

INTRODUCTION: THE TEACHER SURFACES by Ken McGoogan

Hands up anybody who has arrived here thinking that Point of View means picking a pronoun and getting on with it. Let's see, should I write this story in first person or third? People, I would refer you to an anthology called *The Art of Fact*, edited by Kevin Kerrane and Ben Yagoda. In it we find Norman Mailer writing about himself in the third person, as if he were treating a character in a story – which, of course, he is. We encounter David Simon writing in the second-person, doing some fancy footwork with you, you, you. And what about Tom Wolfe, serving up a tour-de-force, shifting between three points of view: his own, that of a group of young girls, and Baby Jane Holzer's?

Beginning writers learn that first person is intimate and authoritative: I saw and heard this, I experienced or witnessed that, and now I am telling you about it. They learn that nobody uses second person because it simply doesn't work. And third person, well, omniscience has become old-fashioned, but if you stick with "third person limited," you'll be all right. And that would be it – although in fact, Point of View is the big bazooka of narrative. Handle it badly and you'll blow your story to smithereens. Learn to control and focus its power and, wow, you get Mailer, Simon, and Wolfe.

Most of what we know about Point of View comes from fiction. Many people have written at length about the subject. I think of the late Leon Surmelian (1905-95), who devoted two excellent chapters to the subject in his classic *Techniques of Fiction Writing*. Under Third Person he explored omniscient-personal, omniscient impersonal, limited omniscience, single character, multiple character, and dramatic or external point of view. Under First Person, Surmelian looked at major character tells the story, minor character tells the story, story told by more than one character, presentness in the first person, and reflection of the writer's attitudes and values.

In *A Passion for Narrative*, Jack Hodgins covers the rudiments briskly. He treats First Person Protagonist, First Person Witness, Third Person Omniscient, Third Person Objective, Third Person Limited Omniscient, and Second Person. Bottom line: any book on how-to-write fiction tackles Point of View. But for nonfiction writers, the best treatment I have found turns up in *Writing Creative Nonfiction: Fiction Techniques for Crafting Great Nonfiction*, by Theodore A. Rees-Cheney. He introduces the concept of Angle of Approach, arguing that authors must first choose between writing objectively and subjectively. He then presents an analysis that includes a Pseudo Point of View with a chameleon aspect, and this we can see in Simon and Wolfe.