

Eye for a God's Eye:

The Bold Choice of the Omniscient Point of View in Fiction for Young Adults

By Gwenda Bond

Advisor: Leda Schubert

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In the Beginning

Somewhere in America, the weather is green and breezy enough to keep a writer suffering from allergies inside. She sits down behind her desk for the five hundredth time. Today she doesn't hesitate or look for something else that deserves her attention. She neglects to open her e-mail account or pull up a Web browser. Today is different, because today she will actually start a new novel. She keys in the title—a silly working one—and her name and watches the cursor blink. The characters and plot rattle around in her head, ready to spill out her fingers onto the electronic page. She knows who will be important, where the scene will be set. Maybe she even knows what the book is *really* about. She just has to write the first sentences to begin the story of a small-town misfit battling a monstrous teacher with a black heart, a heroine who ultimately learns to fight for herself. Either way, the world is in peril. Something must be done. The writer hesitates a moment, then the decision is made and she begins.

What was the decision she hesitated over? Point of view. From whose point of view will the story be told? No story can exist without the answer to that question. Since this imaginary writer is somewhere in America, the options she considered are easy to guess. Because her story involves teenagers—she is a writer for young adults, after all—she thought about first person point of view, followed by the possibility of limited third person. And then, she settled on one or the other. What is missing here? Only what Ursula Le Guin calls "the oldest and most widely used storytelling voice the most versatile, flexible, and complex of the points of view" (87) in her book Steering the Craft.

The omniscient point of view (OPOV) is all the things Le Guin says, so why was it not in our writer's list of options? Why was that pathway hidden from her view? Why was it significant that she is American? Why are we—we writers of young adult fiction in America—so blind to

and suspicious of a viewpoint that has served writers well for two hundred years? What are we losing, and what can we gain from restoring the OPOV to our list of options?

Buckle in: The answers to these questions are complex, like the omniscient narrative voice itself. But the topic is *worth* exploring in depth, because the OPOV is a powerful option, the true storyteller's voice, and deserves equal footing within the toolbox of today's young adult writer.

Defining the Know-It-All Point of View

As readers, we rarely give point of view the close examination it deserves. We may question the actions of a character, or not believe the voice, but we hardly ever chalk this up to incorrect use or bad choice of point of view. In Writing Fiction: A Guide to Narrative Craft, Janet Burroway says that point of view is "the most complex element of fiction" (254). Le Guin observes the practical effect of not understanding POV: "... the narrative problem I see most often in workshop stories (and often in published work) is in handling POV: inconsistency and frequent changes of POV" (90). She goes on to say that, "In fiction, inconsistent POV is a very frequent problem. Unless handled with awareness and skill, frequent POV shifts jerk the reader around, bouncing in and out of incompatible identifications, confusing emotion, garbling the story" (90). Note the phrase about awareness and skill, because I will return to those elements. Point of view is vitally important to the writer's work and to the reader's experience. We have no choice but to fully engage with its complexities. Otherwise, we risk limiting the artistic success of our fiction.

When our imaginary writer was considering her options, she was looking at whose vantage point the story would be told from. The choice of point of view is, at heart, the choice of

a narrator or narrative voice. To fully understand the OPOV, we must explore its roots. They are as old as literature, and the word's root meaning is even older.

Fictional omniscience shares an origin with the religious term describing the all-knowing nature of God, itself from the Latin *omniscientia*, dating back to the 14th century. The Oxford English Dictionary online gives the primary definition of omniscience: "As an attribute of God, or of a person: the fact, state, or quality of having infinite knowledge. Also: the fact, state, or quality of having, or claiming to have, great knowledge" (2008). The OED supplies a secondary meaning related to literary theory: "Esp. as an attribute of the author or a third-person narrator: a full and complete knowledge concerning all the events of a narrative, and the private motives, thoughts, etc., of all the characters." The dictionary also cites a revealing fragment from religious philosopher John Locke's "An Essay Concerning Human Understanding," written in 1694: "The Omniscience of God, who knows all things, past, present, and to come." The phrase anticipates the OPOV's all-seeing camera lens, with its extreme close-up and time machine capacities.

The reputation of the OPOV is irrevocably bound up with literary history, even though the first major discussion of it in literary theory cited by the OED did not take place until 1927, in E.M. Forster's Aspects of the Novel. The history of literature shows us that modern prose storytelling began with the preservation of oral sagas and epics in writing. Works such as The Iliad and The Odyssey, or even Beowulf, carry with them a storyteller or proto-omniscient narrator, with the ability to know all the story's secrets. No surprise then, that when the novel as we now think of it began to emerge, writers such as Boccaccio, Chaucer, and Cervantes preserved the storyteller as an important element of the story itself. As the novel continued to develop, omniscience dominated throughout the nineteenth century.

The nineteenth century omniscient narrator commented with free rein upon story and characters, frequently swooping in and pulling away, and not hesitating to offer judgments, typically using the formal language of the period's privileged class. The grand tradition that cemented the OPOV's reputation as godlike arguably reached its height with Leo Tolstoy's groundbreaking masterpiece War and Peace, published in the late 1860s (interestingly, in The Art of Fiction, John Gardner cites Tolstoy's Resurrection as an example of the unsuccessful use of the OPOV—no genius is perfect) (149). In her recent *The Writer's Chronicle* article "Reconsidering Omniscience in Contemporary Fiction Writing," writer and professor Jenny Dunning points out that while the godlike root is applicable in some senses, it can hinder our understanding of the OPOV, writing:

"I have been careful in this discussion to talk about omniscience as 'knowing more than one's characters know'—but that is not the same as being 'all-knowing': knowing everything. Indeed, my experience of contemporary omniscience would more accurately be described as 'all-seeking'—a narrator who attempts to discover something about human existence in the telling of a particular story" (22).

Doubtless the very grandness of omniscience's "godlike" associations may have put off some writers—especially writers of ever-immediate teenage fiction—from using it. Perhaps we should think of omniscience not as the know-it-all point of view, but the knows-more or even the seeks-to-know-more point of view. We write to discover what we know, and what we think, and the story we are telling—the OPOV is perfectly suited to this task, because it is the primal and transcendent storyteller's voice.

The OPOV's relationship to the other major points of view is also important to understanding its current state. Dunning does a good job of laying out the basics: "A story can be

told in the first person, in which case the narrator and point-of-view character are the same; or a story can be told in the third person, in which case the narrator can be omniscient, that is able to access the consciousness of more than one character and to know more than the characters themselves know; or the third-person narrator can limit herself to a single consciousness" (19). The last option is what we call the third person limited point of view. The Bedford Glossary of Critical and Literary Terms explains the parameters of omniscience in greater detail:

"A third-person point of view in fictional writing that permits the author to present not only external details and information through an all-knowing narrator but also the inner thoughts and emotions of all the characters of a work. The omniscient narrator is frequently described as 'godlike.' Authors writing from the omniscient point of view may reveal—or conceal—at their discretion; their presentation of material to the reader is limited only by their own choices. Shifts in time and place as well as shifts from the viewpoint of one character to another are common" (316).

The key element is the open presence of the knowing storyteller. Stories in the OPOV are told in the third person, but the teller knows and may tell more—and tell us more subjectively—about the characters and world than in the first person or limited third viewpoints.

Because all stories are told, all stories have narrators. The narrator may be more or less obvious in a text depending on the point of view, however. In first person, the author can only share what the point of view character directly experiences or is able to express. In limited third person, the narrator focuses on a chosen character. In her Characters, Emotion & Viewpoint, Nancy Kress writes, "We can go inside the head of the third person POV character, but we can also see him from the outside" (165). Multiple third person, continues Kress, is simply "Third

person that goes into more than one POV." The narrator in both these types of limited third person is usually invisible and typically offers little commentary or perspective outside that available to the chosen viewpoint character(s). In limited third, the most common strategy is to try and simulate the experience of the main character as closely as possible, often referred to as close third. The narrator is still present and can reveal all the selected character's thoughts and traits, but that quality is *limited* to the character(s) in question.

We often think of point of view as a camera lens, which can be useful to illustrate the unique capabilities the author has when writing in the OPOV. Unlike the limitations of first or third person limited point of view, the third person omniscient narrator has absolute freedom to visit any character within the story world, no matter how seemingly insignificant, and to do so from the highest vantage—a cloud, or a mountain—or the most extreme close-up. In fact, the omniscient narrator has capabilities the camera never will. Chief among these is the ability to see into and express the mind and emotions of any character; a *very* extreme close-up. And the omniscient narrator's camera has a time machine—any moment in the history of any character, any moment the author wishes, is available. The true OPOV offers unparalleled flexibility to send the camera anywhere at any time to see anything.

So the OPOV can show us whatever the author desires, but is that all we need to know to understand and recognize it? Not so fast. We may still find it difficult to recognize omniscience on the page. Dunning admits it is not always easy to spot the OPOV at work: "I suspect that many of us have misread omniscient narration as third person limited or serial limited narration. I know I have. We are so acclimated to close-to-character narration that we miss the selective use of a narrator who knows more than a character can know " (20). The problem with recognizing the OPOV flows from two main issues: that we are not as used to encountering it as

other points of view and that point of view itself is so basic to narrative that we often just accept it and keep reading.

By keeping a single concept in mind, it becomes much easier to know the OPOV when we encounter it. At its most basic, the omniscient viewpoint is the presence of the narrator or storyteller—to a greater or lesser extent—in the telling of the story. The easiest way to tell whether a book employs omniscience or not is to pay attention to whether the prose of the narrative reveals something beyond the scope of the character(s) to know or express, or which is expressed in language that does not belong to the character(s).

Contrasting an example of third person limited—where the narrator is not openly revealed, and the language mirrors that of the main character—with one of omniscience demonstrates the principle. Sarah Ellis's Canadian Children's Literature award-winning Odd Man Out offers a strong example of limited third person. From the first chapter: "Kip's eyes jumped open. Four o'clock in the morning and he was awake. Not just awake but super-awake, like some martial arts master—alert, energetic, ready to spring into action" (11). Compare that passage to the opening lines from the first chapter of Mal Peet's Tamar: "The air shook; you could feel it. And the noise was unbelievable. It is probable that humans had never heard anything like it, since it was perhaps the sound of the planet giving birth to its mountains, of raw young continents grating together. In the fields of southern England, animals panicked and continued to panic because the noise would not stop" (9). Peet's paragraph clearly signals the narrator's presence and ability to stand back and comment on whatever he wishes. Spotting the omniscient viewpoint may not always be possible in the opening lines of a story or novel, since some authors may use a more subtle approach. Because limited third and the OPOV are both types of

third person narration, they can look very similar. That said, the author will *usually* reveal the choice of omniscience early to prevent the reader from being surprised by shifts in focus.

Of course, as pointed out by Le Guin, the OPOV must be used intentionally for the "knowing storyteller" method to be reliable. Viewpoint shifts may occur by error, and multiple third person viewpoint is especially prone to accidental slips into omniscience. Multiple third person is used with some frequency in young adult literature (and is the default for much commercial adult fiction). Scott Westerfeld's Midnighters trilogy is a prime example, with chapter headings that signal which character in the group protagonist that we will follow. Westerfeld avoids the tricky ground of confusing lapses between viewpoints, something not all authors manage.

Getting a handle on the legitimate overlap between the OPOV and multiple third person can help us recognize mistakes when they do occur. Kress acknowledges the difficulty in separating the viewpoints completely:

"There are strong similarities between omniscient POV and multiple third person when the multiple third person includes much exposition. This is because exposition is, after all, in the author's POV by default—none of the characters are thinking it or saying it. Exposition that is written in a distinctive style (playful, sarcastic, romantic) suggests even more strongly that a persona, not just information, is present, and that persona is, of course, the author's.

The answer is that omniscient POV and multiple third person are not discreet entities but exist on a continuum, one sliding into the other. However, if you write near the middle of the continuum, you get occasional dips into some characters'

minds and the hint of an authorial presence, which looks a lot like either sloppy multiple third person or weak omniscient POV " (210).

Essentially, multiple third person viewpoint lacks the storyteller's presence. The defining voice of the storyteller, the omniscient narrator, must be present and *consistent* in the OPOV, regardless of the number of characters we visit. The storyteller's presence concept makes it much easier to identify omniscience—and to notice when an author slips into it by mistake or sends mixed signals by using it inconsistently.

Just such a sloppy, scattershot approach mars Ann Brashares' best-selling, Best Books for Young Adults (BBYA) top 10 title The Sisterhood of the Traveling Pants, about four girls whose summer is transformed by a pair of magically perfect jeans. Brashares seems to establish that the novel's narrator will stick close to Carmen's perspective during the first chapter:

"Can you close that suitcase?" Tibby asked Carmen. "It's making me sick."

"Carmen glanced at the structured canvas bag splayed wantonly in the middle of her bed. Suddenly she wished she had all-new underwear. Her best satin pair was sprouting tiny ropes of elastic from the waistband" (11).

This passage might indicate that the novel will use multiple third person rather than the OPOV. And, for a page and a half, we do see the other girls from the outside, having access only to Carmen's thoughts and feelings. Then, without warning, an omniscient narrator is outside Carmen and visiting another viewpoint character: "Carmen looked baffled" (13) and "Tibby tried not to let her smile get loose" (14). The chapter possesses confused elements of both the OPOV and multiple third person. Kress sums up the solution to problems such as this astutely: "Your best choice is to commit firmly to one or the other and then happily exploit all of its particular advantages" (210). Yes, Brashares should get credit for attempting the OPOV, something that

most of her American colleagues avoid (as we will discuss). And, yes, teens love Brashares' book, but they would also love a more thoughtfully crafted version. As is, her charming story about friendship remains mostly forgettable pop fiction.

The issue of the omniscient narrator's identity also relates to the concept of the storyteller's voice. Scholars and authors often dance around the topic of *who* exactly the omniscient narrator is. The OED's definition plainly states that the omniscient narrator is either the author or a third person narrator with more knowledge than any character in the story could have. The Bedford school of thought emerges in the guide's entry on narrators: "Third-person narrators (particularly omniscient ones) generally have a more authorial-seeming sound and function and are more likely to comment upon the action in addition to recounting it" (288). The use of the phrase "authorial-seeming sound and function" hints at the contemporary discomfort about whether it is ever appropriate to characterize the omniscient voice as belonging to the author.

A sizeable number of sources use the author and the omniscient narrator as synonyms, as implied by the term "authorial omniscient"—a term that directly identifies the author with the omniscient narrator. For instance, Burroway characterizes the narrator as the author in an illustrative chart about point of view (255), indicating that the author speaks directly to the reader. Le Guin explains her own take, writing, "I don't like the common term 'omniscient author,' because I hear a judgmental sneer in it. I think 'authorial narration' is the most neutral term, and 'involved author' the most exact" (87). British author Philip Pullman would probably find fault with that terminology's implications if taken literally, saying in a 2007 interview with the editor of *The Barnes and Noble Review* that: "The interesting thing to me about Middlemarch, and Thackeray's Vanity Fair, and several other great novels, is precisely this

omniscient, as we call it, third person, which naive readers mistake for the author. It isn't George Eliot who is saying this; it's a voice that George Eliot adopts to tell this story." But maybe these authorities are not as far apart as they first appear.

Obviously, some readers will perceive the omniscient narrator as the writer—the writer is the storyteller, after all, and the only source of the knowledge the omniscient narrator accesses. The full reality of the relationship between the omniscient narrator and the author is more nuanced. In an interview, author Karen Joy Fowler, who has used the OPOV in several acclaimed novels for adults, says, "I always remember hearing Dianne Wakowski saying that first you have to create the person who writes the poem. I suspect I do this, but in an unconscious way. On the conscious level, I'm usually just telling the story, and occasionally telling it to a clearly imagined audience" (Bond, 2008).

Tying the storyteller's voice directly to the author is unnecessary and imprecise. Instead, as Fowler intimates, the narrator's voice is often an *aspect* of the author. The omniscient narrator may reflect the author's own voice or have a completely different one constructed solely to suit the story. Even when the narrator is presented as the author him or herself, the narrator remains a proxy voice, created like the rest of the fictional universe. All the authorities cited would likely agree, and surely their differences stem from preferred terms and shorthand.

Another thorny aspect is that while the story is told in third person, there may be instances when the omniscient narrator uses the pronoun "I." Again, that does not mean the story is in first person or that the narrator is identical to the author. So long as the narrator telling the third-person story knows more than the characters could, the point of view is the omniscient. The technique of the involved "I" in the text was especially common in the 19th century, and is often—if not always—present when the omniscient narrator is intrusive. In the OPOV, the

intrusive omniscient narrator makes value judgments, according to the Bedford guide, while the unintrusive narrator largely avoids that type of commentary (316). No matter which type of approach is used, the narrator is the narrator and not the author, just as the story is the story and not reality. That is no small thing, for the best fiction creates its own equally satisfying reality.

The Fashion Victim Problem

What is considered fashionable in fiction can change in a blink or a decade or every hundred years. On the short end of the scale, books may end up remaindered because fickle audiences no longer care about trendy subjects like what will happen when the Mayan calendar goes kablooeey in 2012. No major concern there: The world probably has enough trendy books. (Vampires are always hot, for good or ill.) Far more dangerous is when fashion gets applied to a tool of the writing craft. What happened to the OPOV is a prime example. Writers are reactionaries; see too much of something (the OPOV pre-20th century), encounter something seductively new and modern (what is this limited third person you speak of, you beautiful 20th century genius?), and our heads turn, and with them our backs on a common technique that now appears hopelessly outdated. We can hardly blame our imaginary writer for not giving the OPOV a glance.

But we are not talking about the theory of evolution, and literary fashion does not always involve the survival of the fittest. Artistic evolution is more slippery and subjective than that. Sure, the OPOV has always had its boosters. In the early 1980s, during the height of the third person limited's reign over American letters, Gardner wrote: "The noblest writers, like Isak Dinesen and Leo Tolstoy, rise above the pettiness and unseemly familiarity of third person subjective, and avoid the savage sparsity of third person objective, by means of the authorial-

omniscient point of view" (157). Nearly two decades later, Le Guin held that, "But the voice of the narrator who knows the whole story, tells it because it is important, and is profoundly involved with *all* the characters, cannot be dismissed as old-fashioned or uncool" (87). For every Le Guin and Gardner, a number of other authorities over the years have remained aloof about, and have even dismissed, the OPOV. A significant part of the bias contemporary writers absorb against the viewpoint still comes from the writing establishment.

Beginning writers—both for adults and young adults—are often warned against using the OPOV, despite its rich literary history. No less radical an author than Samuel R. Delany writes in his recent book About Writing: "There is an 'omniscient' point of view, a narrator who, Godlike, knows—and is ready to tell—everything that everyone in the scene is thinking and feeling. But such stories become rarer and rarer and register as more and more eccentric" (411). He goes on to hold that the OPOV is loaded with problems and spends several pages advocating for the use of first and, even more so, third person limited. Burroway states that "it is one of the manifestations of modern literature's movement downward in class from heroic to common characters, from external action to the psychological action of the mind, that authors of realistic fiction have largely avoided the godlike stance of the omniscient author and have chosen to restrict themselves to fewer areas of knowledge" (258). There are many more such pronouncements out there, and as Dunning observes: "Craft books and fiction writing teachers often advise inexperienced writers to establish a point of view at a story's outset and stick with it, thus avoiding confusing willy-nilly shifts in point of view. And while various options may be presented, effectively what ends up being promoted in both craft books and most classrooms is third person limited narration in which character voice obscures narrator voice" (19). Writers

may be intellectually aware of the OPOV, but no one would argue that they are widely encouraged to investigate it in the classrooms and craft books Dunning references.

In fact, the opening up of literature to a variety of viewpoints and the end of omniscience's dominance is entirely understandable. It is easy to sympathize with the impulse to move away from something so ubiquitous and broaden the possibilities open to writers. In The Art of Fiction, Gardner largely chalks up the decline in the popularity of omniscience to "... widespread doubt, at least among intellectuals, about the existence of God, and increasing fascination with Pilate's tiresome question 'What is Truth?'" (158). He observes that the modernist period of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries—during which progress and invention were highly prized—saw the popularization of new point of view options like limited third and the unreliable narrator by writers like "Charles Dickens, Joseph Conrad, Henry James, Stephen Crane" (158). That expansion of craft was undoubtedly a good thing.

Yet the overreaction against the OPOV left its reputation tarnished, subject to decades upon decades of suspicion and dismissal. In an interview, American YA and children's writer M.T. Anderson said he sees at the heart of the OPOV's rejection a discomfort with the narrator's existence: "For the modernist (and later the post-modernist) there is no neutrality, which calls into question the role of an omniscient narrator—so runs the argument" (Bond, 2008). One of modernism's legacies is a core discomfort with the idea not just of neutrality and authority, but of the creator's appearance in the art. Art should exist independently, fingerprint-free, so the rationale goes. Kress charges that, "Omniscient POV destroys the reader's sense of entering a separate, self-contained world, that, at least for the duration of the novel, becomes its own reality" (206). She continues that it "strains the illusion that the fictional world feels real" (208). But does the OPOV really commit this sin?

Ironically, given Gardner's advocacy for the OPOV, the current fixation on the fictional world or "fictive dream" stems mainly from misinterpreted passages in his two most famous books on craft, On Becoming a Novelist and The Art of Fiction (both of which were published posthumously). In truth, the OPOV can help us *create* a vivid fictional reality. If we return to Gardner's original point about the ideal reading experience, his meaning becomes clear. In On Becoming a Novelist, he wrote: "We recreate, with minor and for the most part unimportant changes, the vivid and continuous dream the writer worked out in his mind (revising and revising until he got it right) and captured in language so that other human beings, whenever they feel like it, may open his book and dream that dream again" (5). He elaborates at length on the fictive dream's importance in The Art of Fiction, concluding that, "...one of the chief mistakes a writer can make is to allow or force the reader's mind to be distracted, even momentarily from the fictional dream" (31). In every method of storytelling devised by humans there is one constant: the storyteller. The presence of a storyteller is the most natural and innate characteristic of fiction. The OPOV openly acknowledges the narrative voice is also a part of the story, or fictional dream.

By rejecting the storyteller's voice, we lose far more than we gain. Pullman has said that one of the key weaknesses of much contemporary fiction is the current distrust "about telling a story from a single, central directing consciousness" (Isis lecture, 2003). Further, he finds that the overemphasis on staying away from the omniscient narrator neglects the needs of readers. In a recent essay for The Guardian newspaper, he writes:

"And despite the profound and unsettling discoveries of modernism and post-modernism, and everything they show us about the unreliability of the narrator and the fallacy of omniscience, some of us still, when we read, are happy to

accept that the narrative voice has the right to comment on a character, whether tartly or sympathetically, and the ability to go into that character's mind and tell us what's going on there. . . . The narrative voice, with those mysterious powers, is the reason I write novels" (2007).

Certainly Pullman's own young adult novels, particularly the His Dark Materials trilogy, are proof that teens (and adults) can and do accept the omniscient narrative voice. They also demonstrate that the presence of the narrator does not necessarily distance the reader from characters or stories. Witness this excerpt from a quiet scene in the trilogy's final book, The Amber Spyglass: "But Pantalaimon was trembling and shivering, and nothing Lyra could do could soothe him into stillness, or quiet the soft little moan he couldn't help uttering. So her sleep was broken and shallow, on the floor of the shack with all the other sleepers, and her death sat watchfully beside her" (240). The omniscient narrator's ability to show us these characters vulnerable and sleeping, with death literally watching over them, is devastatingly effective. We are awake to Lyra and her daemon Pantalaimon's peril and completely absorbed by the story, not sleeping the lie of a pristine fictive dream untouched by the storyteller's fingerprints.

Even the most intrusive of omniscient narrators can be used to pull readers in close to the story at hand. Anderson has employed an intrusive omniscient narrator in his series for younger readers, The Thrilling Tales, if not yet openly in his books for teenagers. The first of these books, Whales on Stilts, opens, "On Career Day Lily visited her dad's work with him and discovered he worked for a mad scientist who wanted to rule the Earth through destruction and desolation" (1), and features interjections from the narrator like, "If you want to guess their plan, you're welcome to" (130). When asked if the presence of this omniscient narrator creates distance for the reader, Anderson answered: "I feel that it actually brings me closer to the readers. I love the feeling of

telling them a story they'll enjoy—or that I hope they'll enjoy! To me, it felt more human, more involved—and of course it makes certain things (like triumphant monologues by bad guys alone in their lairs) possible that a close third or first person narration wouldn't allow" (Bond, 2008). Humor is clearly well suited to the over-the-top, intrusive omniscient narrator, but the idea of the OPOV bringing the author closer to the story—and the reader—is a valid one across many types of fiction.

Simply put, the presence of the storyteller does not ruin a story by signaling that it is a story. So long as the story is being told successfully, the reader will happily consent to its fictional reality. The omniscient narrator is no more intrinsically artificial than a first-person narrator telling the tale, or of a third person limited perspective that comes from a vaporous invisible teller (and, arguably, less so). As Anderson puts it, "It is only our squeamishness about narrating at all that gets people so worked up about these issues" (Bond, 2008). All stories are told—be they for children, teenagers, or adults—and being told a good story is one of the most primal pleasures of life as a human.

The most serious problem with the large-scale rejection of the OPOV develops when another viewpoint begins to dominate as completely as omniscience once did. Gardner cautions: "The third-person-subjective point of view has its uses, but it also has severe limits, so that something is wrong when it becomes the dominant point of view in fiction, as it has been for years in the United States" (156). Le Guin offers a reason of her own: "Limited third person is the predominant modern fictional voice—partly in reaction to the Victorian fondness for involved author narration, and the many abuses of it" (87). Both Gardner and Le Guin are mostly commenting on fiction written for adults. While these same trends and concepts have an impact

on the entire field of literature and publishing, we must also deal with concerns specific to the field of children's and young adult literature to get a complete picture.

The OPOV has always appeared in books for younger readers, and continues to do so. In addition to Anderson's Thrilling Tales, look no further than the outrageously popular A Series of Unfortunate Events (with its ultra-intrusive narrator Mr. Lemony Snicket), Kate DiCamillo's Newbery-winning The Tale of Despereaux, Derek Landy's Skulduggery Pleasant, China Mieville's Un Lun Dun, and a wide range of other titles. Pullman offered a reason why children's literature—and a few other genres—have become a main refuge of omniscience in his 2003 Isis Lecture:

"... because the rejection of the central directing consciousness, of the omniscient narrator, is exactly what happened to literary fiction in the twentieth century, to its eventual impoverishment. Novelists became fascinated by other things than telling stories, and in the process, the feeling seemed to grow that there was something *wrong* about telling a story from a single, central directing consciousness, because that act involved a narrative voice, and narrators were now notoriously unreliable. So more and more literary fiction became tentative, diffident, uncertain, openly self-contradictory, uncommitted, shifting, relative ... and *story*, which is both events and the voice that tells us about them, was banished.

Where *story went* was into genre fiction—crime, romance, fantasy, and so on; and into children's books."

Young adult literature is an exception within the children's book field (setting aside fantasy, which will be discussed in more detail). The continual arguments over what young adult books

are—legitimate literary form or marketing category—may be telling. In many ways, young adult literature is as close to literature for adults as it is to literature for children. YA is situated on the interstices between the two fields, just like its intended readers themselves. Young adult literature mirrors the tendency of its audience to strive toward the grown-up end of the spectrum. Like its readers, it wants to be taken seriously. So the OPOV is largely a stranger to young adult novels, particularly those written by Americans, just as in literary fiction. But, while third person limited and multiple third person are certainly common enough, the dominant point of view for young adult books is first person.

Examining every young adult book published would be impossible, but we can extrapolate tendencies in point of view by looking at trends within books honored by the field. The Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) started the Michael L. Printz Award in 2000, with the aim of recognizing literary excellence in young adult literature. Unlike its older, sister awards, the Newbery and the Caldecott, given by the American Library Association to honor books primarily for younger readers, the Printz rules allow consideration of books published by non-American writers, if they are published in an American edition during the eligibility period. Because of its more generous eligibility criteria, the Printz is uniquely suited to provide a snapshot of the best work in the YA field and to broadly show the differences in how writers from different countries approach—or avoid—the omniscient viewpoint.

A review of the forty-two Printz winners and honor books to date reveals just five novels that use the OPOV, all honor books instead of winners. Just one of these is by an American, Gary Schmidt's Lizzie Bright and the Buckminster Boy (2005). Schmidt's novel—also honored by that year's Newbery Committee—is an anomaly, in that it is one of only a handful of realistic novels for teens written in the OPOV by an American. As such, we will deal with it in greater

detail later in this essay. Worth noting is that two Australians, an Englishman, and a New Zealander wrote the four remaining OPOV books. Twenty-nine of the forty-two recognized books are first-person narratives, and all the winners have included some form of first person—although two mixed other formats or third person limited with first person. The remainder of the Printz books split among third person, nonfiction, a short story collection, and even one example of second person. A survey of the BBYA top ten lists over the same period yielded similar results—a majority of first-person narratives, a sizeable portion of third person limited books, and a smattering of omniscient titles that were mostly fantasy.

The results demonstrate that first person is overwhelmingly the most honored and the most popular viewpoint within YA literature. The prevalence of first person is unsurprising for several reasons. Teenagers often feel locked within the parental and societal constraints of their lives, just as first person locks the reader inside one character's point of view. First person offers great immediacy; as Nancy Kress puts it: "Such is the power of the pronoun that when something happens to a fictional 'I,' it feels as if it's happening to the reader 'I'" (163). The growth of young adult literature has also happened in lockstep with the coming of age of the baby boomers—sometimes called the "me generation"—and the further rise of youth culture with Generation X and Generation Y. Advocating for the OPOV does not mean advocating against first person or limited third. But we must stay on guard against the limitations on inventiveness inherent in a single point of view becoming so prevalent that it seems like the only choice available to writers for teens.

The results of this survey and my own firsthand knowledge of the young adult field say that omniscience has largely met the same fate as in adult literary fiction—relegated to genre works and the stray oddity—but also offer hope that we *can* expand our options. Stories using

the OPOV are being written, read, and recognized for their excellence. Two of the five OPOV books recognized with honors by the Printz were published in 2007, New Zealander Elizabeth Knox's Dreamquake and Aussie Judith Clarke's One Whole and Perfect Day. We can hope that signals not a trend, but a long-term broadening of options that includes the OPOV.

Best in Show: Case Studies of the OPOV in Young Adult Fiction

Like Knox and Clarke, a handful of other writers serve as prominent counterexamples to the larger trend against the OPOV in YA fiction. These writers seem not to have absorbed the warnings, and have continued exploring its uses. The fact that the writers in question hail mainly from the southern hemisphere and the United Kingdom is notable, and their work should serve as an inspiration and challenge to those of us in America writing for teenagers.

The best argument for the value of omniscience in contemporary young adult fiction comes from the remarkable work that has been produced using it. To that end, I will examine several examples of work using the OPOV, both in the speculative fiction genre and in the realistic novel.

From the fantasy genre, I will discuss Knox's Dreamhunter Duet, Pullman's His Dark Materials trilogy, Aussie Markus Zusak's The Book Thief, and American Kelly Link's novella "Magic for Beginners." Realistic YA novels using the OPOV remain something of a rarity—for reasons that will be discussed—but Clarke's One Whole and Perfect Day, New Zealander Margaret Mahy's The Catalogue of the Universe, Aussie Ursula Dubosarsky's The Red Shoe, and Schmidt's Lizzie Bright and the Buckminster Boy will demonstrate masterfully why that should no longer be true.

The Fantastical Voice of Story

Fantasy, as always, is a special case. Like the OPOV, its historical roots go back to the beginning of literary history. Whether or not they were perceived as truth or religion at the time, those same oral sagas and epics that contained the proto-omniscient narrator also contained fantastical elements that are with us centuries later—gods, monsters, demons. The legendary Diana Wynne Jones produced a hilarious guide to navigating the tropes of the fantasy genre, The Tough Guide to Fantasyland, which included the following entry:

"**Management** is the body who has arranged this Tour for you. It has made up the Rules for your comfort and convenience, so that no Tourist will ever be taken by surprise or shocked by an unexpected INCIDENT. Management reserves the right to alter the Rules in accordance with current fashions, and will admit absolutely no complaints or responsibility. It wishes you a safe and happy tour of Fantasyland" (119).

Wynne Jones could be describing the traditional omniscient narrator of fantasy, if not in a wholly flattering light. The storyteller serves the role of Management. Since the Tour often traverses worlds and world-sized narratives, the omniscient narrator is especially suited to the genre.

Speculative fiction—a broader term that includes both fantasy and science fiction—is by no means immune from infiltration by larger literary trends. Third person limited, multiple third person, and first person point of view have become extremely popular in speculative fiction. Authorities within the SF genre often discourage the use of omniscience just like their literary fiction counterparts. Witness not just Delany's views, but Orson Scott Card's take in Characters & Viewpoint: "As the omniscient narrator slips in and out of different characters' minds, he keeps the reader from fully engaging with any of the characters" (159). Despite the increasing

focus on and use of these other points of view, the OPOV has not been displaced from SF, and is not likely to be.

Fantasy need not be constrained by the idea of *simulating* reality in the same way as mimetic fiction. Still, a high level of craft is required to conjure a convincing reality outside (or inside, or beside) our own. As readers, we usually perceive what the omniscient narrator tells us as inherently trustworthy; think of it as the reliable source phenomenon. By their very nature, fantasies leave space for the omniscient narrator. The presence of the narrator can help bolster the believability of the invented universe, aided by our desire to believe. After all, an innate part of the fantastic's appeal lies in being told a story outside our everyday experience, on one level or another.

The storyteller's presence is a given since fantastical elements automatically depart from reality, to a greater or less extent. Anderson agreed in his interview, saying, "Such stories, having fabulist or absurdist elements, already get around the supposed prohibition against narrators 'showing their hand'," and also are, "... generically more closely linked to traditional storytelling forms (fable, picaresque novel, epic, folk tale, etc) than American realism, and thus it doesn't jar us in the same way" (Bond, 2008). With works of fantasy, we know that we are being told a story and cannot pretend otherwise. Acknowledging that fact within the text runs no danger of undermining the reader's suspension of disbelief.

The narrator can also be useful for SF writers in more practical ways. The rules of the story world can be explained more easily with an omniscient narrator able to openly seed such exposition into the story, for instance. In high fantasy, the narrator can even provide a more natural context for the use of epic language that might strike the modern reader as far-fetched in a first person viewpoint. Perhaps most important of all, omniscience can support the sense of the

story being bigger than the sum of its parts—it invokes a larger meaning. Rather than focusing us only on the particular experience of a character or characters, we become aware of layers of meaning that exist independent of the inhabitants of the story. As Dunning says, often contemporary writers using the omniscient viewpoint seek to discover something about human existence, and not just *a* human's existence. The OPOV was absolutely ideal for J.R.R. Tolkien's The Lord of the Rings, and Knox and Pullman's series novels demonstrate why it remains the perfect choice for today's large-scale fantasies.

The His Dark Materials trilogy's omniscient narrator matches its many-worlds-size narrative, supporting Pullman's desire to tell a story about the nature of reality and consciousness. The classic omniscient narrative voice employed belongs to an older and wiser presence than the story's main protagonist, young Lyra Belacqua. To demonstrate the distance between teller and tale, Pullman himself, in his 2007 essay for The Guardian, points to lines from The Golden Compass such as, "In many ways Lyra was a barbarian," (31) and "That was Lyra's world and her delight. She was a course and greedy little savage, for the most part" (33). The narrator offers perspective and assigns a sense of larger significance to events that we do not yet understand—that we may not fully understand until the end of The Amber Spyglass. But the narrator is also close enough that we have a firm handle on not just what happens in the plot, but on the main characters, particularly Lyra.

One of semi-barbarian Lyra's most notable—and lovable—traits is her courage. Time and again she gets into trouble and fearlessly invents a way out. Often, she takes on trouble on someone else's behalf, concerns for herself cast aside. The novel's opening scene offers a memorable example, with Lyra's insistence on visiting the Retiring Room at Jordan College, over her daemon Pantalaimon's objections. Lyra and Pan are trapped in a wardrobe and witness

poison being poured into wine for Lord Asriel, who Lyra believes is her uncle. After preventing Asriel from drinking the poison, Lyra steadfastly insists she has saved his life in response to being chastised. He sends her back to hiding: "Lyra relaxed a little, and allowed herself to feel the pain in her shoulder and wrist. It might have been enough to make her cry, if she was the sort of girl who cried. Instead she gritted her teeth and moved the arm gently until it felt looser" (13). We feel just as close to Lyra in scenes like this as we would in third person limited. Pullman also subverts the chosen one paradigm by creating an oft-repeated warning that Lyra must not know what part she is to play. The prophecies must remain hidden, and so we discover Lyra's destiny as she does, again underscoring our connection with the character.

Over the course of the story, Lyra must rescue an entire universe ripped apart by several competing factors, including a mysterious cosmological "dust," the malignant control of a church, a God figure who seeks to control and keep the populace ignorant, and her own parents. Pullman has a large story to tell, sprawling across worlds and character agendas. He is also careful to show the effects of actions taken by the powerful on the less powerful—not just Lyra and her companion Will, but the kidnapped children at Bolvangar, the nearly feral children of Cittagazze, and, especially, the dead. It is no accident that children are frequently used to represent the impact, intended and unintended, of the machinations of adults. The children are closer to their natural state, and not in thrall to the same gray moral agendas motivating many of the adult characters. Pullman explores the journey from innocence to experience, and depicts innocence as far more complicated than the simple, pure thing of many religious texts.

In Lyra's world—and some other worlds within the series—humans have physical manifestations of their souls that take the form of animals known as daemons. The relationship between human and daemon is sacred, but also unbalanced; the human has more power. The

bond mimics the connection between adult and child, between self and soul, and between the unbalanced universe with the Authority at the top and everyone else beneath. We are painfully aware of how Lyra's actions en route to the land of the dead impact Pantalaimon. Pullman never lets us forget that in the His Dark Materials story world everything is connected to everything else, that for every action there is a tangible impact on other living beings. The omniscient narrator enables Pullman to travel from one point of the universe to the other and from the view of one character to another quickly enough to offer the perspective necessary for us to catch these larger meanings.

The trilogy also confronts the nature of God and acts done in the name of authority (and the Authority)—the most telling example of the conflicted relationship between the weak and the powerful, the innocent and the experienced. These novels point to one reason why characterizing omniscient viewpoint as "all-seeking" instead of "godlike" works better in a contemporary context. The nature of God is a chief concern of Pullman's story, and if the narrator were truly godlike the trilogy's implicit conclusion that religion is largely illusory and that humankind must save itself would be undercut. We are always clear that the omniscient narrator is the storyteller, not God, not even a godlike presence, despite his ability to give or hold back any piece of information as desired. Pullman's narrator is there to help us understand by leading us along the journey, clarifying narrative connections for us without getting in our way. Take this passage from Lyra and Will's trip to the land of the dead in The Amber Spyglass:

"So they set off, and the numberless millions of ghosts began to follow them.

Behind them, too far back for the children to see, other inhabitants of the world of the dead had heard what was happening and were coming to join the great march.

Tialys and Salmakia flew back to look and were overjoyed to see their own

people there, and every other kind of conscious being who had ever been punished by the Authority with exile and death. Among them were beings who didn't look human at all, beings like the *mulefa*, whom Mary Malone would have recognized, and stranger ghosts as well.

But Will and Lyra had no strength to look back; all they could do was move on after the harpies, and hope" (288).

The narrator's presence is felt in every line, building not just this sequence but the entire story toward a riveting climax. Far from feeling the distance from the characters and the story that Card alleges is inherent in the viewpoint, we are gripped by the need to know what happens, and we care deeply about the outcome.

Delany writes of omniscient narratives that, "Such tales cannot turn on any sort of mystery or character revelation, so that it becomes hard for the writer to keep them interesting" (411). That would come as news to Pullman and his readers. The nature of Lyra's destiny and what exactly she is prophesied to do remain mysterious through most of the narrative. Pullman is not afraid to let his narrator misdirect us to keep the tension going. Early on in The Golden Compass, we visit a conversation between Jordan's Master and its Librarian:

"Because of what she must experience. Part of that includes a great betrayal . . . "

"Who's going to betray her?"

"No, no, that's the saddest thing: *she* will be the betrayer, and the experience will be terrible" (29).

The reader believes that this betrayal happens at the end of the first book, with Roger's death at Lyra's father's hand. She has rescued her friend only to deliver him up to death. This sequence of events motivates Lyra for much of her journey, ultimately leading her to the land of the dead. It

is during The Amber Spyglass, at the river with the ferryman when Lyra leaves Pantalaimon behind, that the narrator reveals the truth of the earlier prophecy: "And thus the prophecy that the Master of Jordan College had made to the Librarian, that Lyra would make a great betrayal and it would hurt her terribly, was fulfilled" (254). The omniscient narrator's slow reveal of this information makes it far more affecting. Just as in any other point of view, the writer is not prevented from achieving a suspenseful plot. We have accepted the narrator knows all about the story and its characters. The writer must not betray our trust, but use it to his or her advantage, as Pullman does.

Knox's masterwork fantasy duology The Dreamhunter Duet also investigates large political stakes and the nature of reality, but in the context of one country rather than Pullman's many worlds. Her use of the OPOV is very different from Pullman's, but supports and expands her story equally well. In an interview, Knox characterized her approach to the omniscient narrator as "a kind of limited eye-of-God" (Bond, 2007). Her decision to tell this story in a wide-ranging omniscient point of view—dipping into and out of the points of view of dozens of characters—elevates her story beyond the concerns of two families and allows it to take on an epic sense of scope.

Set in Southland, an Edwardian-era version of New Zealand, the books center on the intersection between the current society and a geographic anomaly known as the Place that only dreamhunters can visit. Teenage Laura Hame's father, Tziga, discovered the Place twenty years earlier, pioneering the art of retrieving and performing dreams for huge sleeping audiences. Dreams have become big business, developing a shadow economy that exerts a dark hold over Tziga. When her father disappears, Laura must try to find him, notably with the help of a literal sandman, a golem called Nown whom she creates in the land of dreams. Laura and a host of

other characters uncover secret after secret, until finally the secret of the Place itself is revealed. Along the way, we experience the story through the eyes of not only Tziga and Laura, but her cousin Rose and her family, Laura's romantic interest dreamhunter Sandy Mason, various rangers, Nown, and corrupt bureaucrat Cass Doran, to single out but a few of many characters.

Knox establishes the parameters of her omniscient narrator early in Dreamhunter. She does not jump from one character's point of view to another during the same scene, although she sometimes jumps to another perspective within a chapter after a scene break. Knox's narrator also refrains from offering the kind of direct perspective of Pullman's narrator, instead focusing her commentary largely on bridging and descriptive material. She does occasionally characterize situations and events, however, pulling the camera away from them to provide the scope of the scene or historical context. An example occurs near the beginning of the second novel,

Dreamquake:

"That was until the early hours of St. Lazarus's Day 1906, when sleepers in those houses found themselves snagged by the rim of a great, screeching wheel of nightmare. Only its edge—and although they woke with their hearts pounding, and gasping for breath, their distress quickly passed, to be replaced by something else. Fear. They sat up in bed and strained to hear. Some ran to their windows and threw them open and looked toward the festively lit Opera, from which came the sound of screams—a hellish howling that filled the still, chilly spring night" (9).

During Dreamquake's opening chapter, Knox's narrator artfully slips from scene break to scene break, from perspective to perspective—a technique that allows her to quickly catch up readers to the point where the previous volume ended. The omniscient narrator re-engages the

reader by offering a larger sense of what has happened than we have at the end of the first book; we are launched from those events further into the story to come.

Knox also relies on her narrator's voice to flesh out the rules of her created world, a capability of omniscience particularly suited to the demands of fantasy. Near the beginning of Dreamhunter, she breaks away from Laura's perspective to explain the importance of a major event the cousins and their families are anticipating:

"In two weeks Laura and Rose were due to Try. Any person who wanted to enter the Place for the first time had to do so under the eye of an organization called the Dream Regulatory Body. The Body had been set up years before. It employed 'rangers'—those who could go into the Place but couldn't carry dreams out of it—to patrol the uncanny territory and its borders. The dream parlours, salons and palaces in which working dreamhunters performed had to obey laws enforced by the Regulatory Body and its powerful head, the Secretary of the Interior, Cass Doran. The parlours, salons and palaces were businesses and had to have licenses. Dreamhunters, too, had to have licenses. A Try was the first step on the road to a license and a livelihood" (7).

Knox introduces such expository passages only when they fit seamlessly into the novel. The measured, distanced voice of her narrator makes such interjections possible without disrupting the flow of the narrative.

Knox could have chosen to tell the story as a pure family saga, a choice that might well have employed multiple third person using only a few viewpoint characters. But while the two families central to the story are important, they alone do not make up the story. She could also have chosen to tell it through a tight lens of Laura's point of view, in either first or close third

person limited, making it a more personal tale of a girl coming to grips with the loss of her parents and her own destiny. Or she might have told it from Tziga's point of view, chronicling the first and most troubled dreamhunter's journey. Any of these more conventional decisions would have resulted in a far less rich world and less satisfying story. Because Knox chose omniscience the balance of Southland becomes the balance of the world—we are keenly aware of how many places there are where that balance could be lost forever.

Talking about the constraints she set for The Dreamhunter Duet to accomplish this feat, Knox says, "Dreamhunter jumps between people only section by section, but never within sections, between one sentence and the next. The tricky thing about this method is that you have to make it clear to the readers whose point of view you are going to continue to visit—who the main protagonists are" (Bond, 2007). She establishes these rules in the early chapters, using specific techniques. She said that: "... in Dreamhunter, the early departures from the points of view of the principals are into the heads of a group of people—like the people watching Laura saying goodbye to her father on the platform of Sisters Beach station—or into the head of a casualty, the ranger who gets run down by the stagecoach" (Bond, 2007). The narrator will not focus overlong on characters that do not matter strongly to the main plot. We are never confused about who is important.

Knox rewards our investment in more prominent characters by ensuring that each has a sequence told from his or her vantage point. For instance, one of the signal events in Dreamquake is a fire at a debutante ball attended by both Laura and her cousin Rose. While Laura makes it out quickly and safely, Rose is trapped inside. The event is told almost entirely from Rose's perspective, flashing out to her family in the crowd or to Laura's golem Nown only for quick visits. In some cases, the character chosen as the camera lens on a particular scene or

sequence is not even the character most dramatically affected. Ultimately, this inability to predict whose perspective the narrator will select to reveal certain events yields a greater investment in the narrative as a whole, underscoring each event's importance to the entire story world, instilling that all-important sense of sweep.

Knox's fantasy sequence ultimately does the unthinkable—creates an elaborate fantasy world and tears it apart, destroying it completely by the story's end. And yet, we cannot mourn that loss, because we have become too attached to the other world, the "real" world of Southland inhabited by so many characters we have come to love, despise or be fascinated by (sometimes all three at once). It is a testament to Knox's skill that we ultimately like her people far more than her fantasy creation. Had Knox chosen a point of view with less scale than the OPOV, the reader's emotional investment in the believability of the world as a greater whole would have been compromised.

The omniscient viewpoint's flexibility makes it suitable not just for multi-volume, larger-than-worlds stories like Knox and Pullman's, but for more self-contained fantasies. Omniscience can endow smaller stories and more personal events with a larger sense of meaning by adding additional layers. Zusak's much-feted The Book Thief and Link's YA novella "Magic for Beginners" are entirely different sorts of stories than those we have discussed so far, drawing more of their power from inventiveness than from magic. However, the use of an omniscient narrator is critical to the success of each.

Zusak's novel is not a traditional fantasy, but draws upon a fantastical conceit—the story is told by the personification of Death, the ultimate omniscient narrator (at least as portrayed). Zusak creates a unique character in Death, employing energetic prose and stylistic flourishes, including bolded and centered proclamations:

*****A SMALL BUT NOTEWORTHY NOTE*****

**I've seen so many young men
over the years who think they're
running at other young men.
They are not.
They're running at me" (174).**

Zusak uses his distinctive omniscient narrator to enable the smaller story of one girl to carry the weight of the tragedies of other characters caught in the war, and to make a larger point about the power of stories.

When Death tells us that the story he will share is that of the book thief, a girl named Liesel Meminger he has seen three times, what he says is true and not true. The poignancy of Death's involvement in the life of one girl, in a time when we know that he would be intimately familiar with the deaths of millions, is devastatingly effective. We identify with Liesel and engage with her story because Death, our guide, is fascinated with her. The omniscient narrator in this case is the fantasy that we accept, enabling him to focus us on the reality—ugly, sometimes beautiful, always fascinating—of Liesel's life.

Death vividly captures not just her, but the people she grows to know and love, sharing with us not the whole world, but *her* world, a small universe full of large meaning. In telling Liesel's story, Death is telling us something else: that all humans die, but that we also have the potential to be remembered. No other choice of point of view could have produced such an effective and ironic contrast within the narrative itself. That contrast reveals the importance of each individual life, along with larger-than-life commonalities. Like Pullman and Knox's novels,

The Book Thief demonstrates that the omniscient narrator can still be tremendously relevant through ambitious storytelling.

Link has published a series of strange fantasy short stories in several anthologies targeted at teens—such as The Faery Reel, The Restless Dead, and The Coyote Road—that will be collected this fall in a YA short story collection of their very own, Pretty Monsters. Though she is working at a much shorter length than the authors discussed so far, her YA novella "Magic for Beginners" employs a particularly interesting omniscient voice that questions the nature of reality itself. "Magic for Beginners" may be the story of suburban teenager Jeremy Mars and his favorite (fictional) TV show, *The Library*, or it may be an episode of that show, or it may be a thought experiment. The omniscient narrator is a particularly fitting choice given the focus on a television program—albeit one like nothing that actually exists—since most TV programs are told from the vantage of an ordering force not unlike the omniscient narrator. This narrator signals from the opening lines that we will be directly involved in creating this story by talking to us: "Fox is a television character, and she isn't dead yet. But she will be soon. She's a character on a television show called *The Library*. You've never seen *The Library* on TV, but I bet you wish you had" (189).

The narrator of this novella is mysterious, mirroring the uncertainty about reality in the story. The narrator keeps us off kilter throughout, not showing her hand as Pullman or Knox's narrator might. There is a similarity to Pullman's narrator in the tone, though, a hint of the narrator being older than the teenage Jeremy:

"Karl's always pissed off about something," Jeremy says. Jeremy is resolutely resisting a notion about Elizabeth. Why are they sitting up here? Was it his idea or was it hers? Are they friends, are they just two friends sitting on the roof and

talking? Or is Jeremy supposed to try to kiss her. He thinks maybe he's supposed to kiss her. If he kisses her, will they still be friends? He can't ask Karl about this. Karl doesn't believe in being helpful. Karl believes in mocking" (190).

While it is tricky to draw a hard line between what Jeremy is actually thinking and what the narrator is expressing, the presence comes through in the phrase "resolutely resisting." This is not the language of this particular teenage boy. The narrator plays with us over the course of the story, leaving us with as many questions as answers: Is protagonist Jeremy real? Is he a character on *The Library*? Can he be both? Are we watching an imaginary television show? Whatever the case, we are left as huge fans of *The Library*, and the author's choice to tell the tale using the OPOV.

Both Link and Zusak showcase something the omniscient narrator is particularly suited to—the story about story. Omniscience obviously does not *have* to be employed in this way, commenting on the nature of story, but it is worth pointing out as a specific use. The omniscient voice is deployed in this way with some regularly by experimental contemporary writers. Kress says that omniscient point of view "emphasizes the artificial nature of the story, is a natural for metafiction" (205), meaning fiction about fiction. The omniscient narrators of metafiction seem to be saying, "Look, this story is as real as anything else."

The Reality Game

The OPOV may be more common in speculative fiction, but it also has a rich tradition in the realistic novel. Fantasy never turned away from its use to the same degree as mainstream literary realism, however. Contemporary realistic fiction continues to employ the OPOV far less than fantasy. Anderson sees reasons why that might be true in another literary fashion trend:

"A few things have to be recognized about American realism, especially as it has been practiced since the late '70s, that strain often called minimalism. First of all, it demands, brutally and (I think) disingenuously, that the writer should not 'show his hand,' that an artifact should be created which appears to be created seamlessly and without effort or rhetorical direction. While this is fine as an illusion, I think it's bullshit as a philosophy, and feeds into an unexamined notion of what 'reality' consists of. It is a style (and an ideology) that tends to constrict gesture, genre, and diction" (Bond, 2008).

The fallout of minimalism and the disdain for fingerprints on fiction are still the most prominent aesthetics driving the popularity of the third person limited viewpoint in today's realistic fiction. They are primarily responsible for the idea that a transparent prose style is best. As author and teacher Ben Yagoda writes his preface to The Sound on the Page: Style and Voice in Writing, "Simplicity, clarity, and invisibility are, in any case, the gospel in almost all post-Strunk and White writing manuals, whether or not they invoke the word *style*. each time, it's the same minimalist and impersonal doctrine" (xx). The OPOV is not invisible, as we have seen, but audacious (to varying degrees, of course). The good news is that the omniscient viewpoint has made somewhat of a comeback in this arena. Popular writers like Karen Joy Fowler, John Fowles, and Julia Glass have successfully employed omniscience in novels for adults within recent publishing history.

Once again, in the YA field, we find authors from outside America serving as the chief pioneers of the OPOV's use in the realistic novel. Mahy's The Catalogue of the Universe, Dubosarsky's The Red Shoe, and Clarke's One Whole and Perfect Day are prime examples of such work from the southern hemisphere. These three novels may be smaller in scope (and page

count) than their fantasy counterparts, but they retain access to the complicating thoughts and perspective of multiple characters, as does American Schmidt's Lizzie Bright and the Buckminster Boy. Very different books result in each case, showing the breadth of effect that can be achieved with the OPOV. Mahy, Dubosarsky, and Schmidt employ an OPOV focused on just two to three major characters, but Clarke's narrator visits the viewpoints of nearly everyone inhabiting her story. We will look first at how the OPOV enhances the more closely focused stories, and then examine what Clarke has accomplished using a wider lens.

In Mahy's The Catalogue of the Universe, the focus stays on two teenage friends, Angela May and Tycho Potter, as they become lovers. Mahy takes care to subtly assert the omniscient narrator's presence from the very first page, offering expansive description interspersed during Angela May's moonlight walk. Once the narrator is established, Mahy grows bolder and the omniscient narrator quickly becomes an even stronger presence. In the second chapter, the narrator leaves the protagonists at the end of the chapter, pulling back from Tycho's perspective to linger on his mother, Mrs. Potter, and then visit the cat:

"She seldom joined in the exchanges of smart remarks which Richard, Tycho and Africa used to entertain themselves, but she had a soft way of having the last word, due, no doubt, to years of practice. Her sons went to their separate rooms, glad that they were not being forced to share, after all. Within a few moments the house was as quiet and restful as it had been before the interruption, and Morris-the-cat, realizing the fridge would not be opened just yet, curled up in a carton of cleaning rags beside it, and went to sleep too" (20).

The reader feels no discomfort visiting the cat or the thoughts of Tycho's brother Richard. Mahy offers a prime example of how writers of realistic fiction can capitalize on the flexibility and freedom offered by the omniscient viewpoint to emphasize their stories' thematic concerns.

The voice of the omniscient narrator perfectly underscores the romance between Tycho and Angela that forms Catalogue's heart. Even the prose's rhythm captures the breathless obsession and fixation that are so much a part of teen love:

"But Tycho wanted to be as beautiful as Lucifer, and instead, he sat here in the kitchen with his mother telling him he had nice eyes, and, somewhere out in the city, Angela was wandering quite out of control—unless, after all, she had changed her mind and gone home. He let himself glance casually at the phone, squatting in its corner beyond the fridge like a disinterested toad. He had let her go. He had not even turned when she called his name across the street" (108).

The emotions of teen love are often tempestuous and filled with regret. The way we witness these thoughtful characters go over and over their moments with each other, casting and recasting them in their minds, rings true. The presence of the omniscient narrator hums beneath it all like a current, conducting the electricity that the teenagers feel for each other. When the two of them finally have sex, we cut away, and rejoin them afterward. The choice is exactly right.

The narrator—and readers—have become as romantic as the protagonists.

Though the primary characters in Catalogue are Angela and Tycho, the use of other viewpoints in a limited way—like the cat's—supports the narrative's overarching theme. This is a story about the romance of two young people swept up in the expansiveness of the universe. It makes perfect sense, then, that the narrator can burrow down to the cat's level, or hover out at the distance of a star. The waxing and waning of the narrator's presence is appropriate to the story's

romantic and thematic nature. The book itself is named for a book within the text, a choice that structurally supports its concern with the many layers of existence. Dealing with heady subjects like philosophy, astronomy, and love, Mahy has chosen a point of view that will expand and contract as she needs in order to capture the sweep of those subjects.

In The Red Shoe, Dubosarsky's omniscient narrator reveals the perspectives of three sisters—Elizabeth, Frances, and Matilda (oldest to youngest). The novel is set during the Petrov Affair, a sensational 1954 episode involving the defection of a Russian diplomat to Australia. Unbeknownst to the family at the center of Dubosarsky's story (with the exception of Matilda), they are living next door to the Petrov safe house, where the defector is guarded by strange men in black suits. They are a complicated family, smothered beneath the weight of the world stage—the girls' father has been severely damaged by the war, even attempting suicide at one point.

We have all been told how important it is to create complex, fully realized characters with whom the reader can closely identify. Again, while it might make sense to assume that the OPOV—which necessitates some degree of "telling"—would create distance between the reader and the characters in the story, in practice this does not hold true. The reader can bond to the omniscient narrator as strongly as they would to any character. The reader falls instantly in love with the voice behind The Red Shoe, at the beginning of chapter one: "In a house far away, right at the end of a long, dusty road deep in the bush at the back of Palm Beach, lived three sisters with their mother, their father, and sometimes their Uncle Paul. The three sisters were called Elizabeth, Frances, and Matilda" (11). This passage masterfully evokes the fairy tale, by the use of the language "in a house far away," with its "once upon a time" echoes, and even the fact that there are three sisters. (Fairy tales are stuffed with threes.) Not only does it immediately bond us

with the omniscient narrator and create interest in the story, it subconsciously calls up our acceptance of the OPOV so common to fairy tales.

The omniscient narrator's voice also renders the thoughts and eccentricities of the children in an engaging, light-handed way. In the prologue featuring a retelling of "The Red Shoes," also clearly invoking fairy tale mores, Matilda contemplates religion:

"Matilda nodded. There was a Catholic school not far from their own. Matilda sometimes peeked through the fence on the way home to look at the beautiful white statues of Jesus and Mary in the asphalt playground, like shining swans on a hard gray lake. There was a church next to the school, and on Saturdays and Sundays it was always full of people because Catholics loved going to church all the time, but the priest spoke a different language that only God could understand. A girl at school called Isabel told her all about it. Isabel knew because her auntie was a Catholic. Catholics really believe, Isabel said. Doesn't everyone believe? wondered Matilda, because she believed, at least she thought she did. Not like Catholics, said Isabel" (5).

The narrator's distance in showing us this incident comes across as older and wiser, without being judgmental or condescending. Clever juxtapositions between the character's own perceptions and the narrator's rendering of them can provide flashes of humor in the text.

Just as Mahy's choice supports the expansiveness of her romantic universe, Dubosarsky's narrator focuses us with masterful subtlety on the human impact of world events. Her introduction of Matilda is a perfect example:

"Matilda was the youngest. Matilda was six. Some six-year-olds are not sneaky, but Matilda was. Her hair was black and so were her eyes. Even her blood was

nearly black and seeped out very, very slowly when she cut herself. She was like a spy.

"You're not brave enough to be a spy," her friend Floreal told her. "You're cowards, all of you."

"My father is brave," Matilda retorted. "He was in the war."

"The war is over now," said Floreal. "And he's not so brave, anyway. I have seen him go white in the face when a big lizard crawled up the back step" (12).

In this short passage, the omniscient narrator provides us with perspective on Matilda's character, but also introduces the fact that her father fought in the war and the question of what bravery means. As Floreal, Matilda's imaginary friend, points out, the war is over and the family must deal with its fallout alone. We immediately know the story's terrain.

Dubosarsky gives glimpses of those larger world events—some concerning developments in the Petrov incident—by incorporating period news stories as interstitials placed between chapters. The omniscient narrator does not explicitly recount these events, but the reader still knows the news clippings have been placed to show us precisely the context that the narrator believes we need. In a talk at the Reading Matters Conference called "Pushing the Boundaries," Dubosarsky spoke of the strategy and what it aims to achieve:

"It's that swoon I want to express in all my novels, a realization of the vastness of interpretation, what Louis McNeice referred to as the nature of the world being 'incurably plural.' In terms of Abyssinia and The Red Shoe, an excerpt from a newspaper is one way to tell a story, a child's parody of a newspaper is another, again a rational recount is one, a dream is another, a court case or a memory of a doll's point of view are yet others, as are the versions of each child in a family,

like the three girls in The Red Shoe. All these perspectives connect and are perhaps unresolvably intertwined in the fabric of the story. I found it quite uncanny in The Red Shoe at various points how the nonfiction of the newspaper and the fiction of the novel seemed to slip over into each other's territory, becoming part of some whole huge resonant elusive truth" (2007).

Her objective presentation of the news accounts heightens the narrator's focus on what is going on in the shadow of that larger stage—the story of these three girls, and, by extension, their family. The OPOV is uniquely suited to provide the "swoon" Dubosarsky craves.

Ultimately the storyteller's voice unifies the three sisters' story, providing larger coherence and meaning. In an interview, Dubosarsky confirmed that was her intention: "My original idea was that the story would be told equally from the three different girls' point of view . . . I never thought of it as one girl's story, absolutely not, I wanted it to be the three of them" (Bond, 2008). During the editing process, Dubosarsky was pushed to place a greater emphasis on Matilda, and while all three sisters are still represented, she said she regrets the loss of equal viewpoints within the published version. The novel remains a beautiful success, but it would have been anyway. The omniscient narrator's voice binds the story together, no matter which sister we follow.

The Red Shoe also serves as a reminder that novels set in other historical moments are well suited to the OPOV, since they share several overlapping concerns with the fantasy genre—most notably, the need to fully evoke an unfamiliar world. As previously discussed, the Printz Award has honored just one realistic young adult novel written by an American using the omniscient viewpoint, Schmidt's historical Lizzie Bright and the Buckminster Boy. In this novel, Schmidt crafts a gentler, less noticeable strand of omniscience than Mahy or Dubosarsky, but the

choice still elevates the thematic concerns about race, entitlement, and land development that are so central to the story.

Lizzie Bright could easily be mistaken for limited third person. It opens on Turner Buckminster, and while there is a clear narrative presence, it is unclear at first whether that presence will stay focused solely on Turner. We do get a hint that we may be dealing with an omniscient narrator from the very first page: "Every member of Phippsburg's First Congregational—as well as lost reprobates from other denominations—had gathered to greet the new minister and his family" (1). After all, there is no way that Turner, arriving for the first time in Phippsburg, could know who is a member of the regular congregation and who is visiting. However, it remains possible that the viewpoint is third person limited with a more distanced narration than the "close to character" kind typically employed. Two-thirds of the way through chapter one, just before the introduction of Lizzie Bright, the omniscient narrator becomes more prominent:

"The sea surge that had drawn up the coastal waters of Maine poured past the cliffs and tore along the ragged coast. It covered the high rocks—dry for more than three months of high tides—all the way from Small Point up past Harpswell. When it had finished its fussing, it seethed back down the New Meadows River, sluicing between the mainland and the islands. It spent its last surge on one rock-shouldered heap just a spit or two off the coast, frothing over the mudflats, setting the clam holes flapping, and carrying a small, startled crab out from its weedy hiding place. It tumbled upside down up the island shore and onto a toe stretched toward the water" (15).

We go on to meet Lizzie here, sampling her perspective. This passage clearly demonstrates a narrative presence with access to more than Turner could know, and the ability to visit other characters' viewpoints. The narrator, however, largely avoids visiting the interior perspective of anyone other than Turner.

The question of why an omniscient narrator is needed at all in this story might come up, but setting, weather, and place are tremendously important to Schmidt's fictional rendering of the real 1912 theft of Malaga Island from a small African American community under the guise of "progress." The only natural way to include those environmental elements—to give the land a strong voice and character of its own—is through the use of the omniscient narrator. The narrator uses commentary on these elements to provide unity across distance and smooth transitions across time:

"It rained all night, and Turner up in Phippsburg and Lizzie down on Malaga Island lay in their beds in the deep dark, their arms up behind their heads, listening to the play of the drops on their roofs. The drops played long after Turner and Lizzie had fallen asleep, and they played while Turner's mother and father lay still and unmoving in the dark, and they played while Lizzie's granddaddy sat quietly at his door, an unlit pipe in his mouth. They played across the coast all through the night, until the soft new day shrugged itself awake, tried on amethyst and lavender for a while, and finally decided on a pale yellow" (54).

The omniscient narrator even uses these powers to insert an outside perspective into key scenes, having the weather reflect the emotions of Turner or the turmoil of the larger situation in the town. In an e-mail, Schmidt confirmed this was his intention: "It seemed to me that I could focus on him, but also give a larger sense of the play of the mainland and island settings, thus saying

things with the third person narrator that he wouldn't necessarily say as a narrator, but which he as a character would observe—which is the main reason for the narrative choice" (2008). I have already discussed why the presence of an omniscient narrator does not necessarily have to create distance between the reader and the story. Schmidt's book, however, does use the omniscient narrator in this way. The overall effect of the narrator in this case is to make the story bearable—to keep us a little bit distant from Turner and the other characters so that we can continue to see the larger story.

If there is a flaw to Schmidt's approach it lies in inconsistency in how he uses the viewpoint. Lizzie's perspective is visited at the beginning of the novel several times. Schmidt's narrator first shows us her perspective in chapter one on the beach (15), then again in chapter two during the key scene when the Phippsburg delegation orders the Malaga Island residents to vacate their property (30), and, finally, during chapter three when Lizzie first encounters Turner (43-44). Following those more prominent examples, the only hints of her interior state we get are more distanced, after she hits her head on a rock: "She tried to stand up, Turner behind her and holding onto her, but her feet didn't go where she wanted them to, and Turner had to steer her as she swayed and zigzagged to the dory" (73). Even here, we mostly see Lizzie only as Turner does and through her actions.

The decision to stop allowing access to Lizzie's perspective ultimately comes across as a conveniently developed restriction when she and her people are taken away to the home for the feeble-minded at Pownal, near the novel's end. A snow storm prevents Turner from immediately being able to go after her. It comes as a blow—as it is meant to—when Turner arrives at Pownal and is told by the matron that "Elizabeth Bright Griffin died ten days after coming to this institution" (201). In an e-mail exchange, Schmidt admitted this is problematic, saying that the

early pages in Lizzie's point of view are "cheating, but I really wanted to have those pages" (Bond, 2008).

If this had been *only* Turner's story up to this point—if the narrator had been denied her perspective all along—this would not be an issue. Schmidt makes his own strategy clear: "For my part, I hoped that this would accentuate the notion that this is Turner's story, the story of the growth of his soul, in a sense, as he begins to mature into adulthood" (Bond, 2008). Because we have sampled Lizzie's perspective and know it is available if the author desires, a clear reason for the omniscient narrator to stop accessing Lizzie's experience is necessary. Even if the reason we lost Lizzie's perspective was tied to her being removed from Malaga and her beloved home, since the narrator is so closely bound to the environment, it would seem less convenient and contrived. Lizzie's death is necessary to give the story its full meaning and historical context, but the way in which Schmidt chooses to deliver it is counterintuitive within the parameters of the omniscient narrator. Still, at least Schmidt is consistent in characterizing Turner's emotional response, calling again on setting as metaphor:

"Turner felt the cold of the place come into him. He could not move. It was as though the bricks surrounded him and him alone. He felt that he would never escape them, never see anyone he loved again, never see the ocean waves again. That he would always be cold, and the cold would be in him more than around him" (201).

Despite the shortcomings in juggling perspectives consistently, the use of the OPOV adds a larger sense of purpose and meaning to a beautiful, largely successful novel. Schmidt is to be commended for taking on a point of view many American writers shy away from.

While the three realistic novels we have looked at so far visit the viewpoints of only a handful of characters, Clarke's One Whole and Perfect Day shows that it is possible to incorporate far more in such works. The novel's action is loosely organized around teenage Lily's desire for one perfect day, a break from the imperfect family life that makes her feel old before her time. Lily's wish comes to be represented by her grandmother May's decision to throw a party for her husband Stan's 80th birthday. Clarke's novel masterfully shows us the weeks leading up to the party through the viewpoints of Lily and her family—and those in their wider orbit—leaving us wondering but hopeful, about whether they will get the perfect day they richly deserve. The use of the OPOV elevates this simple, barely-there story to greater heights, constantly surprising the reader with unexpected viewpoints and insightful narration.

Clarke has employed the omniscient viewpoint before in her works and her confidence comes through in her risky decision to delay the widening out from Lily's perspective until chapter three. On the first page, much as with Lizzie Bright, we sense the narrator's presence, telling us about Lily:

"Every day on her way home from school, Lily lingered in the quiet streets and avenues of her neighborhood gazing through the windows of the houses at the families inside. She saw kids watching TV and doing their homework and playing computer games; she saw mums and dads talking and laughing together, chopping vegetables in their kitchens, stirring pots on the stove. Proper families, Lily would think to herself, they're proper families" (7).

Clarke's narrator goes on to introduce us to Lily's immediate family, as she walks home. Her confidence also comes through in this section; rather than opening with a proper scene, the

narrator is simply telling us about the characters. This is rule breaking of the highest order. Clarke need not justify her decision, because it works.

We are immediately engaged, not just with Lily but also with the story's conceit. Clarke's story seeks to discover the nature of family—Is there such a thing as a normal family? Can this freaky family find happiness together? Are families born or made? How many ways can we be connected to each other?—and she effortlessly absorbs us into the story's thematic concerns. All that rule breaking in chapter one turns out to be carefully calculated to define the story's parameters and prepare us for the many viewpoint shifts to come. We are quickly and firmly grounded in Lily and her family, so by the time we visit another perspective in chapter three, the jump feels natural: "In her small stuffy office at the day-care center, Lily's mother Marigold closed down her computer, stretched, and yawned. It hadn't been a bad day, she reflected: no one had wandered from the premises" (16). Clarke carefully ensures we know whose viewpoint we are visiting, and how that connects with Lily. We accept it without a blink because we want to meet these people. We want to see the story through their eyes too.

Following this, Clarke moves with speed to show just how wide the omniscient narrator will range. In chapter four, the narrator delicately establishes a sense of scope:

"As Marigold drove down the highway toward home, the winter night began to close about the city. It crept down from the mountains where Nan and Pop lived, spreading an inky stain across the suburbs on the plain. Lights came on in the streets and houses, in Lily and Marigold's place and in Lonnie's Boarding House for Gentlemen, and in Mercer College, where, as the students returned, the windows lit up one by one until the residence hall was a tall bright tower against the darkened sky" (22).

We then meet Clara Lee, our first viewpoint outside Lily's immediate family—but she is thinking about Lonnie, Lily's ne'er-do-well brother. Clarke's narrator then jumps to Clara's friend next door, Jessaline O'Harris, who is struggling with familial issues of her own and later connects with Clara's own estranged mother. Finally, we meet Lonnie, and then Pop (Stan) and Nan (May), asleep and dreaming. By the end of the novel, we do not question at all a brief snapshot of the thoughts of a homeless, mute, pregnant girl who has become a shared focus of Stan and Lonnie: "Her name was Lucy. And as the train sped westward through the dark, she had the unaccustomed feeling that she was going home" (248). We know that she is about to be enveloped by the family we have come to love through the story, swept up in the magic of their one perfect day. In one last bold statement, the story ends just before the party starts.

Clarke's expert use of the OPOV is wholly effective, and clearly the only way this beautiful novel could exist. It simply could not be told in any other point of view to the same stunning effect. In fact, told in limited third person, multiple third or first person, One Whole and Perfect Day would risk being overly sentimental. Its joyful conclusion would be hard to swallow without the larger perspective and sense of meaning the omniscient narrator brings. A perfect example of the possibilities of omniscience and its ability to give old themes and stories new life, this novel should be required reading for all writers of realistic fiction for teens.

These realistic novels by Clarke, Schmidt, Dubosarsky, and Mahy give a strong sense of the immense range of possibilities available to writers willing to follow in their trail-blazing footsteps. What becomes clear in looking at the variety of successful fiction using omniscience is that there really is no limit on what kind of story it can enhance. Turn about is fair play. Far from coming across as old-fashioned, the OPOV now brings a sense of freshness for the contemporary reader, a seductive, come-hither quality of the new and radical.

Reaching for Such Great Heights

The one thing all the writing authorities agree on is that using the OPOV well is difficult. In fact, this may be one of the reasons that it is often dismissed without much discussion in the writing classroom. Sensing like any good omniscient narrator that the audience is ready for concealed information, it is time for me to share Le Guin's entire statement on the OPOV partially quoted at the beginning of this essay: "It's not only the oldest and the most widely used storytelling voice, it's also the most versatile, flexible, and complex of the points of view—and probably, at this point, *the most difficult for the writer*" (87). (Emphasis provided.) Of course, it is difficult. But difficult is not the same as impossible.

As Anderson says, "Sure, it's more difficult to write, because you need to summon up several characters' points of view, rather than working out simply one, and you need to be able to segue clearly between them, which is a skill in itself" (Bond, 2008). Such a task can be intimidating, especially the idea of ably handling the perspectives of multiple characters. We should not be scared off by these challenges. In an interview, Australian writer Justine Larbalestier said, "All points of view have their technical challenges. And most beginning writers are horrible at all of them. The only reason writing teachers haven't outlawed first person and limited third is because those viewpoints are so ubiquitous they're invisible to them" (Bond, 2008). She has it exactly right—all points of view come with intrinsic difficulties. There is no easy path to a great story. The choice of point of view should always be a balancing act between the advantages of the different points of view, the needs of the story, and the writer's intuition about what seems right.

None of the works we have examined would ever be mistaken for another. Anderson points out the range of effects the OPOV can yield: "Keep in mind that third person omniscient narration can be very pale and bloodless—or riotously sloshing with characters' consciousness, as in Woolf's later novels—or joyously directed and narrated by a highly intrusive storyteller, as is the case in many novels for kids. It does not have to be one way or the other" (Bond, 2008). Omniscience provides the opportunity to use language and voice in ways that close third or first person cannot with their usual focus on the character's voice. It takes guts for writers to buck ubiquity and literary fashion. Fowler says, "I was told early on by someone who was, I think, quoting Delany, that you should choose the smallest POV possible with which to tell your story, but I like the exuberance of omniscient. I like to feel I can spread out" (Bond, 2008). The results of such gutsy choices—as we have seen—speak volumes. Connecting with the voice of an omniscient narrator can be a profound and exhilarating experience for readers of all ages, and all tastes.

Finally, contemporary omniscience is an ambitious, bold choice, worth the risk and complexity writers must deal with when the story demands. It is past time that we fully restore the OPOV's standing as a valid choice in the range of options available to today's writers—for children, young adults, and for adults. Surely what Delany, Card, Burroway, and other literary authorities have objected to is not the OPOV, but the inappropriate or unskilled use of it. Surely no one is suggesting that writers focus on what is in vogue or fashion when deciding what point of view best supports the stories they have to tell. The OPOV offers nearly limitless freedom to an author to choose any perspective, at any moment, in service of the story. Writers choosing this viewpoint should not fear the reaction of readers, for readers require only that an author makes

the choice work. When we read, often we seek nothing more than another point of view. The noble storyteller's voice allows us that and far more.

It is a cold, clear, bright day when we next visit our imaginary American writer. She sits down at her desk, dreaming of possibilities for the new novel she is ready to begin. The story is not like anything she has attempted before. She feels scared, but excited. She knows she is about to surprise herself. She pauses a moment, considering her options, asking that essential question, and an attractive alternative to the same old-same old occurs to her. She thinks, "This is a time of explosive invention, a golden age of YA fiction. Now is the moment to push the boundaries and see how much further we can go." She thinks that, chooses the omniscient point of view for the very first time, and starts to remake the landscape of the field.

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