

Ben Sperber

P.6 AP Lit

Independent Project.

*I would like to say that this comes from a series of questions that I had as I read the novel, and as I attempt to answer and explain such questions in such a short period, I apologize if it is somewhat disjointed.

Christopher Isherwood's novel, "*A Single Man*," was distinct in the way it portrayed a deeply grieving protagonist through point of view; the work is written in third person limited, with forays into third person omniscient which effectively communicates George's thoughts and processing. However, I would like to argue that the novel is in fact written from a first person point of view; after George's peaceful death in his sleep, he is incorporated into a communal consciousness and becomes the third person narrator that tells the story.

Throughout the day-in-the-life novel, the narrator is both disengaged and highly personal, much like George himself. In the early parts of the work, George shows signs of dissociative tendencies, having to begin every morning "with saying am and now" and having to take time to recognize "its name. It is called George." (pp 9-11). Due to this dissociation from self, at this point in the novel, it is unclear to the reader the point of view that it's written from. George could be referring to himself as "it"—a phenomenon that is repeated multiple times in the novel—generating a sort of out-of-body experience in his time of grief. This removed narration then becomes consistent with third person omniscient when Dreyer's future—with children and friends and a night of reminiscence—are spoken of at length. (pp 51-52). Yet, due to the nature

of the novel as being the series of events of a single day, it is unclear to the reader if this is merely a musing of George or a look into the future by an omniscient narrator.

The nature of a third person narrator is to be able to be simultaneously aware of the past, present, and future. Thusly, if George were to die, he would be inherently separated from his body—which is noted later in the novel, saying that George’s consciousness “will return to find itself homeless. For it can associate no longer with what lies here”—and therefore he would likely be able to tell this story from such a perspective. (p 186). The final sections of the novel cement the concept of a communal consciousness with the metaphor of rock pools on the coast. Isherwood says that “Each pool is separate....and you can, if you are fanciful give them names, such as George, Charlotte...so you may think of a rock pool as an entity; though, of course, it is not.” (p 183). In this metaphor, it is clear that each rock pool is meant to be a human conscious—as shown by their names. And, when the tide pools are drained at high tide, they intermingle into a single “consciousness which is no one in particular but which contains everyone and everything, past, present and future...” (p 184). This metaphor reinforces the notion that once George dies (or when “high tide” comes), he is incorporated into the wider “waters,” in this case a communal consciousness.

As a result of his death, George is therefore able to be out-of-body and tell the story from a third person narrative perspective. However, due to the nature of this ocean which contains everything past, present, and future, he is also capable of being the omniscient narrator that makes the appearances throughout the novel as noted above. Therefore, while seemingly telling the story from the POV of a third person narrator, the story is actually first person. After his death, George is not a being but is rather a consciousness and this consciousness is no longer

associated (nor can it be associated) with a body, making George as the narrator both impersonal and disconnected. Yet, George's consciousness is still present and is capable of telling the story from his perspective, even if he is inherently separated from the situation, thus making him both a first and third person narrator.