OMNISCIENCE

By Mike Klaassen

Omniscience measures the scope of a narrator's perception, which can range from limited to unlimited. A narrator with *unlimited omniscience* may tell a story from any and every perspective, from a very remote viewpoint (literally across the galaxy) to a view from within the mind of a character. A narrator using unlimited omniscience may also zoom back and forth between remote and up-close views; he may switch back and forth between the minds of characters; or he may narrate from the perspective of no character at all. Unlimited omniscience is often referred to as *omniscient viewpoint*.

The advantage of using unlimited omniscience is its flexibility of presentation—anything goes. The disadvantage is that jumping from one perspective to another can confuse the reader, making it difficult for him to identify with any one character.

Omniscience limited to only what a single character can see and hear (but not what that character thinks or feels) is often referred to as *objective viewpoint*[i] and is sometimes described as *cinematic* or a *fly-on-the-wall viewpoint*, much like a reporter telling a story or a video camera with sound recording events.

Compared to unlimited omniscience, objective omniscience makes it easier for readers to identify with the character because the story is being told from the perspective of only one character. Another advantage of objective omniscience is that the manuscript is easier to adapt to a screenplay, where a character's thoughts, feelings, and sensations are more difficult to express compared to written fiction. The

disadvantage of objective omniscience is that it omits a character's thoughts, feelings, and sensations, along with the opportunities they offer authors and readers.

Limited omniscience that delves into the consciousness (including the thoughts, perceptions, sensations, and feelings) of a single character is sometimes referred to as *subjective narration[ii],* also known as *close*, *intimate,* or *deep-immersion* narration.

Subjective omniscience shares the advantages of focus provided by objective omniscience by restricting the perspective to a single character, making it easier for the reader to identify with the character. Subjective narration also reveals the character's thoughts, perceptions, sensations, and feelings, which makes it even easier for the reader to identify with the character. The disadvantage of subjective omniscience is that perception is limited to one character, so we are unable to share the thoughts of other characters.

Variations in the scope of a narrator's perception, or *omniscience*, provide an author with alternatives to meet the needs of the writing project.

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[i] Lubbock, *The Craft of Fiction*, 217.

[ii] Lubbock, *The Craft of Fiction*, 76.