

Points of View

In my current book project, I have a bit of a quandary. Although the same concern occurred in my earlier books, it didn't seem to bother me much in those. Let me explain my dilemma. In all my novels, I have an ensemble cast. There is not always an obvious protagonist. Instead there are several important figures. Is that for the best, each person having his or her own story lines, and each with their own thoughts, feelings, and motives? I like that format. It results in multiple plots and sub-plots, as well as assorted points of view for the reader to wrestle with.

But that brings me to my concern. Do most readers prefer a story told from one perspective, with one main character, through whose eyes the tale unfolds? I think a lot of readers do find one narrator easier. And I admit, when I read, I find the single voice, usually in first person, comforting. It's just simpler, and it can be more engrossing, because I can more readily identify with the character and experience their struggles and actions fully. In such novels, the reader lives inside the mind of just one person, and after all, that is the way we live, of course, so why not experience life in a book in the same way?

Of course stories need more than one character, and these others can be people our hero encounters in the course of his days that he reacts to. But part of what makes life and books interesting to me is what goes on inside other people's heads. I like to explore what each is thinking. I think that is more interesting and more rewarding psychologically. And I believe that kind of intimacy deepens the sub-plots, and enhances reader engagement. All those other characters are experiencing their own trajectories, their own story lines, and those stories need to be told. Being privy to others' thoughts is fun and intriguing for the reader. Those thoughts just better be interesting or the reader will close the book.

All of the above is probably a long rationalization for writing the way I want to write, with multiple characters, multiple points of view and multiple plots. I suspect that's why my books (so far) are over 400 pages long.