Do I or Don’t I? Using the First Person in Fiction

Carol Berg 2024

**A-1**

It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune must be in want of a wife.

However little known the feelings or views of such a man may be on his first entering a neighbourhood, this truth is so well fixed in the minds of the surrounding families, that he is considered as the rightful property of some one or other of their daughters.

“My dear Mr. Bennet,” said his lady to him one day, [NOTE, this is his lady, not “Elizabeth’s mother” or “my mother”] “have you heard that Netherfield Park is let at last?'”

Mr. Bennet replied that he had not.

But it is,'' returned she; ”for Mrs. Long has just been here, and she told me all about it.”

Mr. Bennet made no answer.

-- Jane Austen *Pride and Prejudice*

**A-2**

…the general pause that ensued made Elizabeth tremble lest her mother should be exposing herself again. She longed to speak, but could think of nothing to say…

-- Jane Austen *Pride and Prejudice*

**A-3**

Jean-Claude clung to the *St. Marie’s* guardrail with one hand and to his tether with the other. He wanted a word with Captain Jerome, who stood on the quarterdeck of the skyship, an impossible distance away. Unfortunately doing the impossible was a sworn part of Jean-Claude’s duty, so he side stepped awkwardly. The whistling win made jib sails of his tabard’s loose sleeve flaps, tugging him toward the emptiness beyond.

-- Curtis Craddock *Alchemy of Masques and Mirrors*

**B-1**

There was nothing more Rutledge could do that day about his promise to Nell Shaw. Nor the next… It nagged like a sore tooth as he drove into the part of south London where the Shaws lived. It was familiar ground, and yet as the motorcar turned down street after street, he could see that the once working-class houses were showing signs of neglect after five years of war and shortages of men and materials. England had impoverished herself to win, and Rutledge found himself thinking that here was the invisible cost in human suffering and hardship.

-- Charles Todd  *A Fearsome Doubt*

**B-2**

“What kind of circus is only open at night?” people ask. No one has a proper answer, yet as dusk approaches there is a substantial crowd of spectators gathering outside the gates.

You are amongst them, of course. Your curiosity got the better of you, as curiosity is wont to do. You stand in the fading light, the scarf around your neck…

-- Erin Morgenstern *The Night Circus*

**C-1**

I tried to think how many times I’d kneeled down on asphalt to read the signs, but I knew this was the first time I’d done it in Hulett. Located in the northeast corner of the Wyoming Black Hills, the town is best known for being the home of Devil’s Tower. I looked at the macadem blend, the stones shining in the mix still wet from the morning rain, and sighed. With the advent of anti-lock brakes, it was hard enough to properly estimate the speed of a vehicle involved in a traffic accident, never mind in the rain. -- Craig Johnson, *An Obvious Fact* (Longmire series)

Lest anyone should suppose I am a son of a nobody, sold off by some peasant father in a drought year, I may say our line is an ancient one, although it ends with me.

-- Mary Renault, *The Persian Boy*

**C-2**.

It was about eleven o'clock in the morning, mid October, with the sun not shining and a look of hard wet rain in the clearness of the foothills. I was wearing my powder-blue suit, with dark blue shirt, tie and display handkerchief, black brogues, black wool socks with dark blue clocks on them. I was neat, clean, shaved, and sober, and I didn't care who knew it. I was everything the well-dressed private detective ought to be. I was calling on four million dollars.

-- Raymond Chandler, *The Big Sleep*

**C-3**

When I wake up the other side of the bed is cold. My fingers stretch out seeking Prim’s warmth, but finding only the rough canvas cover of the mattress. She must have had bad dreams and climbed in with our mother. Of course she did. This is the day of the reaping.

*--* Suzanne Collins, *The Hunger Games*

**C-4**

“I thought you told me he was well-behaved,” said the Prince. “Why is his owner getting rid of him?”

Of course the slave merchant would not understand. The kindly old warrior baron I had served for the past two years was dying and had decided he would sell me rather than allow me to become the property of his only daughter--a woman who took singular pleasure in abusing those she could not command to love her. Deciding whom to love was one of my remaining points of honor. No doubt it would crumble along with all the rest, given enough time.

-- Carol Berg, *Transformation*

**C-5**

I attempted to wriggle my toes and succeeded. I was sprawled there in a hospital bed and my legs were done up in plaster casts, but they were still mine. I squeezed my eyes shut and opened them three times. The room grew steady. Where the hell was I?

-- Roger Zelazny, *Nine Princes in Amber*

**C-6**

Siobhan has long blond hair and wears glasses which are made of green plastic. And Mr Jeavons smells of soap and wears brown shoes that have approximately 60 tiny circular holes in each of them. But I do like murder mystery novels. So I am writing a murder mystery novel.

-- Mark Haddon, *The Curious Event of the Dog in the Nighttime*,

**C-7**

It was one of those dismal autumn nights, with the wind whistling like a mad huntsman calling up the Hounds of Hell, and you know there’s rain toward. And sure enough it came, battering at the roof and shutters, and not a little down the chimney so the fire smoked up the place. But there sat my Meg, nice as you please, sewing at a shirt for her niece’s eldest down Rutherford way. I was doing a bit of basket-mending, glad that the flock were well penned up already this rough night. Between the rushlight and the fire’s glow we could see to work. Or maybe it was our fingers remembering the way of it. Lately, light’s not as bright as it once was.

-- Ellen Kushner, *Thomas the Rhymer*

D-1

When he was nearly thirteen my brother Jem got his arm badly broken at the elbow. …When enough years had gone by to enable us to look back on them, we often discussed the events leading up to his accident.

-- Harper Lee, *To Kill a Mockingbird*

D-2

It’s sweat. I wasn’t sure at first. I haven’t been a vampire that long, but I sure as hell don’t remember sweating since becoming one. Drops of moisture pool between my shoulder blades.

-- Jeanne Stein *Chosen*

D-3

“Here we are, Damoselle de Vernase.” My escort drew aside the overhanging pine branches so I could better view the disturbed ground. A raven flapped away, screeching, scraping my already stripped nerves. The shallow ravine was heavily wooded, preventing any glimpse of the severe gray walls or the round, slate-roofed towers my younger sister had called home for the past seven years.

-- Carol Berg, *The Soul Mirror*

D-4

I, Tiberius Claudius Drusus Nero Germanicus This-that-and-the-other (for I shall not trouble you yet with all my titles) who was once, and not so long ago either, known to my friends and relatives and associates as “Claudius the Idiot,” or “That Claudius,” or “Claudius the Stammerer,” or “Clau-Clau-Claudius” or at best as “Poor Uncle Claudius,” am now about to write this strange history of my life; starting from my earliest childhood and continuing year by year until I reach the fateful point of change where, some eight years ago, at the age of fifty-one, I suddenly found myself caught in what I may call the “golden predicament” from which I have never since become disentangled.

-- Robert Graves, *I, Claudius*

E-1:I couldn’t believe that Murphy could maim a child’s pony and three young racehorses. Not Murphy! It was impossible.

I knew there were dozens of people who could have learned where to find all four of those vulnerable animals. I was stupid to give any weight to a coincidence. Jeremy was honest, I had no doubt, but I believed he was a liar.

E-2: I saw George run down the street as if the fiends of hell were on his heels.

E-3: I heard the bells pealing high noon.

E-4: I knew Herman was a loser when I saw his mustard yellow socks.

E-5: I was only a boy when my mother died. I touched the photograph and the memory of her scent roused a kaleidoscope of memory.

E-6: I woke when the sun slipped below the horizon.

F-1

“You’re to go straight to the Prince’s chambers.” The slavemaster gave me no word as to what was wanted. Whether I was to serve dinner or be murdered, it wasn’t his business to know...or to tell me even if he did. I ran across the bustling, slushy courtyard to the kitchens, cleaned the mud off my bare feet in the footbath by the outer door, then hurried up the stairs, regretting the savory smells and billowing warmth left behind with the spits and baking ovens. Perhaps I’d get to linger a moment on the way back.

F-2

I walked obediently over to the table and assessed the bottles. In his old-fashioned way he kept brandy and sherry in decanters. Scotch remained in the screw-top bottle. I would have to have scotch, and doubted if I could pour even that.

I glanced upward at my portrait. In those days, six years ago, I’d had two hands. In those days I’d been British steeplechasing’s champion jockey, whole, healthy, and I daresay, fanatical..

F-3

*Should*—my foot slammed into his left knee—*have done this*—spinning, I brought the club down on his neck—*years ago*. He collapsed in an oily heap.