Introduction to Literary Studies: Who Speaks and Who Sees

Voice and Focalization

* Voice: Who speaks?
* Focalization: Who sees?
* When we read for voice and focalization, we are often attempting to determine a relationship of DISTANCE OR PROXIMITY between:
  + **A:** Author (NOT narrator)
    - **B:** Narrator
      * **C:** Characters
    - **B:** Narratee (implied reader: Who hears? Who reads?)
  + **A:** Reader

Voice: Who Speaks?

* When?
* Where?
* How? With what voice? Authority? Tone?
* What kind of language?
* To whom?
  + When? Past, present, long ago, or just a short while ago?
  + Where? From the perspective of a friend? A neighbor? With poetic distance?
  + How? Affectionately? Kindly? Angrily? Bemused? Compassionately?
  + With what voice? Authority? Tone? Factually? Untrustworthily?
  + What kind of language? Realistically? Poetically? Scientifically?
  + To whom? To us as readers? To someone like the character?

Focalization: Who Sees?

* When?
* Where?
* How? To what extent?
* With what level of accuracy?
* More or less than what “we” see?
  + Where? In a room? In the mind? On the street?
  + Who sees? Is it the character or someone else? Is there a distance implied?
  + How much more than the protagonist does the narrator know? What can the narrator “see” that other characters cannot?
  + How close is the omniscient narrator’s voice to that of the protagonist?

Direct, Indirect, and Free Indirect Discourse

* When considering “who speaks,” we encounter different kinds of speech represented by the narrator: **direct, indirect, and free indirect discourse or speech.**
* **Direct discourse or direct speech** is the direct representation of speech. Often identified by quotation marks; a reporting phrase such as “he said” or “she said;” sociolect or dialect; the present tense; and first person when the speaker refers to him or herself.
  + Illusion of *least mediation.*
* **Indirect discourse or indirect speech (**a.k.a. reported speech) is the indirect representation of speech. It also uses reporting phrases such as “she said,” but no quotation marks; tends to be in the past or past perfect tense; can adopt character’s syntax, vocabulary, and pronunciation; and references to the first person are rendered in the third person.
  + Less immediate, more mediation.
* Representations of thought are sometimes called **silent or inner speech** and can be represented in a direct or indirect manner:
  + Direct: He thought, “I’m tired today.”
  + Indirect: He thought he was tired today.
* **Free indirect discourse (**FID**;** also known as narrated monologue) is a technique by which the narrator reproduces the “mind style” of the character, as if the narrator is ventriloquizing what the character is thinking or feeling (without saying so). The narrator continues to talk of the character in the third person but the character’s thoughts are reproduced in a way that one would imagine the character to think. Unlike drama, narrative allows the reader to look into a character’s thoughts without having the character speak, giving the impression of first-hand and intimate knowledge.
  + Gosh, how tired he was today!
  + FID should NOT be straightforwardly equated with “stream of consciousness,” which describes the way cognitive processes are formed through chaotic associations rather than orderly and well-structured thoughts.
  + FID can be recognized by:
  + A change in syntax, often to less formal incomplete sentences, exclamations, rhetorical questions, dashes, etc.
  + A change in diction, to match the speech style of the character; emotive words (Oh! Damn!).
  + Stream of consciousness of the character to reproduce their thoughts and perceptions.
  + Adverbs indicating uncertainty (perhaps)
  + Modal verbs (can/could, may/might, must, will/would, shall/should)
  + DUAL VOICE: FID gets you “inside” the character’s thoughts while maintaining the possibility of distance (frequently ironic): proximity with the hint of distance!
  + Find an example in the novel where the narrator is describing Jacob in what seems to be free indirect discourse: where is the distance? Where is the proximity? How do we know this is FID?
  + What can we learn about the narrator by their approach to Jacob?