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Uncle Charles Repairs to the A&P: Changes in Voice in the Recent American Short Story

That the craft and effect of the mainstream American short story evolved rapidly during the latter half of the 20th century is beyond dispute. Still problematic, however, are the theoretical underpinnings of widespread shifts in narrative technique, especially as they involve vision and voice. Efforts to theorize the short story have focused overwhelmingly on a turn from omniscient narration and a necessary sense of unity in the story to “the familiarity of an individual point of view” (Miller 35) and “fragmentation as an accurate model of the world” (Ferguson 191). Equally salient to the actual narrative discourse of the contemporary short story, however, may be the relative disappearance of the technique known as the Uncle Charles Principle. By pinpointing both the waning of this so-called principle and the strategy that may be taking its place, we not only limn an aspect of literary evolution, but also locate its significance in the place occupied by fiction in a world populated and counterbalanced by other forms of narrative to which story audiences are necessarily attuned.

Any stylistic shift observable over a broad spectrum of writers and a certain period of time raises the question of what contemporaneous writers and readers are looking to short fiction to accomplish. Narrative techniques and strategies, after all, arise not out of fashion but out of narrative intent. It follows that an empirical examination of stylistic change over time can illuminate an otherwise ineluctable change in narrative goals. It was with this latter premise that undergraduate students in a recent Trinity College course in “Contemporary Short Story” were asked

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to focus on tense and grammatical person, two commonly cited integers of style, in mainstream stories published from 1945–1965 and from 1981–2000. Surprisingly, the students found little difference across time in either of these techniques. What they did find was a vanished Uncle Charles Principle, its place taken by what was christened the “A&P Principle.” From this anecdotal study we can begin to explore the larger implications of a change that speaks to and draws on more dramatized forms of story and suggests how audiences and readers form a different sense of narrative meaning from a different principle of narrative voice.

DISCOVERING UNCLE CHARLES

The Uncle Charles Principle, or UCP, was named by Hugh Kenner after a technique observed in Joyce’s *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, in which the third-person narration, as the character of Uncle Charles comes on stage, drifts toward Charles’s idiom in lines such as, “Every morning, therefore, Uncle Charles repaired to his outhouse.” Kenner writes: “If Charles spoke at all about his excursions to what he calls the outhouse, he would speak of ‘repairing’ there. Not that he does so speak, in our hearing. Rather a speck of his characterizing vocabulary attends our sense of him. A word he need not even utter is there like a gnat in the air . . . the normally neutral vocabulary pervaded by a little cloud of idioms which a character might use if he were managing the narrative” (17).

Kenner himself perceived the UCP as uniquely Joycean. His other example, from “The Dead”—“Lily, the caretaker’s daughter, was literally run off her feet” (Joyce 183)—relies for its argument on Joyce’s own exactitude of language. Joyce, according to Kenner, would never use “literally” when he meant “figuratively.” The adverb belongs in Lily’s expressive toolbox, as does the later line “It was well for her she had not to attend to the ladies also” (Joyce 183).

At first glance, Kenner’s distinction seems to fall within the category labeled by his contemporary Gérard Genette as “internal focalization” (189). With the UCP, Kenner writes, “the narrative idiom need not be the narrator’s” (18); similarly, Genette stresses that, in internally focalized narrative, “the narrator almost always ‘knows’ more than the hero . . . and therefore for the narrator focalization through the hero is a restriction of field” (194). In practice, however, the UCP goes further than Kenner’s definition states. Its central concern is fleeting “specks” of character idiom in a narrative otherwise cast outside that idiom, not a narrative generated by what we traditionally label third-person limited point of view. Moreover, it seems to have more to do with language (which Genette discusses as “voice”) than with perspective (discussed as “mood”). To borrow again from Genette, we may say that the line separating “who speaks?” from “who sees?” becomes intermittently blurred in cases of the UCP. So long as Uncle Charles is strongly present in the scene, even if he is not the “focalizer,” the *language* of the narration belongs momentarily to him more than to Joyce or Joyce’s narrator.

For our purposes here, we shall accept Kenner’s argument—not only as a critical insight into Joyce’s peculiar magnetic bent toward the dialect and thought pat-

terms of even his minor characters, but also as a useful tool to link style and substance in the short story. We may restrict our discussion here to short fiction, because the peculiarity of the UCP is its presence even—or especially—in this economical prose form. That narrative should so suddenly take on the language of a character’s world view, and as suddenly shift away, rightly catches our eye and attention more than the perspectival meanderings of, say, Henry James in *The Bostonians*. The UCP in the novel is worth commenting on; in the short story it is a strategy whose detection may be the very key that unlocks the narrative. And the UCP as Kenner defines it—and as Susan Swartzlander has noted in her study of Hemingway (31–41)—is at work in the short fiction of many of Joyce’s literary descendants.

Among the stories in third person assigned early in the short story course, the UCP peeked out from the “normally neutral narrative vocabulary” at several points. Bernard Malamud’s “The Jewbird,” for instance, begins with a marked but ambiguous prose style—“That’s how it goes. It’s open, you’re in. Closed, you’re out and that’s your fate” (96)—that we might later associate with Harry Cohen, the protagonist, though much of the early exposition (“The frozen-food salesman was sitting at supper with his wife and young son” [97]) seems almost omniscient. However, as the various scenes with the “displaced person” magical bird of the title unfold, we get markers of diction otherwise alien to the story, as when Malamud writes, “Maurie was a restless type and Schwartz gently kept him to his studies. He also listened to him practice his screechy violin, taking a few minutes off now and then to rest his ears in the bathroom. And they afterwards played dominoes” (99). *They afterwards played dominoes*. The inverted syntax, a Yiddishism, comes from no place other than the Jewbird’s mode of thought. As with Lily, the caretaker’s daughter, “the author is less recounting the front-hall doings than paraphrasing a recounting of [the character’s]” (Kenner 16).¹

The students in “Contemporary Short Story” found similar instances of the UCP in Shirley Jackson’s “The Lottery,” Isaac Bashevis Singer’s “The Spinoza of Market Street,” James Purdy’s “Don’t Call Me by My Right Name,” Flannery O’Connor’s “Good Country People,” John Cheever’s “Housebreaker of Shady Hill,” and Saul Bellow’s “Looking for Mr. Green.” Looking for the UCP, moreover, produced in each case new insights into the story.

“The Lottery,” for instance, pretends to omniscience, but as the villagers in Jackson’s dystopic village gather, we get markers of the women’s syntax more specifically than we get the men’s. The men “stood together, away from the pile of stones in the corner, and their jokes were quiet and they smiled rather than laughed.” But the women “greeted one another and exchanged bits of gossip”; when the director of the lottery, Mr. Summers, arrives, we learn that “people were sorry for him, because he had no children and his wife was a scold” (10). *Bits of gossip and scold* are not the language of the story as a whole, which carefully assumes the familiar but painterly tone that gives its gruesome ending shock value. Rather, the language here suggests the women talking. Significantly, the later selection of Mrs. Hutchinson as the lottery’s victim brings out the viciousness of the other women just slightly more than that of the men in the village. “The Lottery” is

famous for its chilling depiction of the horrors to which tradition can lead. Noting its use of the UCP nicely shades that analysis, so that we detect a particular female self-loathing in the story, wherein the murder of Mrs. Hutchinson is both cathartic and self-punishing. The story becomes a feminist caution tale, not just a dystopic fable.

The UCP applies also in James Purdy's odd, violent story "Don't Call Me by My Right Name." As the title suggests, the protagonist is a wife, Mrs. Klein, and although most of the story is dialogue and none of the narration is strongly voiced, the perspective seems to be hers: "Her new name was Mrs. Klein. There was something in the meaning that irritated her" (91). But we never get the inner workings of Mrs. Klein's mind. Rather, Purdy's story gains its effect by the imbalance between brutal action and flat prose—except at one point. Just after Mr. Klein first strikes his wife at a social event, we read, "It was one of those fake dead long parties where nobody actually knows anybody and where people could be pushed out of windows without anybody's being sure until the morrow" (93). *Fake dead long parties* is out of sync with the rest of the narration and with Mrs. Klein's diction. It fits perfectly, however, with the drunk, enraged Mr. Klein. In fact, a little earlier, we have a "UCP hint," when Mrs. Klein says, "I wonder how I will get out of here, Frank." The next paragraph reads: "'Out of where, dear?' he wondered. He was suddenly sad enough himself to be dead, but he managed to say something to her at this point" (92).

Both mentions of death seem to belong not just to the perspective but also to the language of Mr. Klein, whom we can almost hear calling the gathering a "fake dead" party or thinking, "Say something to her," while wishing for death. His brutality is tied to desperation, to death wish. In fact, the quote and tag above are so ambiguous in this regard that we cannot know whether "Out of where, dear?" is the "something" that Mr. Klein says, or if he only "wonder[s]" it to himself and then says something else so unimportant that it remains unquoted. With these intrusions of the antagonist's dialect, the balance of the story tilts so far that its very theme changes. It is no longer simply about a battered wife, but about the batterer's inner pathology as well.

One other example—or rather, an example and a half. In Flannery O'Connor's "Good Country People," we begin with a description clearly focalized through a subjective lens, though we get no hint at first whether the point of view is the protagonist's or another's: "Besides the neutral expression that she wore when she was alone, Mrs. Freeman had two others, forward and reverse, that she used for all her human dealings. Her forward expression was steady and driving like the advance of a heavy truck. Her eyes never swerved to left or right but turned as the story turned as if they followed a yellow line down the center of it" (271).

Only later in the paragraph do we understand whose judgment is being passed on Mrs. Freeman: "As for getting anything across to her when this was the case, Mrs. Hopewell had given it up. She might talk her head off. Mrs. Freeman could never be brought to admit herself wrong on any point" (*ibid.*).

Aha! we think. O'Connor has tricked us. We thought we were getting "neutral narrative vocabulary" when in fact the point of view—and thus the story—belong

to Mrs. Hopewell. We settle into this vantage point. And then, in the next paragraph: “Every morning Mrs. Hopewell got up at seven o’clock and lit her gas heater and Joy’s. Joy was her daughter, a large blonde girl who had an artificial leg. Mrs. Hopewell thought of her as a child though she was thirty-two years old and highly educated. Joy would get up while her mother was eating and lumber into the bathroom and slam the door, and before long Mrs. Freeman would arrive at the back door” (*ibid.*).

The hint is slight, but unmistakable. *Though she was thirty-two years old and highly educated.* Mrs. Hopewell would never use this expression, nor would Mrs. Freeman. Nor is the description neutral; it passes a judgment on Mrs. Hopewell for which the story has provided scant evidence. Such judgment comes—and has to come—from Joy herself. Just as we can almost hear Lily, the caretaker’s daughter, saying to her friends, “I am literally run off my feet!,” we can practically hear Joy saying, “She thinks of me as a child even though I am thirty-two years old and highly educated!”

In fact, “Good Country People,” as we near the end, seems to be *about* Joy, also known as Hulga, who thinks herself too smart for her sanctimonious mother and her mother’s helper Mrs. Freeman, but whose artificial leg is seduced away from her by a fraudulent Bible salesman. In “Good Country People,” the UCP works as foreshadowing of a very special sort. Not only do we eventually move into Hulga’s point of view, but we also end the story with a glimpse back at the ignorant Mrs. Hopewell and Mrs. Freeman. This time, what sneaks out between the lines is a set of comparisons between Hulga’s attitude toward the Bible salesman and Mrs. Hopewell’s toward Mrs. Freeman. Earlier in the story, just as Hulga’s diction begins to assert its perspective on the narrative, we read this description: “It was as if Mrs. Freeman’s beady steel-pointed eyes had penetrated far enough behind her face to reach some secret fact” (275). Later, as the Bible salesman, ever alert to marketable oddities, prepares to make off with Hulga’s leg, we read: “Every now and then the boy, his eyes like two steel spikes, would glance behind him where the leg stood” (289). The steely glances of the fraudulent seducer and Mrs. Freeman having been aligned from Hulga’s point of view, our return to the two adult women completes the parallel:

“Why, that looks like that nice dull young man that tried to sell me a Bible yesterday,” Mrs. Hopewell said, squinting. “He must have been selling them to the Negroes back in there. He was so simple,” she said, “but I guess the world would be better off if we were all that simple.”

Mrs. Freeman’s gaze drove forward and just touched him before he disappeared under the hill. Then she returned her attention to the evil-smelling onion shoot she was lifting from the ground. “Some can’t be that simple,” she said. “I know I never could.” (291)

Mrs. Freeman’s response is of a different order from her usual retort, which is “I always said so myself.” The twist in her departure from her usual script is our suspicion that—being steel-eyed—she knows exactly what “simple” means in this

context and what such “simplicity” can accomplish. This point is emphasized by her pulling-out of the “evil” shoot, with its resemblance both to the arrogant Hulga and to the self-serving Mrs. Hopewell.

Thus the story returns its concern full circle, to the two older women and the power struggle between them. The shift to Hulga’s perspective and the trap she walks into on her artificial leg is important to the story but not its final point. The swing in perspective was not a permanent change, but only a rounding-out of a picture that centers where it began, on the two mutually manipulative older women.

UNCLE CHARLES IS HARD TO FIND

Flannery O’Connor’s prose forms one of several bridges between the stories discussed thus far and the late-twentieth-century group we shall put under the UCP microscope. Take her story “A Good Man Is Hard to Find.” On first inspection, students seized on what they thought was clear evidence of the UCP at work. As the story opens, “the grandmother” is arguing with her son Bailey over the route of their proposed trip, which she claims will take them within range of the dreaded serial killer The Misfit. (In fact, they will put themselves exactly in The Misfit’s path.) “Bailey,” we read, “didn’t look up from his reading so she wheeled around then and faced the children’s mother, a young woman in slacks, whose face was as broad and innocent as a cabbage and was tied around with a green headkerchief that had two points on the top like rabbit’s ears” (117).

Got it! proclaimed the students. *The children’s mother* is not an omniscient way of looking at this character, not in a story that names Bailey and designates the grandmother without using a possessive. It is not Bailey’s way of looking at his wife, and it is certainly not the mother’s way of looking at herself. The language must be the grandmother’s. Indeed, the descriptions of this poor woman’s face *as broad and innocent as a cabbage* and of her kerchief points as resembling rabbit’s ears both belong in the idiom of the grandmother.

But as discussed above, the UCP deals not so much with casting expository prose in the parlance of a character as with fleeting moments of character-idiom identification. When an entire work—in this examination, an entire short story—is not only focalized through, but voiced in the idiom of, a central character, we have moved beyond the UCP to the narrowest limits of third-person narration. In “A Good Man Is Hard to Find,” such third-person narration is decidedly not a variance from a “normally neutral narrative vocabulary,” because the vocabulary of the story as a whole is never neutral. In fact, we only find ourselves in a position to receive O’Connor’s message regarding grace because we are caught so firmly within the idiosyncratic grandmother’s guilt and terror. The story presents a classic case of internal focalization, per Genette; the perspective surprises us only because O’Connor handles it so subtly and because the grandmother’s point of view is the last place we as readers expected to find ourselves.

An argument raised in favor of the UCP’s being at work in “Good Man” was that the story continues after the grandmother’s death. How, then, the students

asked, can it be from her point of view? It cannot entirely, of course. There is a shift to external focalization at the end of the story, when the grandmother dies: “The Misfit sprang back as if a snake had bitten him and shot her three times through the chest. Then he put his gun down on the ground and took off his glasses and began to clean them. . . . Without his glasses, The Misfit’s eyes were red-rimmed and pale and defenseless-looking” (132). But this coda, far from being the “normally neutral” voice of the story, serves to highlight the fixed vision that has dictated our stunned identification with the grandmother as she receives grace. O’Connor’s prevailing narration no longer “detects the gravitational field of the nearest person” (Kenner 16) but instead cleaves mightily to the syntax and idiom of the central character.

Looking for an instance of the UCP, and failing to find it, provided more evidence than students had theretofore uncovered that “A Good Man Is Hard to Find” is a story narrated from the grandmother’s point of view and focused on the grandmother. They were able to reread the story with a richer appreciation of such lines as “The children’s mother still had on slacks and still had her head tied up in a green kerchief, but the grandmother had on a navy blue straw sailor hat with a bunch of white violets on the brim and a navy blue dress with a small white dot in the print” (117). In other words, the detailed description was no longer painterly, but evidence of the grandmother’s snobbery and misplaced priorities.

Stories by a later cohort of writers—Frank Chin, Helena Maria Viramontes, Sherman Alexie, Andrea Barrett, and Mary Gaitskill—vary widely in their use of third-person narration. Chin’s “The Only Real Day,” like “A Good Man Is Hard to Find,” is limited to its main character’s perspective until that character dies. In this case, the perspective then shifts immediately to another character, but we have had none of that character’s dialect (or any other character’s) before the main character expires. In Viramontes’s “The Cariboo Café,” point of view shifts from omniscient to limited third person, then to a lesser character’s first person, then to a main character’s first person. “This Is What It Means to Say Phoenix, Arizona,” by Alexie, is a “buddy” story (it was later made into the “buddy” movie *Smoke Signals*); its language belongs to an ambiguous perspective that could be shared by the buddies or could belong uniquely to the main character, Victor. Similarly, Barrett’s “The Littoral Zone” emphasizes the point of view of “them,” an adulterous couple whose lives the story follows forward and backward in time; the story occasionally takes turns between the man’s observations and the woman’s, but the narration emphasizes the transparency of their thoughts vis-a-vis one another, so that the differences are of details and actions, not of logical pattern or dialect. Gaitskill’s “The Girl on the Plane” is a strictly limited third-person viewpoint confined to the tortured misogynist and misanthrope at the story’s center. Thus, these stories are hardly monolithic in their approach to third-person narration. What they have in common is what they lack. The students in the Trinity course combed through every line of narration in each of these stories, and could find no evidence whatever of the UCP at work. Further research looked at a dozen stories in third person written by a dozen different prominent writers since 1985. Nowhere does a secondary character’s dialect or diction exert such a pull on the narration that the story picks it up like lint. The UCP has vanished.

UCP VERSUS APP

There is no call here to criticize contemporary short stories for their lack of a quality that critics like Kenner have assigned to stories written a century ago. Until he named the phenomenon, in fact, critics did not view it as a discrete stylistic technique, much less as a deliberate authorial choice. The UCP is useful only insofar as it helps us comprehend the richness of Joyce's tapestry, and noting its absence is useful only insofar as it helps us gather other tools to fully apprehend contemporary fiction.

The change begins with writers like Flannery O'Connor, but it also begins with writers like John Updike, whose engagement with his characters' psyches relies on his engagement with language. As William H. Pritchard says of the main character in Updike's novella *Of the Farm*, "Joey's character is infused with authorial energy and imaginative verve; he is the beneficiary of Updike's sentences" (108). Updike's early story "A&P" is in first person, from the point of view of a nineteen-year-old grocery checkout clerk. Readers generally agree that Updike captures the essence of this provincial young man with lines like his opening: "In walks these three girls in nothing but bathing suits" (596). And yet, just a few paragraphs later, the same young man intones poetry as he describes one of the girls who will change his moral life: "[T]here was nothing between the top of the suit and the top of her head except just *her*; this, clean bare plane of the top of her chest down from the shoulder bones like a dented sheet of metal tilted in the light" (597).

Hear the assonance? The internal half-rhyme? The iambs? One wants almost to jump up and cry, "Uncle Charles Principle!" The exclamation would be wrong, not only because "A&P" is in first person and thus from a fixed point of view, but also because the language intruding on the text belongs not to another character, but to the author.² Yet readers never experience the intrusiveness, never spot a deviation from the nineteen-year-old's point of view. Updike's success in this sleight-of-hand derives from his immersion in the character. However unlikely it may be for a poorly educated checkout clerk to say or think *dented sheet of metal tilted in the light*, we have the sense that he would have said exactly that if he had had the verbal dexterity to do so. After all, he's a high-school dropout, a girl-watcher; he probably messes around with cars with amateur body work; he's seen plenty of dented sheets of metal tilt in the light. All Updike has done, it seems, is to supply his narrator with the words and rhythms the narrator needs to express himself to us on the page.

This sort of identification with character, so deep that an exchange of syntactic structures can take place without authorial consciousness supplanting character-based point of view, suggests what has happened to the UCP. We have replaced it with what one may call the "A&P Principle" or APP. Updike's stories, unlike the fiction of Joyce, are not the progenitors of this principle, but they are excellent examples of a broad trend. And although the "A&P" example is first person and therefore easier to highlight, Updike and those who follow him apply the same terms of exchange to limited third-person narration. Here is the Chinese immigrant Yuen's point of view governing the narration of Frank Chin's "The Only Real Day":

He hated the sight of cripples on his night and day off, and one had spoken to him as he stepped off the A-train into the tinny breath of the Key System Bay Bridge Terminal. Off the train in San Francisco into the voice of a cripple. “Count your blessings!” The old white people left to die at the Eclipse Hotel, and the old waitresses who worked there often said “Count your blessings” over sneezes and little ouches and bad news. Christian resignation. Yuen was older than many of the white guests of the Eclipse. He washed dishes there without ever once counting his blessings. (691)

The bitter, misanthropic, ironic point of view is Yuen’s and only Yuen’s. Yuen, however, speaks no English. He may not even understand the phrase “Count your blessings.” Though we believe enough in his verbal dexterity to attribute the synesthetic *Off the train into the voice of a cripple* to Yuen’s “characterizing vocabulary,” the twist of the phrase at the end is a sort of translator’s attempt to help Yuen marry his disappointment to his contempt.

The APP, we might say, differs from the UCP in this inversion:
 Narrative idiom need not be the narrator’s. (UCP)
 Focalizing idiom need not be the focalizer’s. (APP)

This latter designation returns us to Gerard Genette’s distinction between “who speaks?” and “who sees?” But the APP connotes more than the formula articulated by Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan, wherein “the centre of consciousness . . . is the focalizer, while the user of the third person is the narrator” (73). The wonder of the APP is that, in the brief moment when the focalizing idiom is *not* the focalizer’s, we are aware, not that an extradiegetic narrator has snatched up the narration, but that the focalizer has borrowed whatever language he or she needs from the author’s idiomatic field.

SHOPPING AT THE A&P

An example from Michael Chabon’s “Ocean Avenue” may serve to illustrate where the APP takes us. The story begins with an axiom—“If you can still see how you could once have loved a person, you are still in love; an extinct love is always wholly incredible”—then moves quickly from “One day not too long ago, in Laguna Beach, California” into the point of view of “an architect named Bobby Lazar” who is observing his former girlfriend Suzette, “in her exercise clothes, looking like she weighed about seventy-five pounds”:

She was always too thin, though at the time of their closest acquaintance he had thought he liked a woman with bony shoulders. She had a bony back, too, he suddenly remembered, like a marimba, as well as a pointed, bony nose and chin, and she was always—but *always*—on a diet, even though she had a naturally small appetite and danced aerobically or ran fives miles every day.

Her face looked hollowed and somehow mutated, as do the faces of most women who get too much exercise, but there was a sheen on her brow and a mad, aerobic glimmer in her eye. She'd permed her hair since he last saw her, and it flew out around her head in two square feet of golden Pre-Raphaelite rotini—the lily maid of Astolat on an endorphin high. A friend had once said she was the kind of woman who causes automobile accidents, and, as a matter of fact, as she stepped up onto the patio of the café a man passing on his bicycle made the mistake of following her with his eyes for a moment and nearly rode into the open door of a parked car. (39–40)

The presence of Bobby's idiom gives the description its punch. Not only is Suzette's thinness confirmed via Bobby's memory of her, but it is also accentuated by that second, italicized *always*, as well as by the specific details of her exercise routine. These details are somewhat clumsy, as in the phrase "danced aerobically," which is itself a phrase Bobby might use although most narrators would say "did aerobics"; in fact, Bobby's ignorance and discomfort with the notion of "aerobic" recur in the phrase "mad, aerobic glimmer in her eyes." Whatever else he does, Bobby Lazar does not do aerobics. Next, we know the description of Suzette's hair is far from neutral; Bobby (unlike a flat narrative voice, unlike the reader) is an architect, thus someone who has studied art, and references to Pre-Raphaelites or the lily maid of Astolat belong to his "characterizing vocabulary." Finally, the "proof" of Suzette's remarkable looks comes via the conjunction of a friend's earlier remark to Bobby and the near-accident of a bicyclist looking at Suzette. In this short phrase we can almost hear the earlier exchange:

Bobby to friend: Isn't Suzette gorgeous?

Friend to Bobby: Well, she's, uh, the kind of woman who, you know, causes automobile accidents, that's for sure.

Bobby's friend finessed the question, and the bicyclist is probably distracted by the appearance of an anorectic freak—but Bobby, still in love, puts the two together as evidence that his fixation on Suzette is justified by her looks.

Thus far, the only difference between the way Chabon presents Bobby Lazar and the way Joyce presents Lily is that "Ocean Avenue" sticks with Bobby's point of view whereas in "The Dead," "the narrative point of view unobtrusively fluctuates" (Kenner 16). But the APP demands more than an alliance with one focalizer. In discussing the UCP, Kenner observes that it "requires a knowledge of the character at which no one could arrive by 'observation,' and yet its application to the character seems as external as costume, since it does not entail recording spoken words" (21). Whatever we make of the presence of the APP in Bobby Lazar's story, its application is not external—in fact, it is so far internal that even Bobby is not aware, for instance, of the moment in his future when he will realize that he misunderstood his friend's remark.

This time, since Bobby Lazar is an articulate and urbane character, the author's unobtrusive gift to the third-person narration comes in ways other than the

elegant turn of phrase. In the passage just cited, there are at least two instances deserving our attention. The first is the insertion of the present tense, echoing the axiomatic phrase that begins the story. *Her face looked . . . mutated, as do the faces of most women who get too much exercise*. Whether or not Bobby shares this generalization, it comes from the same moment as the axiom, which is also a moment that is recreating, in a playful way, the story we are reading (*One day, not too long ago. . .*). The present tense reminds us that, however deep we may reach into Bobby's psyche, we are still setting him up as an exemplar of the original motto. Second, just as Updike lends his checkout clerk a line of poetry in his hour of need, so Chabon lends Bobby a verbal curtain—*at the time of their closest acquaintance*—to draw over his nagging memories of Suzette. The phrase is not Bobby's, but it is a phrase that Bobby is aching for; it expresses the almost formal tenderness he cannot help feeling for this freakish flirt.

Thus, in another reversal of Kenner's UCP, we might say of the APP that it produces "a little cloud of idioms which an author might use if he were managing the narrative." On its face, this pronouncement sounds like nonsense—who is managing the narrative, after all, if not the author?—but in the story's effect on the reader we have gone to the other side, where we *expect* strictly limited third-person accounts (just as a reader of Joyce's time might have expected neutral narration), and are subtly brought into a more layered view of the story's concerns when and only when our expectations are complicated by a trick of diction.

Looking once again, more carefully, at our chronological survey, this change is borne out by the differences in types of third person between stories written approximately 50 years ago and stories written approximately 15 years ago. The less-limited third person accounts of the earlier stories are balanced by what we rather ambiguously label omniscience. The later stories break through their limitations by clear shifts between one point of view and another. The obvious appendant question is "Why?"

One student, asked why she thought Uncle Charles had vanished, responded that today's short fiction is more interested in depth (thus the entrance of authorial diction at a moment deep in the character's consciousness) and yesterday's more interested in breadth (thus the "various extensions" of Joyce's character-mimicking narration). This opinion fits nicely with the notion that we are increasingly interested in characters' psychology and less in their actions and reactions. However, it mires us in subjective discussions of a story's supposed thematic interest. It also fails to account for psychologically centered stories that employ the UCP—Joyce's "The Dead," on which Kenner focused, is a fine example—or stories of action and reaction, like Chen's "One Fine Day," that forgo it in favor of the APP.

A complementary and more intriguing hypothesis is that the change has to do with something Kenner alludes to when he speaks of Joyce's "playing parts" and thus "refer[ring] stylistic decisions to the taste of the person he was playing" (21). If the UCP holds that narration takes on the coloring of the person who comes on stage, then Kenner's point—that "the extreme of externality is the stage" and Joyce therefore eventually eschewed it in favor of inflected narration—falls just

short of the mark we aim at here. True, the UCP applies to fiction and not to play scripts; but it applies in an atmosphere whereby the dramatic medium counterposing fiction is the stage play. The APP arises when the counterposed dramatic medium is film.

AUDIENCE VERSUS CAMERA

To direct ourselves to the myriad differences in point of view between stage play and film would require another essay altogether. But at least the following point is applicable here. In a play, the stage is equally available to each character who enters onto it. We may (*pace* Kenner) come to adapt one character's version of events as controlling the whole plot—Tennessee Williams's "memory play," *Glass Menagerie*, comes to mind—but we are prepared at any time for the inflections of a character's voice or her stage presence to shift the concerns of the play, which are otherwise set forward by the playwright. In film, our "camera eye" is set *within* the action. However carefully engineered a shot may be, suspension of disbelief calls for us to understand whatever is being revealed from a point that is physically interior to the story. Even in the classic shot of a plane landing at a city airport, we feel ourselves looking from behind that plane; and when a character enters a room, we either see the room as she sees it, or we see her from a point of view within the room—either way, from an adopted physical stance that has psychological implications.

When substituting narration for dramatized action, then, the tendency of a short-story author whose strategies are inflected by film will be to work not from "a speck of characterizing vocabulary" (Kenner 17) but from more interior language. Thus, we have the opening of Mary Gaitskill's "Girl on the Plane": "John Morton came down the aisle of the plane, banging his luggage into people's knees and sweating angrily under his suit. He had just run through the corridors of the airport, cursing and struggling with his luggage, slipping and flailing in front of the vapid brat at the seat assignment desk" (862).

"Vapid brat" is obviously our giveaway for Morton's point of view. But what floats in the reader's mind is not a scene where Morton calls the seat assigner a vapid brat. Rather, we watch the film unroll—Morton clumsily racing, sweating, shoving his ticket at the employee, and then a shot of the employee, a young ascetic-looking man who refuses to be intimidated. "Sweating angrily" is obviously a sensation we attach to Morton as we witness his agitated rush, but we do not need to be looking at or even hearing Morton to understand that "vapid brat" is the epithet he will assign the airline employee. By the time the camera shifts to the young man, we are examining Morton's ticket through two layers—the mindset of John Morton, and the auteur-like sensibility that has placed us temporarily within that mindset.

To ask why the UCP has vanished or transmogrified into the APP is a chicken-or-egg question. In the latter half of the 20th century, film gradually overtook theatre as our chief dramatic vehicle, and the APP overtook the UCP as the

chief departure from the “normal vocabulary” of the story. It is possible that authors, themselves audiences for films in which “it’s clear that the ‘point of view’ that we’re seeing is that of the filmmaker, or filmmaker as storyteller” (Rossio), have internalized what Phillip Lopate calls the “subjective interiority” of film narrative (“Adapt This”). As a result, they tend less to hand characters moments of “characterizing vocabulary” and more to take for granted that readers want the “camerawork” (i.e. authorial language) of the story to convey characters’ most deeply subjective views. It is equally possible that the rise of both film and the APP derive, ironically, from a way of experiencing a world in which we increasingly find no fixed truths. In a world of fixed truth, authorial diction intrudes, God-like, on “normally neutral” narrative, whereas characterological idiom provides a helpful inflection of the drama, a way of proposing that “to repair” to the outhouse is one individual, acceptable modulation of simply going there. In a world of relative truths, by contrast, authorial diction is no more God-like than any other diction and so can be played with—just as film angle is played with; just as notions of identity, history, and the like are all “fair game.”

In short, the *presence* of cinematic storytelling seems highly correlated with the evolution in narrative style and consequent meaning that we posit here as veering from UCP to APP. But whether film is a *cause* for that shift or whether cultural or epistemological changes have affected both these narrative arts remains an open question.

That narrative goals—by which we mean goals of both writers and readers, insofar as those can be aligned—have changed in accordance with the UCP’s disappearance and the APP’s rise seems more certain though by no means more obvious. Let us accept (as we have done, tacitly, throughout this essay) the separate existence of authors and their characters. In this way, by giving characters like Uncle Charles, Lily, the Jewbird, the village women, Mr. Klein, and Joy a moment on the narrative stage, their authors are saying, in effect: “However unified my story creation may appear to be, bear in mind that this other voice exists that might tell the story very differently if he or she were allowed to dominate the stage.” Conversely, by lending characters like the grocery checkout clerk, Yuen, Bobby Lazar, and John Morton a “speck” of authorial vocabulary, their authors are saying, in effect: “However idiosyncratic my character may appear, however broken-off his or her world, we can connect and unify it if we only supply the right language.”

Fragmentation and unity remain, of course, the tension in which narrative is held. In the end, “The Dead” is not a play; “A&P” is not a movie. No doubt, as other storytelling forms—internet games, multilayered TV serials, graphic novels—rise to prominence, a new narrative principle will arrive to account for the interplay among the voices and idioms that comprise the written story, that unify its fragments and subvert its unity. That principle, likewise, will be no arbitrary style decision. It will be a necessary and natural outgrowth of story’s living connection to the *zeitgeist* and the expectations of those who live within their cultural moment, which means all of us.

ENDNOTES

1. Looked at entirely as a question of narrative language and not as a question of perspective, the UCP could partake of what Genette labels “pseudo-diegesis” (237). That is, a hypothetical moment within the narrative when Uncle Charles or Lily is telling a story of repairing to the bathroom or attending to the ladies is presented as if it were simply part of the larger narrative being told from outside. But this approach returns us to the peculiarity of the idiom, which has not been transformed in any way in its movement from metadiegetic to diegetic (Genette 236); Joyce brings it across intact.
2. Wayne Booth might call this entity the “implied author,” since the notion of a living being swapping idiom with his invented character is nothing if not a construct. But I would agree with Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan that “the implied author cannot literally be a participant in the narrative communication situation” (88), and so the simpler “author” serves our purpose here.

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