Duel and Multi-POV Novels and How to Make Them Work

A workshop with
G.S. Prendergast

POV Review

- *Which* point of view
  - Grammatical point of view/tense
- *Whose* point of view
  - What character(s) are the focus? Narrative point of view.

POV Review

- 1st Person Subjective – ex. *The Handmaid's Tale*
- 1st Person Detached – *Moby Dick*
- 3rd Person Limited – *Harry Potter* (with some exceptions)
- 3rd Person Objective – Rare in fiction, common in journalism
- 3rd Person Omniscient – *Lord of the Rings*
- 2nd Person – *Stolen* by Lucy Christopher

POV Review

- 1st Person Subjective – ex. *The Handmaid's Tale, The Hunger Games*
  - Pronouns "I" and "me" are used by the narrator.
  - The narrator is close to the action, often only knowing what the reader knows
  - The narrator is usually a protagonist
  - This POV gives a sense of immediacy.
  - It is popular in literary and YA.
  - Often in present tense (especially YA)

POV Review

- 1st Person Detached – *Moby Dick, The Name of the Rose*
  - "I" and "me" are used
  - Narrator is distanced by time or place
  - Narrator may or may not be the protagonist.
  - Narrator may appear to know how the story comes out
  - Past tense is often used.
  - Popular in literary, autobiographical fiction, historical fiction, genre fiction

POV Review

- 3rd Person Limited – *Harry Potter* (with some exceptions)
  - Pronouns he, she, they etc. are used.
  - Only the inner world/viewpoint of one or limited characters are known
  - Often past tense
  - No sense that the narrator knows the outcome
  - Popular in middle grade, YA, genre

POV Review

- 3rd Person Objective – Rare in fiction, common in journalism
  - the narrator tells what happens without stating more than can be inferred from the story's action and dialogue.
  - The narrator never discloses anything about what the characters think or feel
  - Little reference to past events
  - Can come off as emotionless and cold

POV Review

- 3rd Person Omniscient – *Lord of the Rings*
  - Narrator knows everything that is happening
  - All points of view covered.
  - Difficult to create tension because the reader knows too much
  - Sometimes difficult to follow
  - Popular in high fantasy
  - often past tense

POV Review

- 2nd Person – *Stolen* by Lucy Christopher
  - Pronoun "you" is used.
  - Can be one character speaking to another (*Stolen*)
  - Can be a narrator speaking to a character (*You* by Charles Benoit)
  - Slightly experimental tone
  - Can be either present or past tense
  - More common in picture books, rhymes for children
  - Seen in short fiction

- When you are writing in dual or multi POV you can be using one, two or several of the above.
- Usually all POVs are in the same tense and grammatical POV but not always (Lish McBride's *Hold me Closer Necromancer* is an example where both 1st and 3rd are used)

Why Write in Multi POV?

- Two or more protagonists each with their connection to the main plot or their own plot
- Important subplots separate from the protagonist(s)
- Monogamous or polygamous **romance**
- Antagonist has their own storyline
- Two or more timelines

Why Write in Multi POV?

- Two or more protagonists each with their own main plot or equally involved in the main plot
  - More or less equal time
  - Often chapter by chapter
  - Separate, possibly related conflicts
  - Popular in romance (more on that below)
  - Works well in YA
  - Characters may be related or intersect or not
- To read: *Zero Repeat Forever* by G.S. Prendergast, *Across the Universe* by Beth Revis

Why Write in Multi POV?

- Important subplots separate from the protagonist(s)
  - Minor or supporting characters
  - Consistent throughout book or bookend/opening chapters.
  - Integrated into overall style of book
  - Seen in "epic" books like *Game of Thrones*
  - Often action taking place in several locations
- To read: *Lord of the Rings* by J.R.R. Tolkien

Why Write in Multi POV?

- Romance
  - Very popular with readers and editors
  - Obviously geared towards two protagonists
  - Can show what the characters are hiding from each other (ie their histories, doubts or emotional issues)
  - Helpful in creating tension and revealing obstacles
  - Provides narratively interesting opportunities in sex scenes!
- To read: *Crossfire Series* by Sylvia Day

Why Write in Multi POV?

- Antagonist has their own storyline
  - Sometimes seen in police/detective procedurals/ mysteries
  - Often the POV of the antagonist is "unreliable"
  - What the reader knows about the antagonist might be limited
  - Used to create tension/suspense
  - Usually fewer scenes/chapters
- To read: *Career of Evil* by Robert Galbraith

Why Write in Multi POV?

- Two or more timelines
  - Stories may or may not intersect in time
  - Non-linear narrative
  - May be thematically or narratively related
  - may only be one narrator but in different times (ie. Child and adult)
  - Often found in literary/historical fiction
- To read: *Holes* by Louis Sachar, *Cat's Eye* by Margaret Atwood

In short:
Make sure you have a good reason to use dual or multi-POV.

- Outline the characters separately
- Visualize your storylines
  – Use index cards or similar
  – Use different colored ink
  – Use a spreadsheet or similar
- Can the story work without one of the POVs?

How to differentiate the POVs

- Voice
- POV/tense
- Font!
- Easier in 3rd person (because the character's name is used in narrative)
- Structural breaks
- Headings!

How to differentiate the POVs

- Voice
  – Think about your characters' backgrounds
  – What is their level of education?
  – What do they know about the world?
  – Use of slang, dialect
  – Style: one character's narration might be more poetic, the other more simple
  – To read: *Pinned* by Sharon Flake

How to differentiate the POVs

- Grammatical POV/tense
  – More suited to dual than multi-POV
  – One character can be in 1st, one in 3rd
  – One can be in present tense, one in past tense
  – Should be chapter by chapter
  – Better for parallel storylines/subplots rather than one storyline
  To read: *Hold Me Closer, Necromancer* by Lish McBride

How to differentiate the POVs

- Font!
  - You can use this in your manuscript – sparingly
  - Probably best to keep to Times New Roman and Ariel
  - DON'T use colors!
  - Decision ultimately up to the publisher
  - Probably more suited to YA and kids
  - For submission purposes this is probably a moot point.
  - To read: *Will Grayson, Will Grayson* by John Green and David Levithan

How to differentiate the POVs

- Easier in 3rd person (because the character's name is used in narrative)
  - Issues of voice still relevant
  - Can still change tense
  - Can be used for non linear plots
  - One big difference is that a character will only be thinking in their own POV chapters/sections
  - To read: *Between Lost and Found* by Shelly Stratton

How to differentiate the POVs

- Structural breaks
  - Part breaks (ie. Part I, Part II)
  - Chapter Breaks – common in YA and romance
  - Editorial breaks within chapters
  - Scene breaks within chapters
  - DON'T "head hop"

How to differentiate the POVs

- Headings!

When Dimple Met Rishi
by Sandhya Menon
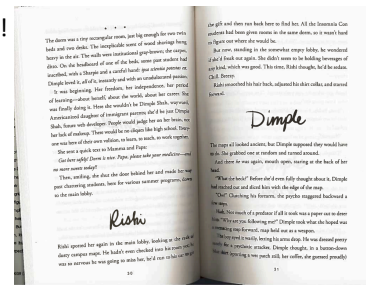
Character Development in Multi-POV

- How much do the characters know about each other?
- How much contact do they have with each other?
- What details are revealed about A by A and what details are revealed by B?
- How does A feel about B. How is that different from how A feels about themselves?

Character Development in Multi-POV

- How much do the characters know about each other?
  - Can range from nothing to a lot
  - They can learn a lot through the course of the book
  - It depends on how narratively connected the characters are
  - One character could know everything while the other knows nothing
  - What details do they share with each other and when? Do they have secrets?

  To read: *Morag's Honor* by Bibi Rizer

Character Development in Multi-POV

- How much contact do they have with each other?
  - In non-linear it might be not at all
  - They may start out separate and meet during the story
  - They may start out together and then separate
  - They may be together in some parts and apart in others
  - To read: *You Against Me* by Jenny Downham

Character Development in Multi-POV

- What details are revealed by A and what details are revealed by B?
  - can be either plot or character details
  - What details they notice speaks to what is important to each character
  - What do they notice/reveal about each other?
  - What do they reveal to each other?
  - To read: *Electrify Me*, by Bibi Rizer

Character Development in Multi-POV

- How does A feel about B? How is that different from how A feels about themselves?
  - Particularly important in romance
  - By reading both sides the reader gets a truer impression of the character
  - Characters not knowing how the other feels heightens tension
  - So: does character A's impressions/experiences of character B help develop them?

Chronology and Plot in Multi-POV

- Sequential – One POV takes you from A to B then the other POV takes you from C to D
- Parallel – Characters are separated from each other and doing different things at the same time.
- Might be a mix of the above two.
- Non-Linear – One, two or more characters telling stories in different timelines. May or may not intersect
- DON'T tell the same events from different POVs unless that is your stylistic choice for the whole book.

Chronology and Plot in Multi-POV

- Sequential – One POV takes you from A to B then the other POV takes you from C to D
  - Characters can be together or apart through the book though usually it's a mixture
  - Breaks can be natural scene breaks or in the middle of a scene
  - Usually applies when both characters are involved in the one plot line.
  - Usually one shared resolution
  - Possibly an "epic" plot carried on over generations
- To Read: *The Cider House Rules* by John Irving

Chronology and Plot in Multi-POV

- Parallel – Characters are separated from each other and doing different things at the same time.
  - Problems might arise when one character needs time to complete a story beat.
  - What is the other character doing during that time?
  - The stories will usually intersect eventually
  - Usually one shared resolution
  - Might have subplot resolutions too
- To Read: *Nothing* by Robin Friedman

Chronology and Plot in Multi-POV

- Non-Linear – One, two or more characters telling stories in different timelines. May or may not intersect
  - One or more might be a historical plot
  - Each plot will have its own resolution
  - Plot A's resolution might feed into the resolution of plot B etc.
- To Read: *Cat's Eye* by Margaret Atwood

Chronology and Plot in Multi-POV

- DON'T tell the same events from different POVs unless that is your stylistic choice for the whole book.
  - This method usually relates somehow to the premise of the book (i.e. a school shooting from multiple POVs)
  - The challenge would be not to be repetitive.
- To Read: *Flipped* by Wendelin Van Draanen

Raising Stakes/Conflict in Multi-POV

- Where to change POV in a scene
- Chapter endings/cliffhangers
- Information known by one character but not the other

Raising Stakes/Conflict in Multi-POV

- Where to change POV in a scene
  - Sometimes reflects shifts in balance of power
  - Sometimes reflects characters' awareness
  - May literally be about character's POV (i.e. in a battle scene where characters are separated)

Raising Stakes/Conflict in Multi-POV

- Chapter endings/cliffhangers
    - If breaking at chapters ends, try to leave on a cliffhanger
    - Either a scene cliffhanger, a cliffhanger for that character (that readers have to wait a chapter to resolve), or a plot cliffhanger

Raising Stakes/Conflict in Multi-POV

- Information known by one character but not the other
    - Tension of not knowing when one character will share information
    - When the reader knows/suspects something but wonders which character will discover it first

Bonus: Multi-POV sex scenes!

- DON'T HEAD HOP
- Natural breaks in "action"
    - i.e. kiss to bedroom for one character, bedroom stuff for the other character, afterglow back to the first character
- Try to give each POV character at least one sex scene
    - Challenging writing sex scenes from a gender you don't share.
    - Research!
- To read: *Objectify Me*, by Bibi Rizer

Tips

- Give characters catchphrases
- Read that character's previous chapter before writing a new one
- Remember each character's appearance and physicality
- Remember what they are wearing, how they have their hair
- Give them unique personalities

Any Questions?