

The Illusion of How the Story is Told

There is almost always an illusion of how a novel is being told, and all novels need world-building

Sometimes it is pretty obvious or even explicit. In the early days of novels, the illusion was often explicit— an attempt to make it seem that the fiction is nonfiction. Today, we are accustomed to the convention of, say, being in a character's head and overhearing that character's thoughts. We just suspend disbelief and imagine this is possible

It is useful, after drafting a good chunk of your novel, to look back over what you have written and consider what illusion you have been creating. You may, of course, use more than one. But are you using the right illusion/s for your story? Is it possible that your illusion is somehow standing in the way of the story you want to tell?

Here are a few of many possible illusions:

Explicit illusion:

- Epistolary novel (letters paper or digital)
- I am the editor, and I found these documents in an old oaken chest...
- Exchange of emails
- Transcript of a trial
- Transcript of phone conversations
- Diary, journal, or blog (perhaps with actual dates of entries)
- Autobiography or memoir (stated as such)

Implicit illusion: (Often implicit through tone— conventions so common we hardly notice them)

- A friend is telling you this story over drinks or coffee (“Well, let me tell you...”)
- Appears to be written with distance on events—a fictional autobiography or memoir
- Appears to be something written, but written soon after the events, like a diary.
- Tone is like a fable or legend: the story telling past, once upon a time (we’re sitting around a fire and you’re telling us this tale)
- Illusion is that we are somehow inside one person’s head hearing thoughts
- We are in someone’s head experiencing what they experience **as** they experience it (first person present tense, stream of consciousness)
- Illusion that we can dip into many people’s minds.
- Illusion is that we rode a person’s shoulder, as if were, overheard their thoughts, saw what they saw (3rd person limited past tense)
- Illusion that we are riding a person’s shoulder as their life happens (3rd person limited present tense)
- Illusion that you are talking through your life (“You pick up the gun and pull back the hammer..”)
- Many others, and mixes.