

AN ANALYSIS OF POINT OF VIEW IN FIVE SHORT STORIES

Beş Kısa Öyküde Bakış Açısı İncelemesi

Hasan ÇAKIR*

ÖZET

Bu çalışmanın alanı, bakış açısı ve türevleri ile sınırlıdır. Bu incelemede kısa öyküde genel olarak kullanılan bakış açısı biçimleri kuramsal yönden açıklanmış ve çeşitleri ve uygulama biçimleri üzerinde durulmuştur. Beş öykü içerisinde, bakış açılarının çeşitli şekilde uygulanışı incelenmiştir. Ayrıca, kullanılan bakış açılarının seçilen öykülere sağladığı yazınsal katkı belirtilmiştir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: *Bakış Açısı, Kısa Öykü, İngiliz Edebiyatı*

INTRODUCTION

A writer must have a point of view to tell his story. He has three basic points of view at his command. By their respective usage in literature, they are third person, first person, and finally second person point of view. The fiction writer is free to choose any of them at the very beginning. Once he adopted any of them to narrate the story, the writer is expected to stick to his choice. It is necessary for the writer to reveal the story only through that point of view he has selected. In this way, he will have no difficulty in consistency. When he becomes inconsistent in narration of the story, the writer will confuse the mind of the reader. As a result, his work will naturally contain a flaw in the aesthetic unity. Consistency in a work is so obvious an aesthetic constituent that an ordinary reader can easily notice its inexistence. However, the adoption of a particular point of view is regarded as a promise between the reader and the writer. When he makes any change in perspective, the writer must provide for the reader a satisfactory explanation of why he does not keep his promise, and must have an artistic motivation of why he makes such a change in point of view. The instant when his message requires different perspectives, the writer feels obliged to use various points of views. Properly sup-

* Selçuk Üniversitesi, Eğitim Fakültesi, İngiliz Dili Eğitimi Anabilim Dalı Öğretim Üyesi

plied with a right perspective, the reader will be able to make a more objective evaluation of the writer's message diffused in the work.

There are many ways of telling a story. Setting up certain rules for himself, the fiction writer decides upon his way of telling before he begins to write. Instead of telling the story himself, the writer may let one of his characters tell it for him, he may use letters or diaries as a medium to reveal his story, he may limit himself to explaining the thoughts of one of his characters. In order to find out the viewpoint of a story, the reader should ask such questions as: Who tells the story? How much does he know? From which standpoint does he observe the events? and To what extent does the author enter the mind of his characters and report their thoughts? The answers given to these questions will be helpful to determine the point of view consistently used in the story.

1. THIRD PERSON POINT OF VIEW

Despite many possible variations and combinations, the third person viewpoints can be divided into three categories as follows: omniscient point of view or editorial omniscience, limited omniscient point of view and finally objective author point of view.

Of all the points of view, none can give as much information on the story and characters as the omniscient point of view, which transcends the dimension of a human. The writer grants the narrator the privilege of knowing all and seeing all from a perspective called divine in theological terminology. The narrator with the omniscient viewpoint has a god-like stance before the events, and knows virtually everything about the characters involved in the incidents, together with their actions, emotions, and thoughts. The third person omniscient point of view is the oldest viewpoint in literary history. For that reason, it is observed to have been used in holy books, legends, and mythologies. According to Guerin and others (1999:88), in the great epics and in most traditional novels of an earlier day, the omniscient narrator possesses godlike quality and narrates from a third person perspective.

In addition, the omniscient point of view provides for the writer a vast and wide vision usually difficult to control. As Friedman (1969:154) points out, *omniscience* signifies literally a completely unlimited point of view. The story may be seen from any or all angles at will: from a godlike vantage point beyond time and place, from the centre, the periphery, or the front. There is nothing to keep the author from choosing any of them, or from shifting from one to the others as often or rarely as he pleases.

The reader has therefore an access to the complete range of possible kinds of information. The distinguishing features of this viewpoint are the thoughts, feelings, and perceptions of the author himself. He is not only free to inform the reader of the ideas and emotions within the minds of his characters, but of his own. The characteristic mark of editorial omniscience is the presence of the au-

thorial intrusion and generalization about life, manners, and morals, which may or may not explicitly related to the story at hand.

For the reader, the *omniscient point of view* provides information on the following areas of knowledge:

1. It objectively reports what happens in the story.
2. It enters the mind of any character.
3. It explains the thoughts of the characters even if they are unable to explain them.
4. It gives information about the past, present, and the future in connection with the story and the characters.
5. It makes general explanation about life, characters, and expresses universal truth.

The following are examples of these five knowledge areas:

2. One dollar and eighty-seven cents. 4. That was all she had saved. 1. Three times Della counted it. 2. Only one dollar and eighty-seven cents. 4. And the next day would be Christmas. 3. There was clearly nothing she could do now but fall down an old worn couch and cry. 1. So Della did. 5. You see life is made of tears and smiles - but mainly of tears. (O Henry:1974, 1).

Even in this simple example, O Henry freely strolls on these areas. The fields of knowledge that the third person omniscient point of view would be possibly present are numbered in the extract given above. In sentences numbered two, the narrator enters Della's mind and explains what she has thought: the sum of money is not enough for her to buy a Christmas present for her husband. In sentence number 1, the narrator objectively explains what Della has done. She counts the money. In sentence 4, the narrator knows what she had saved and the *past perfect tense* indicates that the narrator was near her in the past. The narrator has watched her saving up some money until that time. In addition, he knows what will be tomorrow. Tomorrow will be Christmas. In sentence 3, the narrator explains what is suitable for Della or expected of her. Finally, the sentence numbered five, the narrator, namely the writer himself, makes a general reflection about the nature of life. Life is made of happiness and sorrow and underlines the abundance of sorrow in life.

In the limited omniscient point of view, the writer may assume on himself any authority or any privilege of the omniscient narrator. He may enter the mind of main character and not enter that of the other. He knows something about character's present life, but nothing about the past or future. He might abstain from making general explanation about life. He can objectively report the actions of some characters and never makes any evaluation on them. This way, the writer draws a limit to his vision and to his power in certain areas of knowledge.

In a way, the limited omniscient point of view is a modernist perspective. Conscious of his art, the modernist writer can give a detailed explanation on a certain character limiting himself to that single character alone. In addition, he

frequently avoids passing general reflection on life believing that life is hard to fathom. In fact, a modernist writer tries to violate the conventional devices or limit them to a certain extent. The limited omniscient viewpoint lends itself to the aesthetic understanding of the modern writer.

In contrast, the objective author point of view is an external observation of the character and his actions. While telling the story, the novelist sometimes limits himself with the visible, the perceivable in reality. So the writer finds it indispensable to explain the action, character, setting, and atmosphere and to make some description only through five senses: sight, sound, smell, touch, and taste. Explaining the external signs is satisfactory for the writer in terms of his aesthetic motivation. In this case, the detached writer keeps his perspective as objective as a movie camera.

The objective author point of view lends itself to dramatic narration. With this perspective, the writer observes the characters and their external behaviours and social standing in the world. He can neither go into their minds and interpret their thoughts, nor give information on their past and future life. As he writes as if watching characters act in front of him, the writer obliges the reader to know the story and to make some inference about the outcome of the story. The focus directed by the writer in any directions, the reader gropes for the narrative line of the story. In such a perspective, there is no room for subjective telling. As a result, the reader himself will understand and interpret the complications of the character and his struggle for its solution. Delighted by his own inferences, the reader thus takes an aesthetic pleasure from the dramatic uncovering of the complication followed by an appropriate solution.

Ernest Hemingway in *Hills Like White Elephants* successfully uses objective author point of view:

They sat down at the table and the girl looked across at the hills on the dry side of the valley and the man looked at her and at the table.

"You've got to realise," he said, "that I don't want to do it if you don't want to. I'm perfectly willing to go through with it if it means anything to you."

"Does it mean anything to you? We could get along." "Of course it does. But I don't want anybody but you. I don't want anybody else. And I know it's perfectly simple."

"Yes, you know it's perfectly simple."

"It is all right for you to say that, but I do know it."

"Would you do something for me now?"

"I'd do anything for you."

"Would you please please please please please please please stop talking?"

He did not say anything but looked at the bags against the wall of the station. There were labels on them from all the hotels where they had spent nights. (Hemingway: 1927; in Perrine: 1956, 206-210)

In this story the American and the girl, Jig, talks about abortion in a bar near a station. Across the valley, the Ebro River is seen from the pub they sit down. With no shade and no trees, the hills look like white elephants. The American tries to persuade the girl, Jig, to have an operation. The girl does not want to undergo that operation. They drink beer in pub and have a quarrel about the subject. The reader understands the subject through the dialogue between the girl and the American. The writer narrates their behaviour as if he were present there never going into their mind and interpreting their speech. The evaluation of the theme remains with the reader to the extent that he is able to infer and understand. Burroway (1988:62) states that the characters avoid the subject, prevaricate, and pretend, but they betray their real meanings and feelings through gestures, repetitions, and slips of tongue. Centre of attention directed by the author, the reader learns their problem by inference, as in life, so the reader has the pleasure of knowing the characters better than the created characters know themselves. The reader also understands the message of the story as though he were watching the characters act on a stage. In this kind of standpoint, the dialogues are instrumental to revealing the characters and their actions in an unmediated way.

2. FIRST PERSON POINT OF VIEW

When narrated by a character, the story is told in the first person. The point to which the reader must pay attention is that the writer cannot be the first person narrator to recount the story but the narrator will be a character drawn by the writer. Wellek and Warren (1942:222) make this point and state that “telling a story in the first person is a method to be carefully weighed against others. Such a narrator must not be confounded with the author.” Moreover, the first person viewpoint cannot be omniscient because of a human dimension represented by a delineated character. In omniscient point of view, the reader should accept everything that the narrator discloses. However, the reader does not have to accept all the explanations of the first person because the explanations of the first person holds true if they remain within the dimension of a human and if they are appropriate to the characterization of the narrator, either reliable or unreliable. The character may make an explanation about other characters, setting, and action or about himself in the story. He can predict the future or pass a judgement about life. The reader is not expected to accept all of them without question because these explanations remain fallible opinions of a character susceptible to make mistakes in his evaluation. In addition, the first person can report what he knows and learns by means of his five senses.

Except for the first person, the other viewpoints belong to the writer while the first person belongs to a certain character created by the writer in the story.

The term *narrator* is frequently used to refer to the storyteller in fiction. Only when a character to the reader relates the story is it possible to say that there is a narrator in the novel or in the short story. The narrator may be the protagonist whose decisions change the plot of the events. The protagonist may narrate his story, beginning with pronoun I such as “I went to the house.” In this case, it is called *central narrator*. Alternatively, the narrator can tell the reader a story about someone else whom he knows intimately. Such a narrator is called *peripheral narrator*. Under the light of these explanations, it is clear that the first person may include two main subtypes: the first person central character and the first person peripheral character point of view.

The first person central character is at the centre of the action. The central character or the protagonist tells his own story as he experienced it. In a sense, his account of the incidents will be a subjective narration. The attention of the reader is predominantly directed to the sufferings, problems, and adventures of the recounting character. The reader will always follow him in the action. Furthermore, through this vision, an *intimacy* may easily be established between the reader and the narrator ready to explain his secrets. The evaluation that the narrator will make and the language that he will use should be suitable to his level of education, his age and gender, mental health, and his degree of sensitivity. For example:

It was a hard jolt for me, of the bitterest, I ever had to face. Moreover, it all came about through my own foolishness too. Even yet, sometimes, when I think of it, I want to cry or swear or kick myself. Perhaps, even now, after all this time, there will be a kind of satisfaction in making myself look cheap by telling of it. (Anderson, 1919; in Perrine: 1974, 72)

In *I'm A Fool*, Sherwood Anderson successfully uses the first person central character point of view. The narrator is a black young man, who had left his house with Harry Whitehead and with a nigger named Burt to get a job as a swipe during fall races. His mother and his sister Mildred think it something disgraceful that a member of their family should take a place as a swipe with race horses. The young man thinks himself to be a big lumbering fellow of nineteen. Admiring Burt for his talents, the black young man feels proud to be his best friend. Every explanation and action of the black young man is designed to appear important on account of his inferiority complex.

Sometimes now I think that boys who are raised regular in houses, and never have a fine nigger like Burt for best friend, and go to high school and college, and never steal anything, or get drunk a little, or learn to swear from fellows who know how, or come walking up in front of a grand stand in their shirt sleeves and with dirty horsy pants on when the races are going on and the grandstand is full of people all dressed up.” (Anderson; 1974, 73)

The views of the black young man are a kind of defence mechanism termed as rationalization in psychological register. He thinks that he is superior to the other well-dressed people whom he often refers to as yaps or common cattle.

Knowing the importance of the education in society, the swipe makes compensation for his inferiority complex talking against the educational superiority of a gentleman. Also, his explanation “You can stick your colleges up your nose for all me. I guess I know where I got my education. (Anderson; 1974, 73) The swipe betrays that he himself has a respect for education. Unable to complete his school, he often makes noticeable attempts to evade being embarrassed and humiliated. On the other hand, his sister Mildred, when graduated from school, will work as a teacher in the town.

The swipe always thinks to “put up a good front” and so does he to inflate his uneasy identity. With forty dollars in his pocket, he goes into the west house, a big hotel, buys an expensive cigar, and drinks whisky. In the lobby and bar, he sees a gentleman with a cane and windsor tie. Out of sheer spite, the black young man pushes that gentleman aside. The swipe buys himself the best seat that he can get up in the grand stand. Right in front of him, there is a fellow with two nice girls of approximately his age. The swipe thinks that they go to college and later come to be a lawyer or a newspaper editor.

Encouraged with one of the girls’ smiles, the swipe decides to give the dope about Ben Ahem, a racehorse they bet on. The girl whose name is Miss Lucy Wessen really likes the black young man. In order to make up for his inferiority complex, the swipe tells them he is the son of Mr. Mathers, who has an important place in the country and he is stuck on racehorses. The impostor swipe walks with these people to a restaurant and Wilbur Wessen, Miss Lucy Wessen’s brother, treats him whisky there. When they are leaving him, Lusy Wessen wants the swipe to write his address for correspondence. The swipe has told them the biggest lie in his life. That is why he loses a nice chance. He thinks that he will perhaps get married that girl. He instinctively understands that the girl really likes him as he is, not as his appearance that he is Mr. Mathers’s son. The reader identifies easily with the swipe as he tells his unpardonable mistake. The reader sees him as a man with such qualifications and with his hopes and disappointments. The reader will listen to his heartbreaking story and feel sorry for him. He will be angry at the swipe for having told such a big lie about his personality and smash the big chance to get marry Miss Lucy Wessen. The language and grammatical mistakes and the repetitions that the swipe makes are appropriate to the characterisation of the narrator.

In literature, it is also possible to observe that the writer has made the first person narrator plural. In *A Rose For Emily*, William Faulkner uses the first person plural point of view, that is, **we**:

When Miss Emily Grierson died, our whole town went to her funeral: the men thought a sort of respectful affection for a fallen monument, the women mostly out of curiosity to see the inside of her house, which no one save an old manservant - a combined gardener and cook - had seen in at least ten years. (Faulkner, 1930; Barnett and al, 1993:240)

In this story, Faulkner analyses the attitudes of the town people towards Miss Emily, employing a person as a narrator from the town in which the action takes place. For the people in town, Miss Emily Grierson has been a tradition when she is alive. She never accepts charity from the government. Miss Emily never pays any tax to the authorities, declaring that she has no tax in Colonel Sartoris time. When her father dies, people hardly see her in public. When the construction of the town is underway, people see her with Homer Baron, a Yankee, on Sunday afternoons. They think that they will get married. Miss Emily dies in one of the downstairs rooms in her house. Breaking down the door to take her corpse, people see a long strand of iron-grey hair on her pillow. It is most likely that she has poisoned her lover, Homer Baron. Miss Emily is a symbol of pride, dignity, and courage. The first person plural narrator exalts these values.

In the first person peripheral character, a minor character tells the story. He does not talk about his own adventures, but he does about someone else's. For a fresh and different vision, the writer may choose an old person, a child, a retarded person, or a well-educated person to narrate the story. However, the first person peripheral narrator evaluates, explains, and interprets the action by his mental power. He reports what he knows, and learns about the main hero. He may be an intimate friend of the hero or may be someone observing his actions from a distant and detached vantage point. He should therefore have a limited vision, for he cannot go into the mind of any characters.

In *Youth*, Conrad successfully uses the first person peripheral character viewpoint:

We were sitting round a mahogany table that reflected the bottle, the claret-glasses, and our faces as we leaned on our elbows. There was a director of companies, an accountant, a lawyer Marlow, and myself... Between the five of us there was the strong bond of the sea, and also fellowship of the craft, which no amount of enthusiasm for yachting, cruising, and so on can give, since one is only the amusement of life and the other is life itself. (Conrad; Pannwitz: 1964:90)

The peripheral narrator is used only in the frame story for *Youth*, whose narrator opens the story, introduces his five friends and talk about their occupations, and later Marlow begins to tell the story. Marlow is a narrator Conrad often uses in his works.

3. SECOND PERSON POINT OF VIEW

The second person point of view has recently come to be used in fiction. The second person viewpoint is a novel vision and currently under examination. However, it has a startling effect in establishing immediacy between the character and the reader. Properly identified with character, the reader follows the instructions of the narrator and gets a fresh look into the action as though he were the hero in the story. While reading, the reader experiences the protagonist's adventures as if they were his own adventures, emotions, actions, and motivations.

Tekin (2001:27) says that the second person point of view is a kind of perspective with considerably restrictive practice for the novelist. Michel Butor, a French novelist, has successfully used the second person perspective in his novel *The Change*. In future, the second person point of view will be perhaps a dominant mode of narration and come to be used together with other points of view in literature.

CONCLUSION

In this study, much attention is paid to discuss the viewpoint types, classified as the third, first and second persons in their respective order of practice in fiction. *The Gifts* is examined to illustrate the third person omniscient point of view. In *The Gifts*, O Henry moves both inside and outside Della's mind. He tells us what this character sees and hears and what she thinks and feels, interpreting her thoughts and behaviors. He knows everything about Della more than that character knows about herself. For objective author point of view, *The Hills Like White Elephants* by Ernest Hemingway is selected. The objective author point of view displays the most of the actions with a considerable speed in *The Hills Like White Elephants*, forcing the reader to make his own interpretations. On the other hand, Hemingway rely profoundly on external action and dialogue, and makes no interpretation on them.

In *A Rose for Emily*, Faulkner uses the first person plural point of view to show the manners of the town people towards his dignified crazy character, Miss Emily. The first person plural pronoun has a collective sense and denotation. Its reference may be a group of authorities of the new government or the whole of the town people since the narrator reflects all the sentiments of the people of the town where the actions happen. In *I'm a Fool*, the protagonist tells the story in the first person. Using the first person point of view, Anderson offers exceptional materials for dramatic irony in *I'm a Fool*. The ironical material of the story is presented in the difference between the perception of the narrator and that of the reader. The author offers an interpretation of his materials indirectly using irony. Anderson also indicates his own judgment by expressing it through the lips of the narrator, a black young man with inferiority complex but sympathetic personality. In *I'm a Fool*, Anderson achieves a striking and significant effect by using such a narrator unaware of the inclusive importance of the events he is employed to report. *I'm A Fool* by Sherwood Anderson is scrutinized for the first person central character. In *Youth*, an observer tells the story. The first person peripheral narrator is used only in the frame story for *Youth*. Such a narrator provides an authenticity and therefore a reliability for the fictitious material of the story. *Youth* by Josef Conrad is studied for the first person peripheral character point of view respectively. The different viewpoints applied in each of these short stories specified are stated to have made some particular artistic contributions to the literary texture of the stories under study.

REFERENCES

- Anderson, Sherwood. (1974) “ I’m A Fool” in **Literature - Structure, Sound, and Sense**, Vol. I, Laurence Perrine, New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovitch, 1956, Reprinted in 1974.
- Burroway, Janet. (1988) “ Call Me Ismael: Point of View” **The Writer’s Digest Handbook of Short Story Writing**. Jean M. Fredette (Ed.) , Vol: II, Cincinnati, Ohio: Writer’s Digest Books.
- Conrad, Joseph. (1964) “Youth” **The Art of Short Fiction**, Barbara Pannwitt, Boston, Massachusetts: Ginn And Company.
- Faulkner, William. (1993) “ A Rose For Emily” in **An Introduction to Literature**. Sylvan Barnet, Morton Berman and William Burto (Ed.) , New York: Harper Collins.
- Friedman, Norman. (1969) “Point of View in Fiction”. Robert Murray Davis (Ed.) **The Novel: Modern Essays in Criticism**. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1969.
- Guerin, Wilfred L. and et al (1966) **A Handbook of Critical Approaches to Literature**. Oxford: Oxford University Press. Fourth Edition. Reprinted in 1999.
- Hemingway, Ernest. (1956) “Hills Like White Elephants” in **Literature – Structure, Sound, and Sense**, Vol. I, Laurence Perrine, New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovitch, , Reprinted, 1974.
- Henry, O., (1974) **The Gift and Other Stories**. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Tekin, Mehmet. (2001) **Roman Sanatı - Roman Unsurları, 1**, İstanbul: Ötüken Neşriyat.
- Wellek, René and Austin Warren. (1942). **Theory of Literature**. London: Penguin Books. Reprinted in 1978.