is fiction resisting the 'making over' or 'righting wrongs' of our real-world limitations in perspective. It's enclosing the story within this intimate space and forcing the shared and not-shared blood of family to boil.

THE SWITCH: ALTERNATING POINT OF VIEW

In Marcus Hartner's piece, "Narrative Theory Meets Blending: Multiperspectivity Reconsidered", he links multiperspectivity with Blending Theory, which "assumes that meaning construction involves the selective integration or blending of conceptual elements". Hartner uses the example of *Humphrey Clinker,* one story told by two different characters, whose perspectives he considers separate 'input spaces'.

Blending and Multiperspectivity in Smollett's *Humphry Clinker*



These input spaces are connected by 'generic space' (which he names as time/place/social status/etc.) as well as the 'blended space' which is the constructed mental space of the separate perspective's meditation on the same concept. In *Humphrey Clinker*, two characters travel to Bath and engage in entirely different experiences with the culture and atmosphere of the city. Their dissonant perspectives interweave so that the reader partakes in "cross space mapping" as

they continue to construct the now "blended space" of Bath. Hartner's paper emphasizes the reader's cognitive process of constructing these mental spaces, however, he does not often consider the author or the reader as an additional input space contributing to the blended space. This is a missed opportunity to discuss the blended spaces of the reader and the author, the histories and identities significant to how texts are created and interacted with, depending on one's background, culture, belief systems, etc.

In contrast with rotating perspectives, the structure of alternating perspectives in short fiction allows more space for interiority and meditation. The narrative voice can remain with one character long enough for the writer to settle into it. The opportunity here is the switch—when and how and why the narration is passed from one character to another. In the past, I've thought of this alternating POV as a means to create a more holistic (or, in Hartner's term 'blended') view of the situation. If that's the understanding, then both characters are taking part, and—in a sense—completing each other and the story. My feelings about it have changed. Perhaps that is due to the way my own stories are working, or maybe I'm just less idealistic.

When it comes to alternating perspectives, I am less interested in how characters create a more connected world for each other or the readers. I am much more interested in why this mode of storytelling, alternating between (dis)connections of protagonists, is essential to the meaning of the story, particularly when there is clear insistence on the switch, one character or voice taking back control of the narration.

In Nana Kwame Adjei-Brenyah's collection *Friday Black*, he includes a short story entitled "Light Spitter," which alternates (for the most part) between two characters' points of view: Fuckton, a school shooter who kills a classmate and then immediately commits suicide; and Deirdra, the college student who Fuckton murders. In the first few pages of the story, Adjei-

Brenyah sets up the two characters' perspectives by delineating their interiorities into separate paragraphs with breaks between, leaving space for the narration of each character to develop their unique voices. It also allows a certain amount of tension to develop within the story through suspense—though the reader does not yet know whether Fuckton will kill Deirdra, we know they attend the same college, we know we care about Deirdra's interiority, and we know Fuckton is prepared to kill. These two perspectives are being alternated for a particular purpose. This structure is reminiscent of many other alternating third-person POV stories, in which an overarching narrator/decision-maker (or maybe just the author) allows the story to be handed off between the two characters, often as they navigate a situation that will eventually bring them together.

Moreover, the characters themselves (especially Deirdra) demand control over the conversation and, subsequently, the perspective of the story. As the two spirits become acquainted with the afterlife, Adjei-Brenyah harnesses the alternating perspectives to bring the narration technique to the forefront of the story. The final and most significant move is the characters' decision to merge their consciousness' with a new character, Porter, a bullied boy who is planning on committing a school shooting, spurred on by Fuckton's actions while he was alive.

In "Light Spitter", Adjei-Brenyah breaks from the potential for staleness in this structure of multiperspective narration. After Fuckton murders Deirdra and kills himself, the story is told from their perspectives in the afterlife: "People have cleared out around them, and though Deirdra and Fuckton are there in the library, they both know and feel they've been untethered from time and any particular space" (Adjei-Brenyah). This untethering is mimicked in the narration, as the two are brought into dialogue with one another, literally and figuratively. For

the rest of the story, save a few specific and important moments, the alternating perspective flips back and forth between the two characters, much like a conversation. In fact, Adjei-Brenyah leans heavily on dialogue for their narrative voices and distances the narration of their interiority so that there is difficult to determine which consciousness is privileged in the story's use of POV. The alternating perspectives is tightly knit through the back and forth. Though we slip in and out of each perspective, the use of alternating third POV employs a call and response of switching between the characters.

Adjei-Brenyah, in the final pages of the story, flips the switch so to speak. As Deidra navigates her role in the afterlife, Fuckton follows her, wishing for forgiveness, regretting his actions. Their perspectives are in dialogue with one another throughout the piece and culminate with a merge—both of them want to stop Porter from following Fuckton's homicidal manifesto and murdering his own classmates. In order to make a change, Fuckton wants to enter Porter's consciousness with Deidra. The scene reads as follows:

> "I think I can help you show him," Deirdra says. "You probably won't last through it. Okay?"…"Let me do it. Before though, do you still hate me?" "I'm an angel now," she says as she takes Fuckton's hand. Then the two of them are living through Porter Lanks. They see the halls of Wetmoss High covered in photos of his awkward, naked body. They see Porter standing up to a taller, stronger boy. They feel a fist on their ribs, their nose shattering. And then they are Porter. They feel him as he pulls a trigger…They see the glorious moment when, like a warlock, Porter will end the ingrate of his choosing on this day of glorious judgment. His name will burn eternally…And then Porter Lanks sees himself dying. He feels the wondrous glory bleed out of him. Was it ever even there? He

> sees himself in the bathroom near the tech hall, alone as ever in his stall. The stall that still says, PORTER LANKS IS A FROG. It used to say, PORTER LANKS IS A FAG, but he spent a study hall period trying to carve something else—something that would still satisfy them, but something he could look at every day and not feel like he was already dead…People will remember his name—until they don't. In the crowded halls of Wetmoss High…Deirdra floats beside [Porter] as he walks to the bathroom near the tech hall. He goes into his stall, and he begins to cry, silently, the way he used to. For fun, he uses his pen to carve a small arrow pointing down between the words "a" and "frog" and writes "flying."
>
> (Adjei-Brenyah, 147-148)

While the story retains a mystical quality throughout—Fuckton and Deidra are, afterall, two spirits sharing a form of purgatory—the moment of transcendence is in Adjei-Brenyah's move from alternating third-person point of view to a merged, plural third-person point of view ("they"), and finally back to Porter, a character fundamentally changed by the community with the other perspectives. In a story that considers the violence of socially isolated young men, their interiorities and thought processes, Adjei-Brenyah uses multiperspective storytelling to heal what is broken, to fuse together what's been cut off.

"Light Spitter" has influenced the use of point of view in my short story "Mere Universe", which is told using alternating third-person perspectives. The majority of my story follows a similar structure to Adjei-Brenyah's first few pages, in which the two interiorities are allowed entire paragraphs for their perspective so that I can delve into their narrative voices and offer possible sites of conflictions and connections between them. As I've revised and reworked

this story, I wanted to do more with the 'handoffs' between the two perspectives. I asked myself why the two perspectives need to alternate and, as the story developed, I found that my interest in the story and its characters depended upon the break between childhood and adulthood. In previous versions of this story, the young girl Clem was running through the store as her mother Tina shopped, their perspectives avoiding one another and meeting one another at different points. In rereads, this use of perspectives gave a sort of two-sides-of-the-same-coin effect. I enjoyed it, but I wanted to do more with it. So, "Mere Universe" became two perspectives of the same person, at different ages. Tina is not Clem's mother—Tina is Clem—or rather, Clementine—a decade later. Her memories of being the young girl in the store are so visceral that the child Clem becomes a separate self, brought to life by Tina's reflection. The split of self is the core issue for Tina, who struggles with an eating disorder as an adult, berates herself for it, and longs to heal. She has broken from the child-self, the one she feels she has 'let down'. Her perspective revolves around guilt, control, compulsion, and her conflict is to find a way towards recovery. The story introduces her attempts at breaking from disordered thoughts as follows: "For Tina, visualization is the key to getting out from under it, to take back control of her brain rather than spiral into that tangle of festering synapses and neurons". The visualization technique she uses is a form of relapse prevention, designed to allow space for an individual to pause and consider the options before engaging in any compulsive behavior, i.e. binge eating or restriction. This can switch the person into a mode of logical decision-making as opposed to fear-based reactionary behavior. Within the story, this is the premise for Tina's manifestation of Clem, her child-self. She visualizes her onto the page and, following the technique, the story is written to create enough space for Clem so that she is her own character.

Eating disorders are a coping mechanism, often for trauma. In this story, part of the trauma that Clementine must reckon with is the split from herself. This is why I've chosen the alternating third-person point of view narration for the story. There are other ways the story splits her perspective. Clementine has two nicknames, one for childhood and one for adulthood. She often turns away from or represses thought processes that, as a child, come naturally. The moments of the switch are her decision, the adult Tina controlling the narrative. The child Clem, however, is often interrupted, switched away from when Tina takes back narration. Accessing Clem's is meant to be a breather or a break from Tina, who is struggling. Tina, herself, needs the break—as do the readers who navigate her sadness and defeat. We are with Tina in the search for Clem. The child is able to harness a sort of power through imagination, still unfettered by the coping mechanisms for trauma that her adult self will eventually develop.

> "Clem flexes all the muscles in her face, squeezes tight, purses her lips to make a tiny, puckered 'o'. The first time she did this, kneeling at the pew, praying as hard as she could, it didn't work. But that was because there were so many other prayers getting in the way, floating above the congregations' heads…Clem concentrates, calls forth every little ball of energy to move up her body, starting from her toes, traveling towards her head… Soon, her whole head is funneling strength up to the bulbs, emitting waves through her nostrils, ear canals, pores, even those little holes in each of her eyelids. She expels the quivering rays, feels them streaming upwards, all around, and Clem thinks of souls, of ascension. When she opens her eyes to look up at the ceiling light, it is calm. She lets out a breath. The hot blood in her cheeks and forehead begins to recede. So. *This* is what it feels like to be powerful"

Clem not only partakes in the technique of visualization, she believes in it—something that Tina, for all her discussion of its merits in recovering from an eating disorder, is trying at and, often, failing. Her real success in visualization is bringing Clem to life in the store. By accessing this perspective, Tina emerges from the trap of self-denial and self-sabotage. In turn, the child becomes a way of better understanding Tina. I don't provide a lot of information about Tina's life aside from her failing relationship and her attempts at recovery. Clem's perspective, which is richly detailed with personality, ambitions, interests, and backstory, is a way of reading into and knowing Tina. Her perspective cannot stand apart from Clem's. Rather than the two characters simply being "two sides of the same coin", Tina's character is grappling with the loss of self, trying to discover her once more. This 'self' is not only revealed through the two perspectives. Clementine (as well as the story) depends upon whether the perspectives can join.

While I have concerns about this piece, particularly with the deep dives into layered memories, the intertwined interiorities, and Tina's somewhat limited agency, "Mere Universe" has been a practice of making meaning with alternating perspectives. As Adjei-Brenyah uses the multiple perspective third-person alternating point of view to create the violence of isolation and the redemption of community, I aim for the alternating point of view to guide the reader through the same journey as Tina. The experience of the short story is one in which the reader is asked to coalesce these two disparate perspectives through the location of resonant moments. This is Tina's central conflict as well, and the reasoning behind her re-telling of the memory as a separate character.

After reading "Light Spitter", I wanted to amplify the central conflicts in my own work through the alternating third-person point of view. Adjei-Brenyah merges the three characters into first a plural third-person then a singular third-person, imbibed with the knowledge gained

from the other two. By the end of “Mere Universe”, Clementine (and hopefully the reader) comes to the truth that the child in the story is herself and the loss she feels isn’t for her ex, but for the girl abandoned. While she can’t reconcile with Anthony, the last scene is an attempt at reuniting the two perspectives—adult and child. In “Mere Universe” the crisis of isolating or splitting from others stems from the isolation or split from the self. Tina heals only when she returns to her child perspective, to Clem.

THE DECISION(S): PLURALITY OF NARRATIVE STANCES

In so many craft books and articles on the use of point of view in writing, advice often starts with, “decide which”. In this way, writing might become a flowchart, in which the author picks the *First-Person POV* Tool bubble, then traces a line down to several appropriate Technique bubbles that follow. For each of those bubbles, perhaps there are more lines connecting other bubbles, on and on, you get the point.

If the author glances at the other Tool bubbles—those for Third-Person Limited or Omniscient, or Second-Person—maybe they linger on all the other possibilities, potentialities, and opportunities. But we must decide which! It seems a waste. If we’re building a ladder from the available bubbles’ tools and narrative techniques, hoping the structure of the ladder will take us where we’re meant to go, we’re limiting ourselves. I don’t mean to say that the goal is to break the rules. I also don’t mean to imply that each rung is meant to build to the next—not all pieces are so goal-oriented. I just aim to open my own writing to the possibilities of multiplicity in narrative voice and technique.

Authors have worked to merge, layer, or fluctuate their narration technique through point of view, often because these formal decisions allow a clearer reflection of the content of the story. In fact, it seems a natural choice for a writer handling multiperspectivity to decide upon a plurality of point of view, as opposed to a single narrative ‘lens’ through which to tell the story. To bring back my earlier metaphor: instead of a single hanging crystal ornament breaking one ray of light into its spectrum, the plurality of narrative stances or points of view might be multiple ornaments hung near a window, casting onto the wall a dozen differently shaped, sized, and color-balanced rainbows for the little girl to carefully examine.

As narration is played with and shifted, experimented with and fragmented, correlations between perspective and ideological concerns arise. Multiperspectivity is a tool for writing into (and around) a narrator's position to or control over the text. Edwidge Danticat's "New York Day Women" is told largely in first-person point of view from the perspective of Suzette, a young woman who works in NYC and spots her mother navigating the streets of Manhattan. Suzette secretly follows her mother, trying to reconcile the woman she sees in the city with the woman she is used to seeing at home.

Throughout the piece, the mother's perspective interjects itself into Suzette's narration. At first, the mother's voice is contained in Suzette's associative thought process: "Yet, here she is, my mother, who I left at home that morning in her bathrobe, with pieces of newspapers twisted like rollers in her hair. My mother, who accuses me of random offenses as I dash out of the house. *Would you get up and give an old lady like me your subway seat? In this state of mind, I bet you don't even give up your seat to a pregnant lady.* My mother, who is often right about that. Sometimes I get up and give my seat. Other times, I don't." As the narrator follows her mother, the delineation of the mother's voice and Suzette's own memories of this voice blurs. Danticat uses a bolded font for the voice, marking it as separate from Suzette's. However, the regular font perspective of Suzette does not remain in the present scene and the bolded found perspective of the mother does not remain as a memory in the past. The two converse with each other by the second page of the story: "My mother who at fifty-nine, says dentures are okay. *You can take them out when they bother you. I'll like them. I'll like them fine.* Will it feel empty when Papa kisses you? *Oh no, he doesn't kiss me that way anymore.*" The mother-daughter relationship is told through a multiperspective lens. In the beginning of the story, Suzette seems to be in control over what the mother can say and when she can intervene. However, Danticat

uses multiple voices in a way that interrogates the first-person point of view in a story. When we remember our parents' voices, are they distinct from our own? Once they raise us, is their voice always able to pervade our thoughts, becoming a perspective that we carry with us wherever we go? "New York Day Women" uses the mother's perspective to create a shift in Suzette's way of moving through the world. The particularly poignant moment arrives in the final lines: "*You're so good anyway. What are they going to tell me? I don't want to make you ashamed of this day woman. Shame is heavier than a hundred bags of salt*". The story ends by coupling the first-person point of view with the second-person point of view—the mother's voice narrates Suzette's own feelings about and disappointments with her mother. Of course, this can be interpreted as simply a memory of dialogue rather than second-person. But then why would Danticat refuse quotation marks, or a lead in? I interpret this moment as the mother's use of second-person narration, telling the story of their relationship to Suzette who has joined the reader to become the audience.

Within my own work, I am currently revising a story titled "Green Lake" that follows the stories of several characters through a rotating close third-person point of view. However, the story also uses an objective third-person voice as well as a plural first-person "we" voice. The voices and shifting of points of view within this piece are meant to interrupt, refocus, and interrogate the space of Green Lake—particularly the use of the land by the city and people of Seattle. The characters, each of which deal with their own tensions and crises, move around the lake, oblivious to the complicated and fraught history of the body of water. Much of my work in this story has been my own grappling with the different voices. In my first versions, I attempted the voice of the lake, which is to say, the voice of nature. As I discussed the story with others and continued to research the space, the voice became more human—or rather, bureaucratic. For

example, “There are Friends of Green Lake. Advocates. People who stand at its edge and note the color, temperature, amount of trash, decay. They take pictures, they meet to discuss solutions, they send out their questions to experts and scientists, communities and politicians. They ask, ‘How can Seattle do better for our lake?’…We ask what the lake is for. Swimming? Boating? Preservation? The definition will change how we act, which methods we use. If it’s for swimming, we rule out preservation. If it’s for boating, we won’t go swimming. One decision cancels out the other. We struggle that we can’t have it all.” The voices in “Green Lake” are meant to guide the reader through a new way of knowing the lake. Because this space is imbibed with the perspectives of all the policies, histories, destructions, constructions, ecological occurrences, and human interventions, the story begins to unravel these voices.

While the narrative continues to return to the characters who move around the lake, it re lurching towards disaster as Joe, a father who has waded into the water for his daughter’s flip flop, impales his foot on a metal spike sticking up from the lake bed. While a chorus of voices speaking for Green Lake have been sounding throughout the story, it’s Joe’s scream that cuts through the story to each of the characters’ perspectives, all of whom have a particular reaction to the sound. The characters aren’t aware of the perspectives that have been unfolding from the narrative—or if they are, they aren’t focusing on any voice but their own. The scream is what rings out and, because the story works to develop the plurality of points of view and perspectives, my hope is that the reader holds their own reaction to the sound.

While this story is unfinished, the latest draft ends on the unidentified community voice, which is meant to loop in the perspectives of the characters who were nearby Joe during the accident and bore witness to the danger beneath the lake:

> "We wonder about the spikes for a long time. A police diving team is sent to extract them and thirty-nine are found. We think it's malice, a mean trick. Who could have done such a thing? Research into old records later reveals that the spikes are left over from a forgotten pilot program…Machine-sharpened metal rods were driven into the ground to hold the plastic in place. Each rod is said to have been designed with safety in mind, the ends finished with a rounded metal piece. Two decades might be enough to corrode them, soft ends breaking off so only the jagged barb remains. Rows and rows of spikes, lining the bottom of a lake."

Reading authors like Danticat, who play with point of view and the plurality of voices that can help to rev up the engine of a multiperspective voice, opens the possibilities in narration. "Green Lake" gains momentum through the intrusion of this voice. More importantly, the more I push myself to consider how perspective is working, the more research and thought I put into the world that is being built in the story. By thinking through how the points of view might reflect off each other or merge with one another, I discover new ways to complicate the tensions within the story or to examine my own position to the subjects I write about in my stories.

CONCLUSION

As my sister holds the rainbow, that single scene holds so many perspectives. My father, who has always encouraged our curiosity. My mother, who asked him to take the picture because she was already nostalgic for the moment unfolding before her. Myself, an infant, perhaps in my mother's arms, demanding time and energy, resources that my sister was learning to share, even as she cupped her hands around the spectrum of colors. And now, there is another self, the me who is writing about this moment, turning people into characters, recollections into perception.

Throughout this critical thesis, I have examined the shifting narratorial perspectives within short fiction due to my own fascination with the technique. I've always been interested in writing multiple perspectives in my short fiction. This is due, in part, to avoid one-dimensional characters and to ensure I develop the individuals in my stories. However, as I've worked through this essay, studying the craftwork of transferring points of view and perspective throughout a single piece of creative work, I've found that multiple perspective stories offer so many sites of meaning-making. By focusing in on the plurality of perspectives that shape a single story, a writer need not look beyond the familial home for a place of tension. A writer might consider how disparate identities can be contained in a single self. A writer can attempt to unwind the perspectives and voices that have shaped a single person, a body of water, the world around them. Multiperspective stories make room for writers to explore interactions and (dis)connections and, more importantly, to create new ways of telling such stories. We might take our single ray of light and work to create something worth holding.

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