

An Analysis of Narrative and Voice in Creative Nonfiction

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ABSTRACT

This manuscript surveys and analyzes the relationships between 25 published essays identified in the book *In Fact: The Best of Creative Nonfiction* using Jahn's (2003) narratological framework in an attempt to identify the narratological relationships between fiction and creative nonfiction and to analyze creative nonfiction through a narratological framework created for fiction.

All of the surveyed stories contained many indicators that contribute to a deepened engagement for the readers, however at the individual writer level; the lowest common denominator is each writer's ability to forge ahead and continue to create a narrative that develops meaning for the readers beyond the mere reporting of events.

Areas identified for further research includes experimental research in the areas of cross-cultural cognitive models that could provide insights concerning the existence of an unreliable narrator within narrative discourse. In addition research could be pursued in the areas of structural discourse of the narrative, much like Jahn's model, yet somewhat more cognitive juxtaposing the more psychological aspects of narrative discourse to the structural components.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The beginning is the most important part of the work.
Plato

As with any major undertaking whether it is an anthology, essay, or research project, the beginning is the most difficult part. Therefore, after many hours of research and reading, I had always wondered, what makes creative nonfiction successful? Could it be the story itself, regardless of who the author was? No, that really cannot be the answer because there are many good writers who are not as well recognized as they might have been, even with famous or infamous stories. As my research began to sift through the various nonfiction essays, I began to find several areas in which the essays began to display fundamental differences in the ways in which the authors developed the reader's interest with the ways in which they used narrative and voice. Hence, the discovery of these various characteristics within the creative nonfiction stories was the impetus for the following research questions:

1. What are the narratological relationships between fiction and creative nonfiction?
2. Can a narratological framework created for fiction be employed to analyze creative nonfiction?

The process of this analysis is undertaken with an understanding that there are many distinct as well as subtle differences between fiction and nonfiction. According to Richardson (444), the debate, while uncontested for years, suddenly has been rekindled in recent times. Much of the historical research dichotomizes the two genres in such polarities as true versus untrue, the author-narrator-traditional dichotomy that is typically reserved for fiction, and the author-reader relationship. According to Valken (3);

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The major difference between a fiction writer and a nonfiction writer, it was said, is that the latter should always adhere to truth and should never cross a certain inner border: he or she cannot write about emotions or dreams. Still it cannot be said that fiction is just make-believe, and only nonfiction contains the truth. Techniques are borrowed between fiction and non-fiction.

Interestingly, I found creative nonfiction to be a bridge from which fiction and nonfiction philosophically meet. In other words, for the purposes of this thesis, the delineation of nonfiction versus fiction as individual genres are very clear, however the nuances that make up "creative" nonfiction are a matter of subtle degree.

According to Lee Gutkind, creative nonfiction is defined as:

Dramatic, true stories using scenes, dialogue, close, detailed descriptions and other techniques usually employed by poets and fiction writers about important subjects...Creative Nonfiction heightens the whole concept and idea of essay writing. It allows a writer to employ the diligence of a reporter, the shifting voices and viewpoints of a novelist, the refined wordplay of a poet and the analytical modes of the essayist.

For methodological purposes, rather than developing an anthological source from which to begin the 'discovery' process I chose to review a book entitled *In Fact: The Best of Creative Nonfiction* by Lee Gutkind, founder and editor of the *Creative Nonfiction* journal. Gutkind's book identified twenty-five essays from acknowledged authors in the discipline of nonfiction. The second portion of the methodological strategy consists of research in narratology that had been performed by Manfred Jahn (2003) from the University of Cologne in analyzing narrative frameworks in fiction writing. A review of Jahn's narratological framework resulted in certain areas that I will compare and contrast to the surveyed creative nonfiction essays.

2.0 REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

According to Herman (1997) narratologists began investigating narratives and were determined to achieve a cataloging system that could differentiate components or, universal "...ingredients of narrative" (1046). Interestingly, Herman's (1997) study was focused on the "...interrelations among linguistic form, world knowledge, and narrative structure" (1048). In essence the integration of the three served to form the understanding of the narrative. This strand of research proved interesting in the blend of early cognitive theory (Herman; Jahn). Herman's research found relevance in the differentiation of the "tellability" versus the "narrativity" of the narrative in which the reader's use of scripts while reading is a mitigating factor of the narrative. Whereas, Jahn's use of frame theory posits that readers, when encountering new situations in narrative create a 'frame' wherein the new experience is developed and adapted to reality. Both views are similar in that the affect of the reader is cognitive based, whether readers use scripts for the integration of the narrative or the later frames from which readers are able to relate their experiences to the narrative.

In contrast, Zerweck (2001) argued that existence of an unreliable narrator is in essence a cultural and historical variable in narrative interpretive strategies. While the unreliable narrator notion is not found in nonfiction, according to Zerweck, the cultural continuum of cognitive understanding is mitigated by "...the context of frame theory as projection by the reader who tries to solve ambiguities and textual inconsistencies by attributing them to the narrator's unreliability" (151). This attribution error poses unreliability in a narrative discourse such that the subtle affects cause readers' interpretive strategies to vary, even within socio-cognitive framing paradigms. This 'unreliable' notion theoretically leads to the variable nature of the narrative.

Schneider (2001) in the development of a cognitive theory for characterization seeking the expansion of earlier mental model research was able to conceptualize cognitive and emotional structures for relevant character reception. Schneider argued that readers' mental models are able to "...capture what the text is about, not the text itself" (609) thereby creating the need for the narrative to be cognizant of reader's 'working memory' to achieve sufficient reader engagement.

In addition, Schneider (2001) differentiates readers' cognitive structural mental models in terms of categorization and personalization. Categorization is the process by which "...readers try to establish a holistic mental model of the character early on" (619), whereas personalization is a process by which readers "...pay more attention to individual bits of incoming information" (625). Regardless, Schneider

found that, while conceptualizing the dynamics of the construction of cognitive mental models, they remain a complex and dynamic entity in the narrative.

Alonso (2004) furthered his earlier research by developing an integration network model from which to discern a level of metaphorical thinking in human cognition. Alonso's model incorporates several of previously discussed conceptual components or attributes that are consistent with mental models, that of the integration of the narrative with the reader's cognitive operations, yet Alonso integrates a blended space, essentially a construct for the proliferation of the metaphor. To develop this theoretical model, Alonso applies the conceptual integration network model to John Updike's short story *The Wallet*. Alonso's rationale for choosing this story was based on previous researcher's arguments that Updike's "...fiction was thematically weightless..." and "...his elaborate qualifiers, metaphors and images as mere ornaments that hang on to events" (163). Therefore, according to Alonso (163),

...it seemed quite adequate to progress in the investigation of the conceptual structure of complex narrative discourse by analyzing the work of an author who is precisely renowned for his gifted treatment of the metaphor, a central topic in all linguistic approaches to human cognition.

Alonso's findings were positive in that he was able to utilize his conceptual integration network model to investigate the structure and cognitive components of Updike's short story and has found that the model sufficiently was able to integrate all intricacies found in metaphor theory and cognitive operations.

Manfred Jahn (2003) conducted a survey of incipits, or the beginnings of the stories from which he then developed his narratological frameworks. According to Jahn, narratology is

...the theory of the structures of narrative. To investigate a structure, or to present a 'structural description', the narratologist dissects the narrative phenomenon into their component parts and then attempts to determine functions and relationships. (18)

Jahn's (2003) research went to great lengths to detail, diagram, and develop a complete framework by which he is able to analyze and categorize the various components of the narrative.

3.0 METHODOLOGY

Lee Gutkind's description of the process in which he analyzed essays to be included in his book *In Fact: The Best of Creative Nonfiction* was that he looked for the essays to be "...creative - being indicative of the style in which nonfiction is written so as to make it more dramatic and compelling" (Gutkind xix). Of the 10,000 essays that had been submitted to *The Creative Nonfiction Journal*, only 300 were published; and of those 300, only twenty-five were selected to be republished in Gutkind's book. As a result of this process, only the 'best of the best' creative nonfiction essays are featured.

This manuscript surveys and analyzes the relationships between 25 published essays identified in the book *In Fact: The Best of Creative Nonfiction* using Jahn's (2003) narratological framework in an attempt to identify the narratological relationships between fiction and creative nonfiction and to analyze creative nonfiction through a narratological framework created for fiction.

3.1 NARRATOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

What is Narrative? By definition, a narrative is "...anything that tells or presents a story, be it by text, picture, performance, or a combination of these" (Jahn 18). For the purposes of this anthology, I will be adopting this definition for the works of this anthology. Much like Patsy Simms in *Literary Nonfiction: Learning by Example* stated "In this anthology, I have tried to give you a head start by pointing out the various techniques that make these fifteen stories good" (p 4), I will however, survey twenty-five excellent stories to determine the relationships among the narratives and voice.

Narrative Communication. According to Jahn (2003), there are varying levels of communication within a narrative. However, for nonfiction only one area of his model applies; that of the communication between the author and reader. In as much as this seems to be a somewhat moot issue, the varying communication

styles by the different authors analyzed herein serve as a grounding from which to understand the their fundamental of successful narratives.

Free Indirect Discourse. Similar to the description about narrative communication, free direct discourse according to Jahn (2003) provides techniques that allow authors to render a character's speech or thoughts. This methodology of Jahn's framework will survey the beginning paragraphs of the selected stories to analyze the level of free direct discourse narrative present.

Overt versus Covert Narratives. This component examines the relatedness between an overt narrator, one that refers to themselves in the first person, to that of a covert narrator, or more of a neutral narrative.

Narration (Voice). The narrator's voice is examined in terms of the active or passiveness in addition to understanding "who speaks?" within the prose. Additionally, this view is extremely important when analyzing the first paragraphs, or incipits, of these stories as the beginning sets the stage for the reader's potential interest.

Focalization (Mood). Similar to the previous component, I will examine the orientation of the narrator to include whether the narrator utilizes inter or external moods within the context of the narrative. In other words, I will be surveying the narrative mood – it may either be a point of view from the perspective of the narrator (external) or from the perspective of the character (internal).

Narrative Situation. Narrative situation explains several patterns of the respective narratives. I will survey the opening paragraph of the selected stories from such notions as first-person, authorial and figurative narratives. After reading many creative nonfiction stories, I have found that this is one of the key areas within a narrative that serves to pull the reader deeper into the true feeling of the prose.

Narrative Tenses. Narrative tenses, in addition to narrative situation, place the reader into specific points in time in relation to the story. This component describes how the respective authors apply narrative tense within their writings.

Narrative Modes. Interestingly, this portion of the framework reveals the narrative's presentation in forms such as showing versus telling. In a showing mode, the reader in a sense is or becomes a part of the events whereas in a telling mode, the author forms descriptive, commentary or summary narratives.

4.0 DISCUSSION

What is Narrative? Aside from the previous definition, if you were to ask 100 people "What is creative nonfiction narrative – to you?" You most probably would get as many different answers. They may range from detail-oriented gripping narratives such as Walt Harrington's *True Detective* (Simms 105) to heart-felt narratives such as Jon Franklin's, *Mrs. Kelly's Monster* (Simms 75).

Regardless of the responses that you are able to solicit, it becomes evident very quickly that many different situational components contribute to quality of narrative some of which will be the various topics of this anthology. As an example, in Meredith Hall's opening line in *Shunned*;

Even now I talk too much and too loud, claiming ground, afraid that I will disappear from this life, too, from this time of being mother and teacher and friend.

We get a distinct feel and understanding for her plight even to the point of empathy, before we really get into a truer understanding of the essence of the story. All we know at this point is that the title – that item that initially attracts our interest, causes us to ponder and read further;

That It—everything I care about, that I believe in, that defines and reassures me—will be wrenched from me again.

Our engagement as a reader has been validated; we are beginning on a personal journey of reflective and agonizing disclosure of one woman's experience – and we have now become a part of it!

As mentioned repeatedly in Simms' (2002) text, many creative nonfiction writers often get their aspiration from reading many different authors' work. In spite of the shared notion of the creative nonfiction

discipline, it remains a tenant in this thesis that the various authors surveyed herein may have some similarities on the macro level, but at the micro level, they are as distinct as their fingerprints and I believe that this is one of the main reasons that nonfiction has grown beyond journalism into what we see today as a strong and viable alternative to strict journalism.

4.1 NARRATIVE COMMUNICATION

According to Jahn's model (2003), in nonfiction narrative the communication typically lies between the author and reader. However, the survey of the literature contained within this study demonstrates various ways in which authors communicate through their narratives with the readers. From an initial survey of the opening narratives I was able to ascertain varying levels within the narrative communication that, while extraordinarily different, create an initial bonding with the reader to fully engage them into further reading.

One way in which Lauren Slater communicates in *Three Spheres* is through an initial background consisting of doctor's intake notes;

Linda Whitcomb: Initial Intake Notes

Ms. Whitcomb is a 37-year-old SWF who has had over 30 hospitalizations, all for suicide attempts or self-mutilation. She scratches her arms lightly when upset. Was extensively sexually abused as a child. Is now requesting outpatient therapy for bulimia. Ms. Whitcomb says she's vomiting multiple times during the day. Teeth are yellowed and rotting, probably due to stomach acids present during purges.

This beginning, according to Jahn (2003) can be defined as a first-degree narrative, in other words, it is not contained or embedded within any other narrative. Of the surveyed stories, this is the only one of its kind, i.e., the cold matter-of-factly clinical opening. Others that display the first-degree narrative that provides more imagery such as Jewell Parker Rhodes' *Mixed-Blood Stew*;

It was an old document. Rough parchment, yellowed and withered. I was all of ten, on the threshold of womanhood, digging in my mother's closet, trying to find clues about why my mother abandoned me when I was an infant, why she returned to claim me when I was nine.

While this opening narrative provides a descriptive background similar to Lauren Slater, it doesn't have the cold clinical feel and provides much insight into the mind of the little girl that was investigating possible answers to her past. Yet, another level of effective descriptive narrative may be found in Jana Richman's *Why I Ride*;

The fear begins to subside as soon as I'm out of town. The speed of the open road should cause greater fear, but the whirl of the engine lulls me into a false sense of safety.

This next level that is found within this prose is that of Richman's descriptive feelings and sensations. Richman is able to engage the reader into feeling of the open road. Also on another level, the narrative tells us of how the open road "should" cause us to feel greater fear, yet, we are not afraid because we are somewhat secure of the feeling we get being "one" with the motorcycle.

Another level that I was able to discern from the surveyed essays is somewhat a call to action on the part of the author to the reader. In Terry Tempest Williams' *Prayer Dogs*, Williams begins by asking the reader rhetorical questions concerning prairie dogs;

Prairie dogs. Prairie gods. Pleistocene mammals standing on their hind legs in the big wide open.

What do they see?

What do they smell?

What do they hear?

What they hear is the sound of a truck coming toward their town, the slamming of doors, the voices, the pressure of feet walking toward them.

Within these few opening sentences, Williams is able to gain the attention of the reader by physically placing the reader into the minds of the prairie dogs; we are able to see and feel what the prairie dogs feel.

Lastly, another way in which the opening sentences of a story grasp the reader's emotion is somewhat different in that the feeling may be more externally descriptive, yet the readers "feeling" of being there is shared with the narrator as in Sherry Thompson's *Killing Wolves*;

At the Gold stream General Store just down the road from my house, three creamy wolf pelts dangle from the log beam above the dog food section. Their paws brush my cheeks as I walk the narrow aisle, the wood floor creaking beneath my feet. My fingers drift across the fur. A single paw covers my entire hand.

Thompson's descriptive, yet abbreviated account of the pelts allow the reader to experience the same feeling of not only being there, but based on the descriptive prose, the reader is able to gain an idea of the size of the pelts which creates the awareness of the lifelessness of the store as we walk through the isles together.

From these somewhat limited samplings of exceptional nonfiction beginnings we are able to differentiate varying levels from which to better understand the captivating nature of developing and experiential opening for the reader. We are able to differentiate the subtle differences that the authors communicate with their readers from the very clinical setting from which Lauren Slater begins her essay to Terry Tempest's empathetic view from a prairie dog's perspective. Therefore, it is from within these authorial-specific subtle nuances the impetus of creative nonfiction takes its form to engage the reader beyond that of austere journalism.

4.2 FREE INDIRECT DISCOURSE

Free indirect discourse is one area of creative nonfiction setting renowned authors apart from others. The notion of free indirect discourse is to develop an essence of thought or speech in a character without breaking the prose into portion of "he said, she said" dialogic methodologies. The essays that were surveyed in this anthology provide some very good examples of this technique and create a subtle key foundation of the process these celebrated authors possess. One such example may be found in Codrescu's *Joe Stopped By*;

When I handed her the phone, Laura looked like I was taking her to the dentist. I had met the guy twice. The first time we stood on the lawn of Laura's old place on Myrtle Dale, and he looked on me suspiciously, like he must have looked on all her boyfriends since she started bringing them home around the age of sixteen. He complained about his truck and the lack of rain on his pecan trees, and I told him that the publishing industry was going to the dogs. Nice conversation. Mutual incomprehension. Lasted about five minutes.

It is not beyond most of our experiences to understand the thought behind the look on Laura's face or the mutual incomprehension. Similarly, Williams' *Prayer Dogs* create that imagery as we are swept sown into the burrows with the little creatures;

Prairie dogs. Prairie gods. Pleistocene mammals standing on their hind legs in the big wide open.

What do they see?

What do they smell?

What do they hear?

What they hear is the sound of a truck coming toward their town, the slamming of doors, the voices, the pressure of feet walking toward them. What they see now the well-worn sole of a boot, now the pointed toe kicking out the entrance to their burrow, blue Levi's bending down, gloved hands flicking a lighter, the flame, the heat, then the hands shoving something burning. Something is burning. They back up farther down their tunnel, smoke now curling inside the darkness as inside, closing their burrow, covering the entrance shut. They are running down, down, down, around. They cannot see. What they smell is fear, fear in the form of gas. They cough and wheeze, their eyes burning tightening, cramping. They try to run, try to turn, every one of them scurrying to escape, to flee, but all exits have been kicked closed. The toxic smoke is chasing them like an invisible snake promising an agonizing death, suffocation, strangulation, every organ in spasm, until other's bodies, noses covered in blankets of family fur, families young and old, slowly, cruelly gassed to death.

Although now evident throughout all of the essays surveyed, the ability of these authors to seamlessly report on a character's thoughts, feelings, and expressions is clearly an optional strategy in which authors make it easier for readers to navigate through the narrative.

4.3 OVERT VERSUS COVERT NARRATIVE

The differences that are found in effective creative nonfiction is the ability for the author to transparently develop the narrative structure that will allow the best use of the notions of an overt narrator, one that refers to themselves in the first person, to that of a covert narrator, or more of a neutral narrative.

Both approaches were taken within the surveyed essays and were effectively utilized; however, the overt narrative was used more often as the first-person which added to the emotive influence of the prose. Some examples of the overt narrative style are John Edgar Wideman's *Looking at Emmett Hill*:

A nightmare of being chased has plagued my sleep since I was a boy. The monster pursuing me assumes many shapes, but its face is too terrifying for the dream to reveal. Even now I sometimes startle myself awake, screaming, the dream's power undiminished by time, the changing circumstances of my waking life.

Additionally, in Floyd Skloot's *Gray Area: Thinking with a Damaged Brain*, Skloot traverses beyond the first-person narrative much like Wideman's opening lines;

I used to be able to think. My brain's circuits were all connected and I had spark, a quickness of mind that let me function well in the world. There were no problems with numbers or abstract reasoning; I could find the right word, could hold a thought in mind, match faces with names, converse coherently in crowded hallways, learn new tasks. I had a memory and an intuition that I could trust. All that changed on December 7, 1988, when I contracted a virus that targeted my brain.

The similarities found between these two excerpts involve not only the first-person portrayal of the narrative, but they emphasize more yet to come. With such types of opening paragraphs, the reader's expectations are increased as they are pulled into the narrative.

Similarly, covert narratives can develop a reader's interest as well as illustrated by Mark Bowden's *Finders Keepers: The Story of Joey Coyle* with his creative description that somewhat walks us through the streets of South Philadelphia.

South Philadelphia does not call attention to itself. It is built low to the ground, in row after brick row; no house stands high above another. Brothers live across narrow streets from brothers, fathers from sons and nephews and grandsons. Down the alley folks can sometimes see in the awkward way a boy runs or squints or throws a ball the reflected image of his grandfather or great-uncle. When a man from South Philly says he knew a fellow "from the neighborhood," it means something more like family than acquaintance.

Mark Bowden's narrative style is able to create the illusion for the reader of traversing the neighborhood in addition to the development of the 'understanding' of life in South Philly.

Regardless of the style that the surveyed authors chose to begin their essays with, it seems that the common thread between them is the creative and artful use of narrative to develop the foundation that causes readers to delve further into their work. From the overt perspective, John Edgar Wideman brings the reader into his world by sharing and enmeshing the reader with the feelings that one can have as a child, quite possibly many readers may identify with monstrous dreams that consume much of our memories. Similarly, Skloot, in his essay, utilizes the first-person narrative to give the reader a descriptive understanding from his perspective.

While using the first person or overt, narrative style does allow the reader to become engaged with the essay, the covert style also is creative in how a narrative can draw a reader's curiosity into the essay. Mark Bowden's essay is such an example, the way in which he uses the shorter sentence structure and descriptive sentences causes the reader to learn much of the area in a few lines of text. In this way one does not only understand the city, but also understand those that live there.

4.4 NARRATION (VOICE)

All the essays surveyed were unique and as the individual authors themselves, however, using Jahn's (2003) narratology guidelines, the effective use of voice within a each narrative was found to be very ubiquitous as to the author's presence or absence as defined by Jahn (2003) as homodiegetic and heterodiegetic respectively.

One point that was very obvious within this surveyed group of creative nonfiction stories was that the homodiegetic or authors' presence within the story greatly outnumbered those essays in which the author was not present, or the heterodiegetic narratives. Many examples such as Wideman's *Looking at Emmett Till*;

A nightmare of being chased has plagued my sleep since I was a boy.

This excerpt, in such a short and concise sentence, gives the reader not only the notion of the present, but also the past experiences of the narrator as well. In a similar way, Codrescu's *Joe Stopped By* provides the reader with the same feeling of past as well as presence of the moment;

When I handed her the phone, Laura looked like I was taking her to the dentist. Her father was in town and threatened to come over. I had met the guy twice.

Lastly, McPhee's *An Album Quilt* provides the similar notion of the integration of past and present;

It has somehow become 1978 and for ten or fifteen years I have been intending to attempt a piece of writing called "Six Princetons"—the school as it has variously appeared to someone who was born in Princeton and has lived in Princeton all his life.

Yet on another level, the homodiegetic narrative is developed by others through present experience as demonstrated in Simic's *Dinner at Uncle Boris's*;

Always plenty of good food and wine. The four of us at the table take turns uncorking new bottles. We drink out of water glasses the way they do in the old country.

And in the form of self-reflection in *What Is It We Really Harvestin' Here?* By NtozakeShange;

We got a say in', "The blacker the berry, the sweeter the juice," which is usually meant as a compliment. To my mind, it also refers to the delectable treats we as a people harvested for our owners and for our own selves all these many years, slave or free.

The examples of the heterodiegetic narratives are just as diverse among themselves as were the homodiegetic narratives. In Slater's *Three Spheres* the opening is in the form of intake notes in which the narrator creates an immediate awareness for the reader while maintaining a feeling of distance;

Linda Whitcomb: Initial Intake Notes

Ms. Whitcomb is a 37-year-old SWF who has had over 30 hospitalizations, all for suicide attempts or self-mutilation. She scratches her arms lightly when upset.

On yet another level, while still homodiegetic, Williams' *Prayer Dogs* take the reader into the minds and experience of the animals;

Prairie dogs. Prairie gods. Pleistocene mammals standing on their hind legs in the big wide open.

What do they see?

What do they smell?

What do they hear?

What they hear is the sound of a truck coming toward their town, the slamming of doors, the voices, the pressure of feet walking toward them. What they see now the well-worn sole of a boot, now the pointed toe kicking out the entrance to their burrow, blue Levi's bending down, gloved hands flicking a lighter, the flame, the heat, then the hands shoving something burning Something is burning.

Whereas, Bowden's *Finders Keepers: The Story of Joey Coyle* give the reader not only a little background into the looks and feel of South Philly, but also insight into proximity of the relationships within the city;

South Philadelphia does not call attention to itself. It is built low to the ground, in row after brick row; no house stands high above another. Brothers live across narrow streets from brothers, fathers from sons and nephews and grandsons. Down the alley folks can sometimes see in the awkward way a boy runs or squints or throws a ball the reflected image of his grandfather or great-uncle.

Finally, Gerard's *Adventures in Celestial Navigation* textually places the reader in the story to experience navigation issues;

N: Proving Yourself Wrong

You begin by pretending you know exactly where you are.

You begin with a fiction.

On a chart of the inshore ocean—or on a blank universal plotting sheet you've laid out with penciled straight lines that represent the curved reality of Earth (another fiction)—you mark your position, a dark point on blank water. You call this your DR position—for ded reckoning.

Even though the author's presence within the story greatly outnumbered those essays in which the author was not present, it seems very apparent that even though we are able to differentiate the differences between homodiegetic and heterodiegetic narratives, we cannot help but understand that the continuum between the two provide many opportunities that authors are able to provide their desired affect for their readers.

4.4 FOCALIZATION (MOOD)

According to Jahn (2003), "mood metaphorically invokes a grammatical verb category...mood categorizes verb forms according to whether they express a fact, a command, a possibility, or a wish" (p 30). Additionally, while a narrative may be from an external focalization, or the world view of the story, focalization may also be presented from the character's point of view, or, internal focalization (Jahn).

The majority of the twenty-five surveyed essays present an internal focalization that invokes an emotion or sentiment in the reader which helps to differentiate these essays from the others contained within this study. For example in Wideman's *Looking at Emmett Till*;

A nightmare of being chased has plagued my sleep since I was a boy. The monster pursuing me assumes many shapes, but its face is too terrifying for the dream to reveal. Even now I sometimes startle myself awake, screaming, the dream's power undiminished by time, the changing circumstances of my waking life.

The mood is presented through a man's voice yet expressed in somewhat of child's view – the *monster*; and the *power* of the dream generating anxiety even into waking adulthood.

Another vivid focalization demonstrating the enmeshed power of possibility is presented in an excerpt of Meredith Hall's *Shunned*;

Even now I talk too much and too loud, claiming ground, afraid that I will disappear from this life, too, from this time of being mother and teacher and friend. That It — everything I care about, that I believe in, that defines and reassures me — will be wrenched from me again. Family. Church. School. Community.

This story demonstrates profound devastation in her life; however, the beginning lines set a mood of pending despair which is a narrative style that immediately develops reader engagement.

Factual-based focalization does not necessarily need to be depicted in a clinical or historical format as Slater's *Three Spheres*;

Linda Whitcomb: Initial Intake Notes

Ms. Whitcomb is a 37-year-old SWF who has had over 30 hospitalizations, all for suicide attempts or self-mutilation. She scratches her arms lightly when upset. Was extensively sexually abused as a child. Is now requesting outpatient therapy for bulimia. Ms. Whitcomb says she's vomiting multiple times during the day. Teeth are yellowed and rotting, probably due to stomach acids present during purges.

Doyle's *Being Brians* demonstrates a factual-based narrative, yet structured in entertaining prose;

There are 215 Brian Doyles in the United States, according to a World Wide Web site called "Switchboard" (www2.switchboard.com), which shows telephone numbers and addresses in America. We live in forty states; more of us live in New York than in any other state. Several of us live on streets named for women (Laura, Cecelia, Chris, Nicole, Jean, Joyce). A startling number of us live on streets and in towns named for flora (Apple, Ash, Bay, Berry, Chestnut, Hickory, Maple, Oak, Palm, Poinsettia, Sandlewood, and Teak) or fauna (Bee, Bobolink, Buck, Buffalo, Bull, Deer, Fox Gibbon, Hawk, Pine Siskin, Salmon, Swift, Wildcat).

A very insightful and creative factual focalization is presented in Har-Even's *Leaving Babylon: A Walk Through the Jewish Divorce Ceremony*;

Two years after Cyrus, King of Persia, conquered the Babylonian Empire, he allowed the Children of Israel to return to their land. The year was 537 BCE. Two thousand five hundred and thirty-six years later, I walk down his street in Jerusalem, on my way to get divorced at the district rabbinic court. The travel agencies on Cyrus Street are not advertising group tours to Iraq, not yet. Nonetheless, Babylon is on my mind. By its rivers we sat down and wept when we remembered Zion and wondered how we could sing the Lord's song in a strange land. I wept and wondered, too, for twenty-seven years of married life. Now, just as the Children of Israel walked back to their homeland, their freedom, I am walking to mine.

This opening narrative not only presents factual data, the narrator crafts a somber mood that the reader is able to empathize with the narrator's feelings.

Another effective way in which mood is set within a narrative is to create a presence for the reader within the story. Gerard develops the beginning narrative in *Adventures in Celestial Navigation* around the reader placing us firmly within the story which transitions reader interest to participant;

N: Proving Yourself Wrong

You begin by pretending you know exactly where you are.

You begin with a fiction.

On a chart of the inshore ocean—or on a blank universal plotting sheet you've laid out with penciled straight lines that represent the curved reality of Earth (another fiction)—you mark your position, a dark point on blank water. You call this your DR position—for ded reckoning. You draw a Semicircle above the point, so that it looks like an astonished eye. Ded reckoning has nothing to do with mortality—the ded comes from deduced, what you think you know based on history: the history of the boat you're sailing in.

From this somewhat limited survey, it has become very apparent that mood in the incipit, or beginning of an essay much like voice, truly sets the cornerstone of the foundation from which the author builds the relationship with the reader.

4.5 NARRATIVE SITUATION

Narrative situation in an essay encompasses the arrangements of the patterns of the narratives (Jahn 2003). Such patterns may be narrated through first-person, authorial or figurative narratives. One of the observations noted in this thesis was that a great majority of the essays surveyed were written in the first-person as these example excerpts illustrate;

- Wideman's *Looking at Emmett Till*

A nightmare of being chased has plagued my sleep since I was a boy.

- Hall's *Shunned*

Even now I talk too much and too loud, claiming ground, afraid that I will disappear from this life, too, from this time of being mother and teacher and friend.

- McPhee's *An Album Quilt*

It has somehow become 1978 and for ten or fifteen years I have been intending to attempt a piece of writing called "Six Princetons"—the school as it has variously appeared to someone who was born in Princeton and has lived in Princeton all his life.

- Simic's *Dinner at Uncle Boris's*

Always plenty of good food and wine. The four of us at the table take turns uncorking new bottles.

- Shange's *What Is It We Really Harvest in' Here?*
We got a say in', "The blacker the berry, the sweeter the juice," which is usually meant as a compliment.
- Rodriguez's *The Brown Study*
Or, as a brown man, I think.
But do we really think that color colors thought? Sherlock Holmes occasionally retired to a "brown study"—a kind of moribund funk; I used to imagine a room with brown wallpaper.
- Skloot's *Gray Area: Thinking with a Damaged Brain*
I used to be able to think.

The similarities that become evident throughout this analysis between these stories is that when the narrator is the person 'experiencing' the story, it provides a level of disclosure that the reader is able to relate to and share the experience vicariously.

4.6 NARRATIVE TENSES

Narrative tenses place the reader into specific points in time in relation to the story. The two types of narrative tenses are past and present. A majority of the stories surveyed were written in present tense which helps to engage the reader into a joint series of actions with the narrator experiencing the story. Some examples include Codrescu's *Joe Stopped By*;

When I handed her the phone, Laura looked like I was taking her to the dentist.

And *Sa'mPe'di* by Bell;

Someone was screaming so loudly and horribly I shot out of the bed, but the hotel room was too close and absolutely dark for me to see anything at all.

Yet, others successfully perform tense shifts in which they are able to create a change of perspective such as *Shunned* by Meredith Hall;

Even now I talk too much and too loud, claiming ground, afraid that I will disappear from this life, too, from this time of being mother and teacher and friend. That It — everything I care about, that I believe in, that defines and reassures me — will be wrenched from me again. Family.Church.School.Community. There are not many ways you can get kicked out of those memberships. As a child in Hampton, New Hampshire, I knew husbands who cheated on their wives. Openly. My father. I knew men and women who beat their children. We all knew them. We all knew men who were too lazy to bring in a paycheck or clean the leaves out of their yards, women who spent the day on the couch crying while the kids ran loose in the neighborhood. We knew who drank at the Meadowbrook after work each day and drove home to burn SpaghettiOs on the stove for the children. We even knew a witch. We called her Goody Welsh, as if her magic had kept her alive since the Salem days. But this was 1966. All these people were tolerated. More than tolerated; they were the Community. The teachers and ministers' wives and football players and drugstore owners. They lived next to me on Leavitt Road and Mill Road and High Street. They smiled hello when I rode my bike past their clean or dirty yards, their sunny or shuttered houses.

Hall effectively switches tenses in which she narrates in the present – "*Even now I talk too much and too loud*" – followed by a look toward the future – "*afraid that I will disappear from this life*" – then switching to the past – "*I knew husbands who cheated on their wives*"; "*We even knew a witch*"; etc. These types of tense shifts enable Hall to creatively manipulate the intensity of the narrative by moving in and out of focus.

In addition, the tense shift creates a deeper distancing of the narrative which also helps to create a feel for the reader of shared memories and experiences as the present, past and future become a shared continuum.

4.7 NARRATIVE MODES

Narrative mode, as the final section in this analysis that pertains to Jahn's narratology framework essentially is presented in two major distinctions, showing and telling. If a narrative is developed in a showing mode, the reader becomes a part of the story such that they are witnessing the events that are taking place with the prose. On the other hand, in a telling mode the narrator overtly takes control of the reader's point of view (Jahn 2003).

A very clear example of a showing mode is illustrated in *Mixed-Blood Stew* by Jewell Parker Rhodes wherein the reader is able to visualize each component and she is able to guide the reader through the discovery process;

It was an old document. Rough parchment, yellowed and withered. I was all of ten, on the threshold of womanhood, digging in my mother's closet, trying to find clues about why my mother abandoned me when I was an infant, why she returned to claim me when I was nine. On this sweltering summer day, I found a treasure trove of documents—birth certificates, Social Security cards with various names, paycheck stubs, and blurred photographs of my mother with strangers. But I knew I'd discovered something special when I uncovered the fragile sheet sandwiched between cardboard and tissue paper.

SLAVE AUCTION

*Various goods and animals to be auctioned,
including one Healthy male, a woman (good cook), and child.*

MIGHT PLANTATION

Respectable offers only

It is interesting to take note that the textual layout provides a visual indication of the actual advertisement that she had uncovered.

A similar example of the showing mode is illustrated in *Killing Wolves* by Sherry Simpson;

At the Goldstream General Store just down the road from my house, three creamy wolf pelts dangle from the log beam above the dog food section. Their paws brush my cheeks as I walk the narrow aisle, the wood floor creaking beneath my feet. My fingers drift across the fur. A single paw covers my entire hand.

Dinner at Uncle Boris's by Charles Simic illustrates the integration of imagery yet remains in a telling mode;
Always plenty of good food and wine. The four of us at the table take turns uncorking new bottles. We drink out of water glasses the way they do in the old country. "More bread," somebody yells. There's never enough bread, never enough olives, never enough soup. We are eating through our second helping of thick bean soup after having already polished off a dozen smoked sausages and a couple of loaves of bread. And we argue with mouths full. My Uncle Boris would make Mother Teresa reach for a baseball bat. He likes to make big pronouncements, to make the earth tremble with his political and artistic judgments. You drop your spoon. You can't believe your ears. Suddenly, you are short of breath and choking as if you swallowed a big fly.

Similarly, Rubinkowski's *In the Woods* presents yet a different form of telling; that of a description;

The day my grandfather saw the naked woman began at dawn. He and his brother Louie had parked the Chevy pickup at the edge of the woods and stepped down between the trees, carrying their rifles. When they lost sight of the road they parted, Louie disappearing deep. My grandfather found a stump, sat down, and waited.

The final form of telling is presented as a commentary in which the narrator comments on components of the story such as Ackerman's *Language at Play*;

All language is poetry. Each word is a small story, a thicket of meaning. We ignore the picturesque origins of words when we utter them; conversation would grind to a halt if we visualized flamingos whenever someone referred to a flight of stairs. We clarify life's confusing blur with words. We cage flooding emotions with words. We coax elusive memories with words. We educate with words. We don't really know what we think, how we feel, what we want, or even who we are until we struggle "to find the right words." What do those words consist of? Submerged metaphors, images, actions, personalities, jokes. Seeing themselves reflected in one another's eyes, the Romans coined the word pupil, which meant "little doll." Orchids take their name from the Greek word for testicles. Pansy derives from the French word pensee, or "thought," because the flower seemed to have such a pensive face. "Bless" originally meant to redden with blood, as in sacrifice. Hence, "God bless you" literally means "God bathe you in blood."

Ackerman's commentary and analysis "tells" us in an informative manner many varying items within her prose that provides some rationalization as to her opening argument that "*All language is poetry.*"

5.0 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on my research within this thesis, there were really no two stories that would fit into a specific “creative mold.” However, all of the stories contained many indicators that contribute to a deepened engagement for the readers.

To review, the stated research questions were:

1. What are the narratological relationships between fiction and creative nonfiction?
2. Can a narratological framework created for fiction be employed to analyze creative nonfiction?

To address the first research question, the communicative quality of the analyzed narratives through voice and mood subtly pulls one into the feel of the characters through varying levels of self-disclosure; coupled with the authors creative use of tense espouses a virtual realm in which the reader is one with the prose.

Additionally, more often than not, these celebrated stories were developed through an overt-narrative that reinforced the first-person narratives through compelling communicative structures. The ability for the authors to develop a sense of urgency without creating a hurried sense of textual manipulation helps readers choose their individual levels of commitment within the narrative thereby creating a different sense and feel for each reader.

Lastly, the usage of free indirect discourse in a few of the stories produced the notion of thought or speech within the characters that helped the narrative flow through otherwise dialogic clutter.

The second research question can be somewhat more difficult to explain straightforwardly. As many of the components of Jahn’s narratological framework were applicable to the nonfiction essays surveyed in this research; there can be many problems associated with the literal sense of the creation of a nonfiction framework due to the inherent notion of nonfiction being the ‘representation of fact.’ In other words, reflecting on an earlier quotation by Valken (3);

The major difference between a fiction writer and a nonfiction writer, it was said, is that the latter should always adhere to truth and should never cross a certain inner border: he or she cannot write about emotions or dreams. Still it cannot be said that fiction is just make-believe, and only nonfiction contains the truth. Techniques are borrowed between fiction and non-fiction.

The impetus for this research was the surveyed writers’ ability to “cross a certain inner border” yet still holding true to the genre of nonfiction. According to Simms, many good writers look to better writers for their inspiration or guidance on various skill-based abilities such as sentence construction, the creation of imagery, or the effective use of dialog. Nevertheless, at the individual writer level, the lowest common denominator is each writer’s unique ability to engage the reader in the essence of creative nonfiction.

The writer’s use of a narratological framework that allows us to understand the foundation of creative nonfiction will no doubt serve to bring the two genres of fiction and nonfiction closer in relation to each other rather than furthering the polarization between them creating a literary continuum. Nevertheless, while this research discussed a few of Jahn’s narratological frameworks with regard to creative nonfiction, it by no means advocates a joining of fiction and nonfiction.

6.0 FUTURE RESEARCH

One avenue for further experimental research could be in the area of cross-cultural cognitive models and the development of narrative analysis models. Once standardized results were made available, these data could be developed into a cross-cultural cognitive model, quite possibly utilizing causative methodologies that would espouse a commonality in the creative nonfiction narrative ideologies.

Lastly, additional research could be pursued in the areas of structural discourse of the narrative, much like Jahn’s model, yet somewhat more cognitive juxtaposing the more psychological aspects of narrative discourse to the structural components.

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