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# Narrator Reliability in the Creative Autobiography: An Approach for the Solo Interpreter

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1980



NARRATOR RELIABILITY IN THE CREATIVE AUTOBIOGRAPHY:  
AN APPROACH FOR THE SOLO INTERPRETER

A Thesis

Presented to

the Faculty of the Department of Communication and Theatre  
Western Kentucky University  
Bowling Green, Kentucky

In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Arts

by

Diane L. Schwalm

May 1980

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NARRATOR RELIABILITY IN THE CREATIVE AUTOBIOGRAPHY:  
AN APPROACH FOR THE SOLO INTERPRETER

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NARRATOR RELIABILITY IN THE CREATIVE AUTOBIOGRAPHY:  
AN APPROACH FOR THE SOLO INTERPRETER

Diane L. Schwalm            May 1980

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Department of Communication and Theatre  
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This study develops an approach to narrator reliability in the creative autobiography for the solo interpreter. The relationships between narrator reliability and first-person point of view are given, and the need for an understanding of reliability to develop a performance stance is also stated. The defining characteristics of the creative autobiography are also included.

The analytical approach to narrator reliability is three-fold. The reliability of the narrator is examined in terms of mental locus, spatial locus, and temporal locus. The mental locus of the narrator is determined through his relationships with himself, the characters, the action, and the reader. The narrator's spatial locus is examined according to his use of general and specific locations and the importance placed on given locations in the text. Temporal locus is studied in terms of time order, the relationship between the experiencing and the narrating self, and the relationship between time-past and time-present. Illustrations for the three-fold approach are provided by examples from two creative autobiographies: Stop-time by Frank Conroy and A Fan's Notes by Frederick Exley.

In chapter three, the locus triad is applied to A Fan's Notes, providing an in-depth analysis of narrator reliability for that text.

In conclusion, the problems of narrator reliability particular to the creative autobiography are cited, and possible applications of the approach to other first-person narratives are given. This study is not exhaustive, and the need for further research in this area is apparent.

CHAPTER I  
INTRODUCTION

Statement of Problem and Purpose of Study

The art of interpretation is based in both literary analysis and performance. It is a means of studying literature through performance. To develop an understanding of the literature, the interpreter must be aware of the many elements that comprise a piece of literature and the effect these elements have on the literature as a whole.

In the study of narrative literature a governing element in the text is the narrator's point of view. The point of view of the narrator determines many of the other technical choices made in the text: presentation of the action, scope of information, use of scene and summary, conceptions of time and space, and the basic construction of the whole. The various points of view present a variety of problems and narrative effects for the interpreter to examine.

A major concern for the interpreter of a first-person narration is narrator reliability. The first-person narrator comments on the events in the narrative from his position as a character in that narrative. He possesses no omniscience; all commentary is offered from a mortal, and therefore fallible, point of view. Information offered by



the narrator must be recognized as a subjective interpretation of a person, event, or situation. Difficulty arises for the interpreter if he attempts to distinguish narrator subjectivity and objectivity in the narration. Wayne C. Booth recognizes this problem and clarifies it as follows:

Whenever a fact, whenever a narrative summary, whenever a description must, or even might, serve as a clue to our interpretation of the character who provides it, it may very well lose some of its standing as fact, summary, or description.<sup>1</sup>

Subjectivity and objectivity are not clearly differentiated in the narration, thus an unbiased perspective on the events in the narrative is nearly impossible.

The difficulty extends beyond the presented information. Of equal significance is the information that is not presented. The choice of information in the narrative is controlled by the first-person narrator. This narrator may choose to exclude certain aspects of an action, or may eliminate entire events. The narrator may also lack information. Certain pieces of information can be excluded, simply because the narrator is unaware of them. Thus, as Michał Głowiński states, "A story can either inform or misinform the reader. In other words, in first-person narration the narrator's possession of information is as important as his lack of it."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Wayne C. Booth, The Rhetoric of Fiction (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1961), p. 175.

<sup>2</sup>Michał Głowiński, "On the First-Person Novel," New Literary History 9 (Autumn 1977): p. 104.

The problems in dealing with narrator reliability have not gone unrecognized by interpretation scholars. Several articles and interpretation textbooks contain references to narrator reliability and the authors' advice for approaching the problem. In one of her articles Lilla A. Heston cautions the interpreter:

Unreliable and ironic narrators may believe they present one thing, but the reader knows they present something else.<sup>3</sup>

Heston cites the disparity between the narrator's presentation and the reader's conception of the situation as an outside observer. What Heston fails to discuss is how the reader is able to determine the unreliability.

In The Art of Interpretive Speech, Charles Woolbert describes the limitations of the first-person narrator:

The first-person narrator is an eye witness who presents a close-up view of events; consequently, his tone and observations are immediate. He tells you only what he sees and hears, so his authority may be limited. He may appear at times biased in his reporting, due to the boundaries of his knowledge and intrusion of his personal attitude. He may decide either to withdraw from some action or may report on the significance of some episode.<sup>4</sup>

Though Woolbert offers more information than Heston for determination of reliability, he does not explain how the

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<sup>3</sup>Lilla A. Heston, "The Interpreter and the Structure of the Novel," in Studies in Interpretation, ed. Esther M. Doyle and Virginia Hastings Floyd (Amsterdam: Rodopi N.V., 1972), p. 145.

<sup>4</sup>Charles Henry Woolbert, The Art of Interpretive Speech, 5th ed. (New York: Appleton, Century, Crofts, 1968), p. 109.



narrator limitations he offers are evidenced in the text. Woolbert does not elaborate on how to determine the boundaries of the narrator's knowledge, nor does he show how the intrusion of the narrator's personal attitude affects the text.

Wallace A. Bacon advises the interpreter's judgment of narrator reliability in his interpretation text,

The Art of Interpretation:

When the narrator is a character in the story, we judge him as we judge the other characters in the story and believe him, half believe him, or disbelieve him, depending on our judgments of him.<sup>5</sup>

This statement tells the interpreter that he must judge the narrator on the same basis as the other characters. But it does not provide a means for guiding the judgment of the interpreter.

Joanna H. Maclay and Thomas O. Sloan see several effects created by the use of a first-person narrator. In their interpretation text, Interpretation: An Approach to the Study of Literature, these viewpoints are presented:

When an author chooses to tell a story using a first-person narrator, that is a narrator who refers to himself as "I," he has several advantages. The first-person narrator carries with him a great deal of "credibility" because his story has the illusion of an eyewitness account. If the narrator is a major character in the story he is telling, his account carries not only the credibility of an eyewitness account, but the increased credibility of one who

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<sup>5</sup>Wallace A. Bacon, The Art of Interpretation, 3rd ed. (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, Inc., 1979), p. 287.

actually took a central role in the story's events . . . . .  
Sometimes, however, these advantages seemed almost  
outweighed by the narrator's great subjectivity and  
limited, prejudicial vision . . . . .

In addition to the subjectivity another disadvantage of using a first-person narrator is that he is restricted to reporting only his own thoughts, feelings, and perceptions. This is fine if the reader is primarily interested in the narrator's interpretation of events rather than the events themselves as some sort of objective reality, and if this narrator is articulate in expressing his interpretation of events, and if his expression of his feelings is adequate for the author's purpose.<sup>6</sup>

The illusion of credibility and the limitations of the first-person narrator are given more elaboration in this text than in the others cited. A means for determining credibility, however, is still absent.

As a whole, the previous text references to narrator reliability do make the interpreter aware of the difficulties that may be encountered when confronted with an unreliable narrator, as well as the need for understanding narrator reliability to analyze the literature. However, awareness does not provide a solid base for the development of a performance stance. Without a solid analytical base, the interpreter can do no more than acknowledge a need for understanding narrator reliability. A need exists to discover a method, system, or tool that will help the interpreter devise performance attitudes for unreliable first-person narrators.

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<sup>6</sup>Joanna H. Maclay and Thomas O. Sloan, Interpretation: An Approach to the Study of Literature (New York: Random House, 1972), pp. 234-5.



The purpose of this study is to examine a critical approach to performing narrative incorporating unreliable narrators. Analytical guidelines will be examined, followed by application for performance attitudes relating to two specific narratives.

#### Definition of Terms and Method of Analysis

The term "narrative," as used in this study, refers to the entire fictive structure. It includes all scene and summary, characters, narrator, and action in the course of the literature. "Narrator" defines that voice within the narrative which controls the work's "point of view." "Point of view" establishes "the angle of vision from which the story is perceived and described, and it belongs to the major speaker in the story--the narrator."<sup>7</sup> Literary scholars have identified several types of point of view.<sup>8</sup> However, this study shall limit itself to one type: first-person major participant. The locus of the first-person narrator is within the realm of the characters in the story. He or she possesses no omniscience; the events of the story are presented as witnessed by the narrator. Major participant describes the amount of involvement the

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<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 233.

<sup>8</sup>Elaboration on various types of point of view can be found in Norman Friedman's Form and Meaning in Fiction (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1975), pp. 145-56. Wayne C. Booth in The Rhetoric of Fiction (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1961), pp. 149-65, examines the various functions of the narrator as they can occur in first- or third-person narration.

narrator has in the story: the narrator is a focal character.

"Narrator reliability" is crucial to the design of this study. Wayne C. Booth in The Rhetoric of Fiction provides the operational definition for this concept:

A fact, when it has been given to us by the author or his unequivocal spokesman, is a very different thing from the same "fact" when given to us by a fallible character in the story. When a character speaks realistically, within the drama, the convention of absolute reliability has been destroyed . . . .<sup>9</sup>

The approach to analysis is three-fold: the unreliable narrator is to be examined on the basis of his mental locus, spatial locus, and temporal locus.<sup>10</sup>

Mental locus refers to the narrator's knowledge about and attitude toward himself, other characters, the action and the reader. The way the narrator reveals his knowledge and attitudes, and what he reveals about these four areas, will provide major clues to his mental position in the novel.

Spatial locus is the narrator's relationship to space and how he juxtaposes spatial elements within the literature. More specifically, it involves physical locations in the novel, the shifting of these locations, and the importance certain locations may hold for the narrator.

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<sup>9</sup>Booth, The Rhetoric of Fiction, p. 175.

<sup>10</sup>This analytical approach is credited to Judith Espinola, "Point of View in Selected Novels of Virginia Woolf," Ph.D. dissertation, Northwestern University, 1971. Espinola based her approach on Lilla A. Heston, "A Study of Point of View in Three Novels by Henry James," Ph.D. dissertation, Northwestern University, 1965.



Temporal locus concerns the narrator's use of time in the novel: how he relates to events in time, how he moves through time. Specific concerns in these categories will be the span of time encompassed in the literature, the ordering of time in the novel, and the relation of time-past and time-present.

The creative autobiography presents the specific first-person major participant narrative to be investigated through these guidelines. Problems concerning narrator reliability are focused and intensified in this type of novel because the author as narrator subjectively records observations of real people and actual events. The creative autobiography is based on the author's life and the names of characters, places, and events are left unchanged. Though the information in the novel is autobiographical, the form remains fictive. The author uses summary and scene, and incorporates dialogue within scene. All recorded details of the author's life are chosen to complement a central idea or theme.<sup>11</sup>

These characteristics of the creative autobiography intensify problems of narrator reliability. The interpreter must analyze the narrator's choice of factual events for display, the narrator's perception of those factual events,

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<sup>11</sup>Meredith Ray Cary, "Novelistic Autobiography: A Special Genre," Ph.D. dissertation, University of Washington, 1968, pp. 1-10.



and the way he displays those events in the narrative. The autobiographical base forces the author/narrator to rely on his memory of these events, which increases his subjectivity. The interpreter is examining literature which is subjective interpretation of fact. The subjectivity is also magnified because the author/narrator is viewing his own life and events in that life which directly affect him.

This study begins with an exploratory approach to narrator reliability in creative autobiography. Guidelines for this approach are the narrator's mental, spatial, and temporal loci, and examples will be drawn from Frank Conroy's Stop-time and Frederick Exley's A Fan's Notes. The third chapter will develop a performance stance for A Fan's Notes. Finally, the system will be evaluated for possible broad-based application.

## CHAPTER II

## LOCUS: AN APPROACH TO ANALYSIS OF NARRATOR RELIABILITY

A thorough examination of the narrator requires that the interpreter inspect the narrator's locus in the narrative. The mental locus, spatial locus, and temporal locus of the narrator will serve as the keys to narrator reliability in this study.

Mental Locus

The approach to mental locus of the narrator is four-fold. Initially, the interpreter must understand the narrator's perception of himself. Second, he must determine the narrator's relationship with the other characters. The narrator's attitude toward the action in the story is the third aspect. The final property of mental locus is the narrator's relationship with the reader.

## Narrator's Relationship to Himself

Through the narrator's self-perspective the narrator is able to gain a kind of self evaluation. This self-evaluation is a process of reflection on the part of the narrator: "The self grasps historical reality through the perspectives it brings to bear, it enters into a relationship with itself through mobilizing its standpoints, and through this mobilization it also proves that it is constantly reflecting upon



its own subjective judgments."<sup>12</sup> This reflection offers physical, emotional and intellectual information about the narrator's relationship with himself, and also gives the interpreter a value system for the narrator.

The interpreter must establish a physical presence for the narrator; this is achieved by examining the physical characteristics of the narrator as the narrator perceives them. The narrator may describe himself for the benefit of the reader. In Stop-time, Conroy describes himself thus: "I might have been skinny, but I certainly wasn't little. I was five feet eight."<sup>13</sup> Exley, in A Fan's Notes, gives this account of his physical condition: "During the months I had permitted Patience to assume the man's role of supporting me, I had unmanned myself: I had become infantile. My sleek cheeks had grown flatulent, my girth fatty, my thin hand plumper than that of a thriving child's . . . ." <sup>14</sup> Each of these descriptions provides a physical base for performance of the narrator. They also expose the attitude the narrator has toward his physical being. The interpreter must include that attitude in the performance stance he develops for the narrator. Conroy may be thin, but he doesn't feel small.

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<sup>12</sup>Wolfgang Iser, The Implied Reader: Patterns of Communication in Prose Fiction from Bunyan to Beckett (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1974), p. 134.

<sup>13</sup>Frank Conroy, Stop-time (New York: The Viking Press, 1967), p. 123. This reference will hereafter be cited within the text by author and page number.

<sup>14</sup>Frederick Exley, A Fan's Notes (New York: Pocket Books, 1977), p. 337. This reference will hereafter be cited within the text by author and page number.

He determines his size by height, not weight. Exley is ashamed of his overweight condition; words like "unmanned" and "infantile" indicate his disgust with his physical being. The narrator's physical traits and the attitude he maintains toward his physical appearance give the interpreter a basis for posture, carriage, and body tensions in performance.

Following an analysis of physical traits, the intellectual qualities of the narrator are examined. These qualities can be located within the actions and interests of the narrator, as well as by his own admission. The most accurate disclosure of intellect is found in the actions and interests of the narrator, since he tends to reveal himself in these instances, rather than rank himself. When the narrator tells us of his intellectual capacities, his subjectivity may overtake the account. In Stop-time, the narrator professes a love of books. He tells how he would "read four or five hours every night at home, . . ." (Conroy, p. 149). But when he states "I believed I was intelligent. For a long time that thought had been important to me" (Conroy, p. 61), the interpreter must question the reliability of the statement simply because it is a self-appraisal. The reading of the books is a more accurate appraisal of intellect because it contains no opinion. However, the opinionated statement provides a performance attitude for the interpreter. How the narrator views his intellectual capacities is as important as the capacities themselves. Exley, for example, experiences extreme frustration when he attempts to compile his manuscript.



I had to tackle that mountain of manuscript and tie together all the "pain" and the "joy" and the "anguish" I had so facilely slapped on paper. And to my horror (for I had read the books which by now all but crowded us out of the apartment) I discovered I knew nothing whatever about the grueling, mundane business of making form out of fragments (Exley, p. 306).

We see the narrator questioning his capabilities, giving the interpreter a basis for the narrator's self-appraisal of his intellect.

The emotional position of the narrator involves considerable scrutiny for the interpreter. The emotional reactions of the narrator are present throughout the narrative, whether textually or subtextually. They are in a continual state of flux and the interpreter must be aware of these emotional fluctuations and why they occur. However, the perception of the narrator's general emotional state is of greater initial value to the interpreter. Combinations of emotional responses within the creative autobiography provide information concerning the narrator's emotional structure. For example, Conroy in Stop-time unmasks his sensitivity in the following quotations:

Sadness crept over me--a sadness I didn't question, a sadness so profound I understood it could not have come from life, or any source within my conceptual scope, but instead seeped into me from the very air, from the whole extant universe in which I was less than a speck, sadness that was not emotion but the awareness of vast emptinesses. With my head in my hands I looked down at my feet, knowing that at any second my body might fade out, wavering into invisibility like Robert Donat in The Ghost Goes West (Conroy, p. 171).

I stared at the meaningless stream of cars going by, my brain as empty and silent as the house around me.



Within me sadness had given way to hopelessness. And I mean genuine hopelessness, when faith has evaporated and the imagination is dead, when life seems to have come finally and irrevocably to a standstill (Conroy, p. 178).

I looked down at the ground. Deep inside me gates were closing, one by one, locking up a vital area I couldn't afford to lose all at once, sealing my love in private darkness. When it was done I lifted my head and faced him (Conroy, p. 216).

Though these statements are in reference to various situations within Conroy's life, they all reveal an emotional sensitivity that is prevalent throughout the narrative. The word choice and the descriptive quality of the passages elicit an empathic response from the reader and contribute to the sensitive quality of the writing.

Once the interpreter familiarizes himself with the general emotional qualities of the narrator he must establish the emotional content for specific scenes and summaries. Within the course of a scene, for example, the emotional climate of the narrator may change. Exley records an abrupt emotional reversal when he speaks of his third trip to the insane asylum.

No, that day in the car I was buoyed up with that typically sham American optimism and had blissful dreams of miraculous cures and overnight remedies, believed that in a matter of days I'd be calling home and proclaiming, "Maw! I'm okay, Maw! Bake an apple pie!"

At the swank hospital I kissed my old buddy, Christie III, who made a terrible commotion. I kissed my mother, who looked tired and pained and wept quietly. Then I shook hands with my stepfather. His strong hand was limp and uncertain, as though he didn't know how we stood, and he turned quickly away from me and descended the concrete steps. I wanted to call to him then, to tell him I was sorry

for so many things. I wanted to do this, for I had suddenly seen that the pain I had caused my mother had become his pain, and that that pain bound us together as much as ever filial affection does, that, in a way, he was my father now. But I hadn't the strength to call after him. Instead, I turned and went quickly into the insane asylum (Exley, pp. 206-7).

Recognition of the narrator's emotional shifts enables the interpreter to follow the emotional progression of the narrator and fosters a greater understanding of the narrator on the part of the interpreter.

To further this understanding of the narrator, the interpreter must also discover what things carry importance for the narrator. These things can be tangible like the yo-yo that becomes Conroy's "first organized attempt to control the outside world" (Conroy, p. 115). Liquor carries a great deal of importance to the alcoholic narrator in A Fan's Notes. Exley's need for alcohol is mentioned frequently in his text, and the interpreter comes to realize its importance through Exley's actions and commentary throughout the text. The narrator may also place importance on intangibles. The idea of attaining freedom motivates Conroy to run away from home, study overseas, and go away to college. This intangible is mentioned forthrightly in the text in Conroy's statement, "I was rich and I was free" (Conroy, p. 300). In other instances the need for freedom emerges from the action in the story: running away from home, going away to school. These intangible items of importance can reach obsessive proportions. The need for fame so possesses Exley that mention of it is found repeatedly in the text:



. . . I acquired this need to have my name mentioned in reverential tones (Exley, p. 33).

Knowing nothing about writing, I had no trouble seeing myself famous (Exley, p. 33).

. . . "Have your day, friend. In a matter of months, I'll be more famous than you" (Exley, p. 305).

These items of significance to the narrator become equally significant for the interpreter, for they carry the theme or themes of the text. The central themes of A Fan's Notes are Exley's quest for fame and his alcoholic dependence. In Stop-time the needs for freedom and control dominate the text. Items and actions which undergird the thematic elements are often stripped of their unessential qualities and are presented by their dynamic characteristics. These dynamic characteristics emphasize the striking qualities of the item or action. The intangible items carry importance because of what they represent to the narrator. For Conroy, the yo-yo is control; for Exley, alcohol is an escape. The intangible items carry the motivations of the narrator within the text. The quest for freedom makes Conroy run; the quest for fame motivates Exley's writing and fosters his identification with Frank Gifford. Comprehension of these motivations gives the interpreter guidelines for determining the attitude of the narrator in relation to the events he records.

#### Relationship of Narrator to Characters

To determine the relationship of the narrator to the characters, the interpreter must ask a series of questions:

- (1) How does the narrator feel about each of the characters?



(2) Does he choose to describe them in summary or in scene, or both? (3) What characters carry importance for the narrator and why? (4) How do the narrator's descriptions of his important characters differ from the descriptions of his unimportant characters?

Questions one and two work simultaneously because the interpreter determines the narrator's feelings about each of the characters through the information offered about the characters in scene and summary. It is important for the interpreter to realize that he is dealing with the narrator's perceptions of these characters rather than "factual" information. The portraits are colored by the narrator's subjectivity in his appraisal of the characters and his relationship with them. The accuracy of the narrator's presentation of dialogue in scene must also be questioned, much as Barrett John Mandel questions it in "The Autobiographer's Art": "Can one assume that he [the narrator] remembers accurately the complete conversation . . .?"<sup>15</sup> It makes little difference if the dialogue is presented through direct or indirect discourse. The quotations are subject to interpretation by the narrator either way, so literal reproduction is not an issue.<sup>16</sup> Because the author/narrator must rely on his memory of events, the action of the story is of the same questionable accuracy.

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<sup>15</sup>Barrett John Mandel, "The Autobiographer's Art," Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism 27:2 (Winter 1968): 218.

<sup>16</sup>Michal/ Glowinski, "On the First-Person Novel," New Literary History 9 (Autumn 1977): 109.

In both action and dialogue, we are given only the details as they are remembered or selected by the narrator.

With this questionable accuracy in mind, the interpreter must study the various characters as the narrator perceives them. Obvious clues can be found in evaluative statements made by the narrator concerning given characters. These statements may offer information concerning physical attributes of the character, personality traits, or the character's relationship with the narrator. The manner and choice of description will disclose the narrator's interests in the character. For example, Exley introduces us to the character Bunny Sue with a physical description because she physically resembles the girl of his dreams (Exley, p. 136). In contrast, Exley's father is introduced by a character other than the narrator, and it is not his physical description that is offered, but a personality judgment: "'He was a good fellow--a hell of a good fellow . . . And tough too!'" (Exley, p. 25). It was his father's personality that Exley envied, and the fact that the father had acquired fame and admiration in the eyes of others. The introduction of the father by another character becomes subtly effective as a guide to Exley's feelings about his father. Descriptions of the father throughout the book rely on personality traits; physical features are rarely mentioned, because they acquire no importance in the relationship between Exley and his father.

It is possible that the narrator may not provide a physical or a personality evaluation of a character, but may



simply introduce the character on the basis of his relationship with them. This is the case in Stop-time. The narrator never offers a physical or personality description of the baby, Jessica; the baby's existence in the story is based solely on his relationship with her. When the child is born, Conroy reacts in this manner:

Jessica Fouchet. When she came home her utter helplessness shocked me into loving her. She seemed the quintessence of mortality. It made chills run up and down my spine just to look at her.

And I spent a lot of time looking at her, sitting quietly next to her crib watching her sleep, as if by being there long enough, by imprinting her image on my brain, I would come to understand the mystery (I was a child, remember) of life. But nothing was revealed to me. Jessica simply existed, and no matter how hard I looked, that was all I ever knew. There seemed to be no point to her except the fact that she lived (Conroy, p. 162).

Later, Conroy shows the effect of the relationship he has with the child when he has run away from home and decides to return.

I remember quite precisely the single fact I allowed myself to believe was the cause of my change of heart--that I would never see the baby again. Jessica was the only complete and uncomplicated love in my life, and once having conjured her up I knew I hadn't the strength to leave her. I followed the cat through the dust and thought of Jessica, relieved to know it was she, and not the others, pulling me back, that it was love, and not a lack of courage, forcing me to capitulate (Conroy, pp. 195-6).

In this type of relationship, the reader gets no real concept of the character, only the feelings toward that character as they are expressed by the narrator.

The choice of the use of scene or summary by the narrator is an arbitrary one. If the narrator chooses to show a character in scene, he is, in a sense, providing "proof" for his



evaluation of that character, at least in that particular instance. If he offers only summary, the evaluation of the character is made without extensive verification. The narrator chooses the method which he feels will most effectively illustrate given qualities of a particular character. In passages of summary, the feelings the narrator has toward a character are usually provided without qualification. Exley summarizes his feelings about Bunny Sue as follows:

That summer was my season of love, and though I only saw Bunny five or six more times, she was with me all the hot, sweltering days and all the air-conditioned evenings when, having forsaken all others, I sat alone in the bars on Rush Street drinking till long past midnight, trying to allay riotous exhilaration (Exley, pp. 140-1).

Exley offers no elaboration on the events of that summer with Bunny. The interpreter can only assume from Exley's reaction that the events were pleasurable. With no action offered, the only perspective possible is the narrator's.

If the narrator chooses to display a character in scene, the feelings of the narrator are shown to the reader through his reaction to the scene. At one point in Stop-time, Conroy tells of his observation of a girl in the library. His reaction to the scene, as well as the vocabulary he chooses to describe it, reflect his feelings about the character:

As a glutton standing before a splendid buffet might suddenly decide to move his poised fingers from the olives to the lobster cakes, so I chose to return to the higher level of books for another glimpse of breast, against the chance that she might have moved to a more revealing position. Standing straight up on my knees I pressed my eye into position. There was a moment of confusion. I saw something, but without a larger frame of

reference I couldn't tell what. Were these fingers? Objects I finally recognized as hands moved away to reveal, very close, a face. It was like straining to hear a faraway sound and having a gun go off in your ear. Her eyes were shut tight, tear stained, squinting hard as if to avoid some overwhelming source of light. She wept, her mouth spread wide in a queer, tight-lipped smile of anguish, her head nodding slowly. I recoiled from the peephole as if a needle had pierced my pupil.

In a frenzy of confusion I began sorting books as if nothing had happened. She had not seen me, I was safe (Conroy, pp. 145-6).

The interpreter can perceive the shock and the nervous reaction of the narrator simply by observing the actions the narrator has provided for him. The similes used by the narrator to describe his reactions also provide a basis for the narrator's relationship to the girl.

Once the interpreter has discerned the various relationships between the narrator and the other characters, he must determine which characters hold the most importance for the narrator and why they are important to the narrator. Though the amount of space devoted to a particular character may provide some clue to his importance, the interpreter must not base his judgment on this fact alone. Mr. Blue is an important character to Fred Exley and has an entire chapter devoted to him. Jessica Fouchet is an important character to Frank Conroy and is given two pages in the narrative. Based on the feelings the narrator offers about the characters, the interpreter must determine their importance. The more profound the effect of the character on the narrator's life the more importance he will be given. The narrator may want to emulate desirable qualities of the character, or the character may



fulfill certain needs of the narrator that others cannot. The extent to which the narrator emulates a character, or to which a character fills his needs, gauges that character's importance. Frank Gifford, in A Fan's Notes, carries a great deal of importance for the narrator. Exley sees in Gifford the image of the man he would like to be; the relationship is one of hero-worship. Though the narrator has only one physical encounter with Gifford, he maintains an identification and comradeship with him from afar. From Gifford he receives a lesson in "how to live with one's scars" (Exley, p. 49), and Gifford also "sustained . . . the illusion that fame was possible" (Exley, p. 120). Reasons for the characters' importance to the narrator, such as those just cited, are found most often in the philosophical commentary of the narrator. They can occur in dialogue, should the narrator decide to disclose his feelings about the character in this manner. Exley, for example, makes this statement to a girl about Gifford: "He may be the only fame I'll ever have!" (Exley, p. 212).

Narrator commentary about important characters does offer a candid portrayal of the narrator's feelings about the characters. The unreliability exists in the personal biases the narrator may have towards given characters, causing the narrator to distort the aspects of their personalities which directly affect him. This distortion may be revealed to the interpreter if the narrator allows other characters to inject comments about a character he considers important. Exley



takes issue with his stepfather over Frank Gifford's football ability and the contrast of opinion revealed in the scene demonstrates the extent of Exley's bias toward Gifford:

"You know, Fred," he said, "there are other players in the league as good as Gifford." I froze in mid-step and turned to him with menacing slowness. I slammed my hands onto my hips. With a look of utter incredulity on my face, I snarlingly demanded that he repeat his filthy assertion. "I said," he said, smiling weakly, already sensing that his efforts to be engaging were somehow going awry, "that there are other players in the league as good as--" Refusing to permit him to finish, I turned savagely to mother and fixed on my face a look of crushing hurt, a look which meant to say, "You see, Mummy? He's struck! The beast in him has finally revealed itself!" Turning back to him, my voice tremulous with rage, I shouted, "As good as Gifford? As good as Gifford?" Emitting a mocking, scornful laugh, just before fleeing the room, I added, "You, sir, are crazy!" (Exley, pp. 200-1).

The scene illustrates the means by which the interpreter can discover some narrator bias. The character's opinion juxtaposed with the narrator's opinion allows the interpreter to weigh the narrator's judgment.

The final step involved in character analysis is the comparison of important character description with unimportant character description. The major distinction between the two descriptions is in the number of evaluative comments about the character offered by the narrator. Physical evaluations can be offered for both important and unimportant characters. Personality evaluations require more involvement between the narrator and the character; the greater the amount of involvement with the character, the better acquainted the narrator is with the character's personality. Stop-time is filled with the narrator's evaluations of his step-father, Jean.

Jean is portrayed in both scene and summary, and the narrator comments freely on Jean in both. In contrast, the narrator offers little evaluative comment on his real father: "I did try to think of him as sane, yet it must be admitted he did some odd things" (Conroy, p. 5). There is no further evaluation of the father. The narrator summarizes a few of the father's activities, and provides some information concerning the father's physical condition. Perhaps the most obvious descriptive difference in important and unimportant characters is the relational description. For the important character, the narrator will offer some comment on the relationship established between him and the character. The less important the character, the less reference will be made in terms of any significant relationship with the narrator. The relationship may be one-sided, as in the case with Exley and Frank Gifford, but the narrator has established a tie with the character that reflects the importance of that character in the narrator's life. In Stop-time the narrator encounters a piano-player on board the ship to Denmark. Though several pages are devoted to his conversation with this man (Conroy, pp. 255-59), little is made of any relationship between the two men. We are given the interaction that occurs between the two men, but Conroy gives the reader no indication that the encounter has any lasting effect on his life. Following the evening of the encounter the piano-player is never mentioned. In contrast, Jean affected the same narrator in a variety of ways. Because he lived with Conroy, he had a great effect



on Conroy's lifestyle. Jean determined where the family lived and how they made a living, which shaped much of Conroy's young life. The narrator feels free to comment on the quality of the relationship as well. In dealing with and describing important characters, the narrator will offer commentary on the relationship and the quality of the relationship.

#### Relationship of Narrator to Action

When dealing with the narrator's relationship to the action in the story, the interpreter must ask two questions: (1) What is the narrator's attitude toward the actions, and (2) Is the narrator concerned and involved or aloof and detached? The interpreter must examine each piece of action in the narrative on the basis of these two questions.

The narrator's attitude toward the action is demonstrated by the way he responds to the action as well as by his evaluative commentary on the action. In Stop-time, the narrator becomes involved in a scene at the boy's school, and is carried away in the action of the crowd's condemning and later beating the boy, Ligget. During the course of the trial and the beating, Conroy exhibits his involvement and response to the action in the following statements:

A lot of talk against Ligget, building quickly to the point where talk was not enough. . . . we decided to act. Ligget was intolerable (Conroy, p. 11).

It was my turn. Ligget looked at me blankly. I picked a spot on his chin, drew back my arms, and threw as hard a punch as I could muster. Instant disappointment. I hadn't missed, there was a kind of snapping sound as my fist landed, and



his head jerked back, but the whole complex of movements was too fast, somehow missing the exaggerated movie-punch finality I had anticipated (Conroy, p. 14).

Conroy's intolerance of Ligget and the disappointment he feels in delivering the punch indicate both his involvement in and response to the action. Throughout the course of the action, he also evaluates the events taking place, and provides commentary on the personal impact of the event.

Although Ligget's beating is part of my life . . . and although I've worried about it off and on for years, all I can say about it is that brutality happens easily. I learned almost nothing from beating up Ligget (Conroy, p. 14).

Perhaps it was because we felt cheated. . . . The urge to try again was strong. Unconsciously we knew we'd never have another chance . . . . Spontaneously, the line formed again (Conroy, p. 15).

By examining the narrator's response to the action, the interpreter can determine the amount of involvement the narrator has in the action and the type of involvement. The narrator's evaluative commentary, his reactions, summations, and implications, yields information concerning the feelings of the narrator toward that particular action.

The reliability of the narrator is strengthened as he becomes less involved in the course of an action. The less the action affects the narrator, the more objective he can be about the reporting of it. The more time has elapsed between the event and the narrator's telling of that event the more objective the narrator can be. This increased objectivity is due to the time separation of the narrator from the

emotional involvement in the action. The difference in objectivity as affected by time is apparent in the two evaluative quotations from Stop-time cited above. The first quotation shows more objectivity than does the second simply because a greater amount of time has passed when the narrator delivers the first evaluation of the action. This time separation allows the narrator to gain a more logical perspective and frame of mind to evaluate the event.

#### Relationship of the Narrator to the Reader

In a novel with an autobiographical base, ". . . the author inevitably expects the reader to share in his own preconceptions and interests sufficiently to catch, from each word or gesture, the precise mood or tone that they evoke for the author himself."<sup>17</sup> The sharing of information, and the relationship desired between the narrator and the reader, prompt the narrator to address the reader in a variety of ways. The narrator's relationship with the reader is determined by what he reveals and how he chooses to reveal it; it is found in how and what the narrator reveals about himself, his characters, and the action. The more intimate the divulgence of the narrator, the more intimate the relationship with the reader. Conroy, for example, offers one of his deepest convictions, thus establishing a certain intimacy with the reader: ". . . but my deepest rule, a rule so deep I maintained it without the slightest conscious effort, was never to reveal

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<sup>17</sup>Booth, The Rhetoric of Fiction, p. 331-2.



anything important about life at home" (Conroy, p. 155). The disclosure of personal desires, convictions, and frustrations, as well as the frequency of their appearance in the text, will establish the intimacy between the narrator and the reader for the interpreter.

Certain elements in the narrative can point to recognition of the reader's presence by the narrator: parenthetical or tangential remarks, rhetorical questions, explanations of items already familiar to the narrator. The narrator may even assume mutual knowledge between him and the reader by employing the pronoun "we" rather than "I." The parenthetical or tangential remarks occur most frequently within the text. These allow the narrator to make aside remarks to the reader, or give him the opportunity to add "color" to a statement through the addition of information or sarcasm. These remarks occur frequently in the narratives of Stop-time and A Fan's Notes. Conroy adds additional information to the scene where Jean and he become fruit vendors in New York:

(My wife, whom I was not to meet for many years, lived in a town house one block away and must have passed us many times. Who knows? Perhaps I palmed off some bad grapes on my mother-in-law. It's not entirely impossible that my father-in-law's mysterious reluctance to receive me into the bosom of his family was related to a buried image of myself with a thumb on the scales, under his bananas) (Conroy, p. 136).

Exley offers the same type of remarks in A Fan's Notes. During a conversation with Dr. K. in the insane asylum, he further describes a reaction he received from the doctor:

(he expressed distinct alarm, then quickly covered himself to protect his medical brethren, on learning that I had been given shock treatment) (Exley, p. 101).

A remark such as this not only offers additional information to the interpreter, but also reinforces the narrator's perspective.

In addition to the parenthetical remarks, the use of rhetorical questions signifies the narrator's recognition of the reader. Exley, looking back on the pompous and affected manner that he incorporated in job interviews, asks the reader: "Did I really believe I'd get a job in this way?" (Exley, p. 43). Conroy incorporates the rhetorical question and the parenthetical remark in one address to the reader: "(How can girls be so good? How can what is so difficult for me be so easy for them?)" (Conroy, p. 143). Extensive explanations of a process or event that is already familiar to the narrator also indicate recognition of the reader's presence. Conroy goes into detail explaining a game played at the school in Denmark--hysteria (Conroy, p. 269).

The most blatant recognition of the reader's presence occurs when the author recognizes the reader as an observer of the action by using the pronoun "we." In the form of a rhetorical question Frank Conroy recognizes the reader: "Can we doubt that Jean's hand shook as he hung up the phone?" (Conroy, p. 177). Though little information concerning the reliability of the narrator can be gleaned from these elements of reader recognition, the fact that the narrator presents the information with a reader in mind tells the



interpreter that the narrator's reliability may be questioned. When information is presented for someone other than the narrator, there is the possibility of the narrator altering the text.

The narrator may admit to an alteration or omission in the text; if he does, his unreliability is verified. Exley admits freely to falsification of detail, and in the case of Mr. Blue's death, provides several contrived death scenes for the reader.

And though Mr. Blue's way of death was fitting, I never tell anybody the way it really happened; any more than in a hundred places in these pages I have told what "really" happened. I can't tell the mode of Mr. Blue's death because in actuality it was so right as to force the reader's credibility to the breaking point. Attempting to make Mr. Blue's death more believable, I considered a number of possibilities (Exley, p. 271).

Exley follows the above remarks with several of the scenes he imagined to be appropriate for Mr. Blue's death. The narrator admits to falsification of Mr. Blue's death, and to a number of other deceits. He actually tells the reader that he cannot be trusted, and does not specify where he has distorted or falsified the text. This gives the interpreter reason to suspect the narrator's reliability throughout the narrative; the narrator destroys any trust the interpreter might have placed in him. The desire to distort the text can make the interpreter suspicious of the narrator's reliability as well. Conroy tells the reader that he is tempted to exaggerate the audience's reaction to the diamond yo-yo (Conroy, p. 117) but he refrains from it. The realization that the

narrator would be tempted to distort elements in the text should also caution the interpreter about the narrator's reliability.

The final step in evaluation of the reader-narrator relationship is determination of the attitude the narrator assumes toward the reader. Clues to this attitude can be obtained from the recognition and intimacy the narrator offers the reader. As the reader recognition increases and the details divulged to the reader become more intimate, the narrator's attitude towards the reader is presented more positively. It is difficult to consider narrator honesty in determination of attitude, because an honest image presented by the narrator could be a part of his strategy of deception. It could simply be a "front" used to mislead the reader. This particular problem has no immediate solution for the interpreter, but an awareness of the possibility of deception serves to caution him. A more accurate assessment of attitude can be obtained by determining the overall tone of the text. Is it light? Serious? Does the narrator employ sarcasm? Answers to these questions will provide information concerning the author's attitude toward his material, which is inextricably tied to the telling of it. This will give the interpreter an attitudinal base for performance of the narrator and the attitude he assumes in the telling of his story.

#### Spatial Locus

The spatial locus of the narrator is another means by which the interpreter can determine the narrator's relationship



to his story. The physical locations in the text and the importance the narrator places on these locations offer solid information about the narrator. The interpreter can gather additional information concerning the narrator's attitude by examining narrator preference for people or place, and the shifts in location that occur in the text.

The interpreter begins by compiling a list of general locations and the specific locations within those general areas. Chapter nine of Stop-time, "Falling," would have the following location plotting:

General Locale:	New York City
Specific Locales:	
(in order)	P. S. 6 grammar school corner of 68th and Lexington fire escape of apartment on 86th St.

Plotting the locations of the events in the narrative not only enables the interpreter to follow the movement of the narrator; it allows him to study the shifts the narrator makes from chapter to chapter. Chapter divisions are usually broken by changes in time, action, or location. If the chapters have been divided by location, the location plot will indicate such a division. Chapter division by space will indicate that locations in the novel are important to the narrator. Though Stop-time does not have a strict chapter by chapter change in location, much of the division by chapter serves to juxtapose New York City with either Chula Vista, Florida, or Elsinore, Denmark. Chapter titles may also indicate the importance a narrator places on location. Stop-time frequently employs reference to location in the chapter titles: "Space and a

Dead Mule," "Going North," "The Coldness of Public Places," "Nights Away From Home," "Going to Sea," "Elsinore."

In contrast, Exley makes little reference to space in the titles of his chapters. "Journey on a Davenport" is the only chapter title that refers to a specific place, and the davenport in the text gains its importance in symbolic terms, rather than as a location. Other chapter titles make reference to people or action in A Fan's Notes. Thus spatial orientation would be less important to Exley's narrative, as indicated by his lack of emphasis on location.

The most important concern in relating space and narrator reliability is the importance certain locations acquire for the narrator. It is yet another means of determining the narrator attitude. Specific comment is rarely offered by the narrator concerning his attitude toward the general locations in the novel. This attitude toward the general locations is a culmination of the narrator's attitudes toward specific locations within the general environment, and the associations he has with those specific places. An examination of Stop-time indicates the narrator's attachment to Chula Vista, Florida. The narrator has only pleasant associations with this area during his first year of residence there. "The first year in Florida was my last good year until I became a man. The woods, Tobey, bikes, running, nakedness, freedom-- these were the important things. It was the end of childhood" (Conroy, p. 31). Conroy freely comments on the fascination the woods held for him and his friend, Tobey. The following



quotations each indicate the importance that space holds for the narrator:

We spent most of our time in the woods. The first project was a tree-house built precariously high in a tall pine . . . . Above, the fat white clouds drifted in the blue. Great sedate clouds, rich and peaceful (Conroy, p. 24).

Best of all was the rock quarry. Down the long white coral road on our bikes, mile after mile into the deserted woods (Conroy, p. 24).

We rambled over a tremendous amount of space every day, over vast areas of silent, empty woods, . . . rambled over miles of wasteland trying to find the center of it, the heart, the place to know it (Conroy, pp. 24-5).

Though remarks such as these converge to form a total impression of an area, the author may choose to single out a specific location that has no counterpart for forming a total impression. Conroy offers this isolated instance:

I remember waking up in the infirmary at Freemont. I had been sick, unconscious for at least a day. Remembering it I rediscover the exact spatial center of my life, the one still point. The incident stands like an open window looking out to another existence.

Waking in a white room filled with sunshine. The breeze pushes a curtain gently and I can hear the voices of children, outside, far away. There's no one in the room. I don't know where I am or how long I've been there. It seems to be afternoon but it could be morning. I don't know who I am, but it doesn't bother me. The white walls, the sunlight, the voices all exist in absolute purity (Conroy, p. 16).

This type of revelation offers the interpreter important information concerning the attitude of the narrator. Associations with particular places will help the interpreter determine narrator bias, favorable or unfavorable, towards spatial locations in the novel. This information will formulate a

performance attitude for the narrator in regard to a specific location and the events that may occur in that location.

### Temporal Locus

The determination of the narrator's temporal locus relates directly to the consideration of narrator reliability. The relation of time-past and time-present directly affects the narrator's perception of events in the novel. The time order used in the text provides information concerning narrator attitude and the meaning certain events acquire in relation to other events.

The relationship between the experiencing self and the narrating self is an important consideration for the interpreter of the creative autobiography. Franz Stanzel offers four points for the reader's illusion expectancy in a first-person situation:

1. the narrating self is identical in persona with the experiencing self;
2. the narrating self in the act of narration stands in a relationship of posteriority to the experiencing self and to the action; the narrative distance is designated in the narrative;
3. if the narrative distance is greater than the duration of the narrated matter, then the narrating self regards the action as completed; the narrating self then has the privilege of foreknowing all the action to be narrated; for this reason the narrating self can rise to panoramalike surveys; he can give glimpses of partial resolutions or reveal the ending;
4. the narrating self distinguishes itself from the experiencing self by greater insight and maturity, by a tendency to retrospection and reflection, and often by a completely different way of life; between the experiencing self's experience of an event and the narrative re-creation of the same event at the hands of the narrating self there are therefore



differences of valuation and interpretation which become visible in the structure of meaning of the novel.<sup>18</sup>

To determine the narrative distance the interpreter must first define the time span of the novel. Stop-time covers the author's life from age six to twenty-nine, which would date from 1941 to 1964. Major focus is placed on the years between 1946 and 1954. A Fan's Notes spans the years from approximately 1935 to 1962, a period of 27 years. Exley focuses on his life between the ages of twenty-one and thirty-two. Next the time at the point of narration must be determined. It is nearly impossible to procure an exact date unless the narrator carries the events of the novel to time-present or offers the reader an age or a date. As the distance between time-past and time-present increases for the narrator, the ability of the narrator to accurately recall events in the narrative may decrease. His reliability will be affected in terms of ability to remember detail.

Stanzel's third point, narrator foreknowledge of events, effects the narrator's depiction of events and their significance. The narrator is able to reveal the consequences of certain events, events which may have seemed insignificant at their onset but which derive importance in the light of future events. Exley reveals the consequences of his wife's pregnancy:

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<sup>18</sup>Franz K. Stanzel, Narrative Situation in the Novel, trans. by James P. Pusack (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1971), pp. 69-70.

As an indirect result of this pregnancy, I'd soon be back at Avalon Valley; and though we were to see a great deal of them after my sons were born, on those occasions both Prudence and Bumpy would leave me to my own devices to the point of outright ignoring me; and this, as the reader will see, proved to be fine with me (Exley, p. 292).

This foreknowledge allows the interpreter to gather a total picture of events as they merge within the narrator's life. The significance of the event is related in terms of the narrating self rather than the experiencing self's limited perspective.

The perspective of the narrating self in relation to the experiencing self sets the tone for the narrative. The meaning events acquire for the narrator are a result of the time-perspective the narrator may have gained in viewing those events. Creative autobiographies find their base in this perspective, in the ability of the narrator to interpret and evaluate events as they affect his entire life. The interpreter needs to be aware of the tension created between the narrating self and the experiencing self in the evaluation of an event. A new perspective is created on the event as a result of the maturation process of the narrator.

What does become visible as a result of the mature perspective of the narrating self is a tendency to reflect and to philosophize about the significance of given events. Conroy, for example, mulls over a predicament peculiar to



children, something not possible for the child of his experiencing self. "Children are in the curious position of having to do what people tell them whether they want to or not. A child knows he must do what he is told" (Conroy, p. 50). Exley looks in retrospect at the industrial writing and editing he did as a young man and says he would now "be embarrassed to leaf through those issues I was responsible for" (Exley, p. 126). Because the narrator is aware of the significance of given events, or of elements within those events, the inclination to distort elements due to time perspective is great. Exley admits to this type of distortion in a story about his father:

In telling the story over the years I have added such a captivating touch here, omitted such a bland one there, that the tale is now so aesthetically the way I prefer it that I'm sure the bare facts would prove inimical to my own version (Exley, p. 174).

The interpreter must remain aware, then, of the distorting perspective gained through the passage of time.

The ordering of events as they occur in the novel is another consideration for the interpreter. The author could choose to order the events chronologically, however, "If the object of autobiography is to take possession of our past in as original and coherent a way as possible, then chronology works against that object by extending the past merely conventionally and claiming itself to be the source of life's meanings."<sup>19</sup> Many narrators, like the narrators of Stop-time

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<sup>19</sup> John Sturrock, "The New Model Autobiographer," New Literary History 9 (Autumn 1977): 54.

and A Fan's Notes, choose an ordering of events other than the chronological. The interpreter must trace the progression of events in the narrative and determine the associations of the narrator that trigger his thought currents. Elements of one event in the narrative can force the narrator to associate these elements with another similar event. Consequently, the use of flashback is frequently employed and the only solid link between successive events may be their associations for the narrator or the meaning they acquire for the narrator. Exley's discussion of Mr. Blue's sexual fixation reminds him of an incident he had with a girl at summer camp. The girl's naive outlook and Mr. Blue's naive sexual interest juxtapose nicely, the girl's outlook reinforcing Mr. Blue's childish fixation (Exley, pp. 249-250). In this manner one event may trigger another, allowing the narrator to leap from one time frame to another. What orders the events in a case such as this is the associations the narrator makes between events, not chronology.

The relationships between time-past and time-present also affect the workings of the narrative. The combination of these two perspectives creates time-relived. The narrator of a creative autobiography is able to place himself in time-past to a given degree, but his observation of time-past is certainly tempered by his present perspective. Certain key elements of past events will be



emphasized because of the importance they have acquired for the narrator over a period of time. The interpreter's perception of the events in a creative autobiography is affected by the narrator's positioning of time-past and time-present. If the narrator presents his time-present evaluation of the action before he gives the description of scene, he is attempting to bias the reader prior to the reader's knowledge of the event. If he offers time-present commentary throughout the course of an action, he acts as a guide for the reader, carefully guiding and filtering the information he presents. Should his time-present commentary follow the action, the reader is less affected by narrator subjectivity, though there is some inherent subjectivity in the narrative.

The preceding approaches to the study of time in the creative autobiography are basic in their approach to reliability. The element of time in a text is a complex issue and could constitute a study in itself. Thus it cannot be covered in depth in this analysis.

### CHAPTER III

#### NARRATOR RELIABILITY: AN ANALYSIS FOR A FAN'S NOTES

##### Mental Locus

##### Narrator's Relationship to Himself

In A Fan's Notes, Frederick Exley offers the interpreter very little information concerning his physical appearance. The narrator tells the reader at one point that ". . . my hair was still black, my figure svelte (well, almost svelte), my eyes didn't yet reflect the soul's discontent . . ." (Exley, p. 242). It is only when the narrator becomes concerned about the deterioration of his physical appearance that he offers any kind of description for the interpreter to follow.

During the months I had permitted Patience to assume the man's role of supporting me, I had unmanned myself: I had become infantile. My sleek cheeks had grown flatulent, my girth fatty, my thin hand plumper than that of a thriving child's; . . . (Exley, p. 332).

Physically I became as protean as a chameleon, able to discern the almost daily expansion of my waistline, the way my neck was increasingly sagging over the folds of my collar. After that unremitting spring of beer, pasta, Tia Maria, and futility, I found my body thirty pounds overweight, my cerebrum as dopey as a eunuch's dong (Exley, p. 335-6).

When the summer holiday finally came, I returned to the farm, waddled my pasta-bloated body about the wide yard, looked up at the unvarying blue of the sky, and re-experienced that top-of-the-world feeling (Exley, p. 337).



What is evident to the interpreter is the physical change that occurs in the narrator. After Exley is released from Avalon Valley for the first time and marries Patience, he gains the weight that mars his once "svelte" physical appearance. In a performance situation the interpreter must adapt his physicalization to match the appearance of Exley. The text indicates an alteration in carriage as Exley's weight increases. The interpreter must also display the proper attitude toward the physical features he embodies. The more weight Exley gains, the less he approves of his appearance.

Intellectually, Exley offers information about himself through action and personal commentary. One obvious concern for the narrator is his writing ability. As an aspiring author, this ability is his tool. The narrating self views much ignorance in the experiencing self's ability to write well.

Knowing nothing about writing, I had no trouble seeing myself famous. If, according to a reviewer, So-and-So had written a "masterpiece," I quite facilely imagined myself as So-and-So (Exley, p. 33).

And to my horror . . . I discovered I knew nothing whatever about the grueling, mundane business of making form out of fragments. Like a man with a handful of exquisite, or what in my vanity I was sure were exquisite, diamonds, I hadn't the slightest notion of how to set them (Exley, p. 306).

The narrating self does see some value to his writing seige that the above remarks fail to indicate. "If nothing else, I wrote a great deal during those months, writing rapidly, furiously, exultantly, heart-sinkingly, and a manuscript of whatever merit began, page upon page, filling up the suitcase at the foot of my iron cot" (Exley, p. 302).

Despite Exley's derogatory view of his writing ability, he does show himself to be a learned man in the field of literature. In his encounters with his brother-in-law, Bumpy, Exley impresses him by quoting from Julius Caesar (Exley, p. 282), Plutarch (Exley, p. 283), and F. Scott Fitzgerald (Exley, p. 286). Exley also reads extensively: "(for I had read the books which by now all but crowded us out of the apartment)" (Exley, p. 306). Though this extensive reading does aid him in some respects, Exley feels that it has hampered him in others. He sees a need of wit and cunning, "neither of which I now possessed. I had been wasting away amidst the musty dust of books . . ." (Exley, p. 311). His literary knowledge, lack of wit, and intelligence level provide problems as a high school teacher.

. . . whatever intelligence I possessed was of that savagely unsympathetic kind which didn't allow me to understand the student's difficulty in grasping: sadly, I lacked the intelligence to simplify, and with an utterly monolithic and formidable pedantry I thought nothing of demanding that my students feed me back my own quackery (Exley, p. 348).

In addition to the action and the commentary in the text, the intelligence level of the narrator is demonstrated by his command of the language. Exley is able to manipulate syntax to attain a variety of grammatical structures. He has a broad vocabulary which serves to enhance descriptive passages and add a singular quality to the information presented.

The emotional base of Exley is revealed most explicitly in the narrative. A central element of his emotional constitution is the paranoia that eventually was to bring him to



three confinements in mental institutions. The emotional instability of the narrator becomes obvious through his actions and his own commentary. Exley freely admits to his paranoid state:

I was perfectly aware that I was a paranoiac--which, of course, had caused the entire "seizure" to begin with-- (Exley, p. 23).

That I feared my mother would turn even the latter away indicates the extent paranoia had already dented my psyche (Exley, p. 165).

Like a man whose enemies, being omnipresent and inexhaustible at the same time, insidiously and outrageously present him with no defined face to bash, rendering him numb and impotent, I was a paranoiac in a state close to crisis (Exley, p. 197).

The most unique aspect of the narrator's paranoid state is that the experiencing self revels in the paranoia. He does not necessarily want to get "well."

My own devils--those which, prior to my commitment to Avalon Valley, had already sent me to a private hospital the preceding spring--were not particularly disturbing, at least not at that time (Exley, p. 74).

Yes, I was insane. Still, I did not despise my oddness, my deviations, those things which made me, after all, me. I wanted to preserve those things (Exley, p. 82).

The paranoiac tends to project his own personal conflicts to the hostilities of others. Exley is no exception. Exley directs his personal conflicts to his stepfather, former hometown friends, and to America in general. The hostility Exley believes he receives from his stepfather elicits the most drastic response from Exley. Exley makes snide remarks to his stepfather at the dinner table and later begins to "feign

an actual physical fear of him" (Exley, p. 198). The narrator, in retrospect, states that "I can see now that my baiting him was motivated by nothing other than the guilt I felt at accepting his bed and board" (Exley, p. 197). Though Exley does not choose to lash out against his former acquaintances, he does imagine that they have some hostility towards him. He feels their condemnation when he encounters them on the street: "It was distressing because there was a kind of gloating--undoubtedly a good deal imagined on my part--in these encounters, as though they were telling me that getting myself proclaimed mad . . . was only a childish and petulant refusal to accept their way of life as the right way, . . ." (Exley, p. 9). Exley maintains a deep hostility towards the America that he feels rejects his priorities. Because he cannot or does not wish to conform to the standards America sets, he frequently condemns these standards.

America was drunk on physical comeliness. America was on a diet. America did its exercises. America, indeed, brought a spirituality to its dedication to pink-cheeked, straight-legged, clear-eyed, health-exuding attractiveness--a fierce, strident dedication (Exley, p. 71).

I wanted to kill that attendant, kill him in the same way that I wanted to destroy that America in pursuit of its own loveliness, kill him and it for their utter and unending lack of imagination (Exley, p. 73).

The paranoiac, as a result of the hostility he feels from others, often sees his life as one of pain and sadness, and a great deal of self-pity is involved. Exley often immerses himself in this pain. "Accept your pain as a part of life"



(Exley, p. 11, 12), he tells other characters. When he meets Frank Gifford, a man whose success he resents, he feels the need to cry out, "'Listen, you son of a bitch, life isn't all a goddam football game! You won't always get the girl! Life is rejection and pain and loss'--all those things I so cherishingly cuddled in my self-pitying bosom" (Exley, p. 58). Later, while attempting to write his book the self-pity emerges again: "I was certain, though, that in writing of myself I could find much to pity, and that there wouldn't be a single episode relating to myself that didn't sadden me" (Exley, p. 276). In the final pages of the narrative, Exley settles on a quotation that seems to fit the way he feels about the progression of his life. "John Jay Chapman once said of William James that he seemed always to be stepping out of a sadness to meet one" (Exley, p. 352). This statement not only reflects the narrator's viewpoint, but also serves as one of the thematic elements in the text. The theme of pain and suffering is a projection of the implied author; it has emerged as a major factor in the selection process used by Exley as he records portions of his life. Because it is an important concept for Exley, suffering is a recurrent element in the narrative. The interpreter cannot be certain that Exley's life is as painful as he presents it. The unreliability exists in the amount of suffering Exley records; the prevalence of pain and loss in his life may be highly exaggerated because of his selection process.

The hostility and the self-pity that the narrator has as a result of his paranoia will color his outlook towards other characters, the action, and his life in general. Consequently, the interpreter cannot assume that the narrator's perceptions of these are entirely reliable. Much of the hostility the narrator feels from others is imagined--totally the result of his paranoid condition. His rather bleak outlook on life results from the self-pity that stems from his paranoia. The implied author establishes this viewpoint as unreliable, intentionally creating an ironic effect for Exley's paranoia.

To combat the hostility he feels he receives from others, Exley conjures fantasies to rise above those he feels condemn him. He envisions himself as a man of wealth or a man with magnetic appeal. Exley explains:

There was nothing grossly unusual in the fantasy: it was a projected compendium of all that was most truly vulgar in America: I was rich, famous, and powerful, so incredibly handsome that within moments of my entrance stunning women went spread-eagle before me (Exley, p. 74).

Another of Exley's fantasies involves the inheritance of a cool billion that comes as a result of lending a man twelve dollars when the man was down and out. With the billion dollars Exley purchases the New York Giants and builds a training camp for them in a lush tourist area. He entertains such celebrities as Ernest Hemingway, John Cheever, Sophia Loren, and Edmund Wilson in his penthouse suite and has any number of beautiful women at his disposal (Exley, pp. 189-90). In yet another of his fantasies, Exley sees himself as a rich and distinguished Englishman attacked by African natives.



The Britisher retains his composure as the natives attack (Exley, p. 222-24). In each fantasy, Exley maintains his superiority through the privileges of wealth or by his lofty attitude. Such illusions give the reader further opportunity to question the narrator's reliability. If the narrator is motivated by a need for superiority, he will be inclined to exaggerate instances in the action where he feels he is in control. The high degree of control Exley exhibits in the action of his fantasies is as exaggerated as the fantasies themselves. Exley establishes his unreliability when he begins to project this controlled image of himself into actual situations. The interpreter must see this control as an amplification, a projection of Exley's fantasy into his life.

The importance that certain tangibles and intangibles hold for Exley aid the interpreter in determining narrator motivation. The most obvious tangible motivation is alcohol:

--and with each new milieu my jobs grew less remunerative, my dreams more absurdly colored. To sustain them I found that it took increasing and ever-increasing amounts of alcohol. After a time I perceived that I was continually contemplating the world through the bubbling, cerise hue of a wine glass (Exley, p. 65).

Exley spent much of his time with friends drinking. He drinks with B. (Exley, pp. 11-12), with his brother-in-law, Bumpy (Exley, p. 288), and goes so far as to charge all the liquor he wishes to his friend, J.'s, hotel tab (Exley, p. 314-16). After each morning's selling spree with Mr. Blue, Exley and Mr. Blue spend the afternoon at Moose's or O'Reilly's or Big John's drinking. The alcohol serves to numb the pain and the self-pity, at least temporarily.

The only real exhilaration Exley feels is through football, Giant's football:

Why did football bring me so to life? I can't say precisely. Part of it was my feeling that football was an island of directness in a world of circumspection. In football a man was asked to do a difficult and brutal job, and he either did it or got out.... It smacked of something old, something traditional, something unclouded by legerdemain and subterfuge. It had that kind of power over me, drawing me back with the force of something known, scarcely remembered, elusive as integrity--perhaps it was no more than the force of a forgotten childhood. Whatever it was, I gave myself up to the Giants utterly. The recompense I gained was the feeling of being alive (Exley, p. 7).

At many points of desperation in the narrative, football seems to be the only thing that sustains Exley. His reading of the sports section in the newspaper is nothing short of a ritual. He saves the sports section to read last, and then proceeds to read all the sports information except articles concerning the Giants. He reads all the information about the Giants last. "I was like a child who, having been given a box of chocolates, eats the jellies and nuts first and saves the creamy caramels till last" (Exley, p. 15). The involvement with the Giants team is the one positive drive that Exley possesses. It becomes the focus that pulls him from his otherwise paranoid state.

The most driving intangible motivation for Exley is the quest for fame. The fame his father had acquired weighs heavily upon him, and prompts him to pursue his own quest for fame.

Other men might inherit from their fathers a head for figures, a gold pocket watch all encrusted



with the oxidized green of age, or an eternally astonished expression; from mine I acquired this need to have my name whispered in reverential tones (Exley, p. 33).

The need for fame also prompts Exley to fantasize about what his life might have been like had his father achieved even greater fame.

Still, I always imagined a world infinitely more glittering, one in which my father had indeed become an All-American and had afterward, partly on the strength of it, risen to the top of some huge industrial complex (Exley, p. 177).

Though the pursuit of fame motivates Exley throughout much of his early life, he eventually realizes some of the futility in his aspirations. Following a fight which he has aggravated, Exley concedes:

I fought because I understood, and could not bear to understand, that it was my destiny--unlike that of my father, whose fate it was to hear the roar of the crowd--to sit in the stands with most men and acclaim others. It was my fate, my destiny, my end, to be a fan (Exley, p. 327).

The quest for fame motivates him to write, but the absence of fame is one of the causes of his paranoia. This need for fame causes Exley to have delusions of grandeur: "I had no trouble seeing myself famous" (Exley, p. 33). Until Exley makes the realization on page 327, the interpreter must question Exley's perceptions of his talent and wonder at the feasibility of his ambitions.

By examining the tangible and intangible items of importance in the text, the interpreter can discern the motivations in Exley's life and the major themes in the narrative. The pursuit of alcoholic beverages is motivated most often by

dissatisfaction or depression. Alcohol is an escape that takes him away from daily traumas and soothes the frustrations of daily life. Football represents the fame that Exley seeks, and substitutes for Exley's failure as an author. Exley's reactions to the effects of alcohol and football are amplified. His unrealistic expectations for their effects causes him to exaggerate those effects, making his valuation of their power unreliable.

#### Relationship of Narrator to Characters

The most important characters to Exley and to the content of his narrative are his father, Frank Gifford, Bunny Sue, Patience, and Mr. Blue. These characters each play an integral part in some portion of his life, and Exley acknowledges their effects on his life more clearly than many of the other characters in the text.

Earl Exley, Fred's father, affects Fred's life most profoundly. Fred was continually compared with his father who had been a fine athlete. The continual comparison causes Fred some resentment of his father.

Though my father had been dead for eighteen years, he had in his day been a superb athlete, as good, some say, as any who ever came out of northern New York--certainly no great distinction but not without its effect on a son who had never been permitted to forget it (Exley, p. 25).

At one point Fred describes a football game where he watches his father play. It is at this game that he feels a certain separation between him and his father.



It was the first time the crowd had come between my father and me, and I became aware that other people understood in him qualities that I did not-- a knowledge that gave them certain claims on him. It is a terrifying thing to have a wedge driven into one's narrow circle of love (Exley, p. 30).

The alienation that Exley feels in relation to his father, is heightened in the narrative by having his father introduced in the narrative by another character. The interpreter is introduced to Earl Exley by a doctor who is treating Exley for a severe alcohol reaction.

"He was a good fellow--a hell of a good fellow." And, Just before he went out the door, "And tough too!"

It was this latter that got to me, said as it was in such a way as to indicate that my father's son might not be so tough (Exley, p. 25).

The narrator offers little physical description of his father for the interpreter because it is the personality of the father that seems to make him legendary.

. . . I'm not sure my father's legend was as attributable to his athletic prowess as to his personality. The tales men selected to pass on about him were never so much about a ninety-yard run as about an authentically colorful man having a ball and in an amiable way thumbing his nose at life (Exley, p. 28).

Much of the information offered about the father is offered in summary rather than scene. Thus the interpreter views the father much of the time through the narrator's bias. The father is often pictured in a superior manner as compared to Exley, or appears alienated from his son. Only Exley's reaction to his father is offered. The father is shown in scene during a football game (Exley, p. 30) and following a father-son basketball game (Exley, p. 188). The interpreter is

never given only the scene. Each scene is followed by the narrator's evaluation of it, and its effect on him. Consequently, the interpreter is rarely allowed to make his own evaluation of the scene. The view of Earl Exley is closely controlled by his son's bias, a bias that reflects his son's inferiority complex and resentment of his father. Exley would desperately like to achieve his father's amiable, relaxed attitude towards life and reap the rewards as his father did. The lack of this quality in Exley causes him to magnify its existence in his father. The interpreter is given an unreliable assessment of the father's amiable qualities because Exley is so desirous of them.

The character of Frank Gifford is also of monumental importance to Exley. Exley's quest for fame is tied quite closely to this character. "Frank Gifford, more than any single person, sustained for me the illusion that fame was possible" (Exley, p. 120). Part of this sustenance evolves from a similarity perceived by Exley. Both men attended the University of Southern California and both returned to New York after graduation. From this, Exley develops a sort of alliance with Gifford. His initial encounter with Gifford at USC also serves to reinforce the reality of Gifford for Exley. Though Gifford is portrayed in scene much of the time, Exley is only directly involved in the scenes once. When Exley encounters Gifford in one of the USC hamburger joints, both smile at the other, Gifford greets him with a "hello" and then Exley explains his reaction to the meeting (Exley, pp. 58-59). The other scenic portrayals of Gifford are at



football games. Gifford's action is shown through the eyes of Exley, and we are given Exley's reaction to Gifford's performance on the field. The reader is allowed little, if any, self judgment concerning Gifford. The character of Gifford is developed solely through Exley's perception, even within scene. What really establishes Gifford's importance within the narrative is what he represents to Exley, and the lessons Exley learns from him. The text is full of these learning experiences received from Gifford:

Gifford [had given me] a lesson in how to live with one's scars (Exley, p. 49).

. . . he impressed upon me, in the rigidity of my embarrassment, that it is unmanly to burden others with one's grief (Exley, p. 59).

Thus it was that at the end, or at what Gifford and I must have believed would be the end for him, it gave me some consolation that we were both addicted to something--he to football and I to liquor--capable of destroying us, if not actually, in humiliation and loss of pride (Exley, p. 320).

The narrator's bias towards Gifford is strong. He defends Gifford, encourages him, and this inordinate partiality causes many of the other characters to question Gifford's greatness. Exley's stepfather (Exley, p. 200), and the girl with the roan-colored hair (Exley, p. 212) both fail to grasp Exley's obsession with Gifford, and are met with Exley's incredulous response. The fact that given characters within the narrative question Exley's partiality, gives the interpreter a basis for verifying the bias. Throughout the text, Exley's response to Gifford or events related to Gifford will be disproportionate to reality. The interpreter must be aware of

this exaggeration to create the diversity of opinion between Exley and other characters in regard to Gifford's ability.

Another facet of Exley's personality is revealed through his relationship with the character Bunny Sue. It is the only relationship with a woman that is given romantic overtones. We are introduced to Bunny Sue with a physical description--an appropriate introduction since it is her physical appearance that enamors Exley. She is the girl of his dreams, the one he feels he has waited for. "Within moments of looking at her, I knew it was she" (Exley, p. 137). The only time the reader is allowed to see Bunny in scene is the first day of their meeting; the remainder of Exley's relationship with Bunny is given through summary of the events that occurred over the course of a summer. There is little commentary given on Bunny Sue by other characters. During the first portion of their relationship, the interpreter must be aware of Exley's favorable prejudice towards Bunny Sue. Exley admits to his reaction to a love situation: "It seems to be the fashion to take love as it comes, to examine it rather minutely, and to dismiss it rather lightly, .... But I cannot do that; I know of no greater things" (Exley, p. 139). Bunny is an important character for Exley not only because she represents the girl of his dreams at the time of the relationship, but also because of his reaction to her afterwards. He later discovers that he "had never loved her" (Exley, p. 146), and blames her for his fall into paranoia. "I . . . tried to construct paragraphs about anything save Bunny Sue, who had



brought me to that farm to lie on that davenport, feeding cookies to a dog" (Exley, p. 186). Exley blames Bunny, reversing the enamored outlook he once had of her. Since Exley has chosen to display the latter part of their relationship in summary, his feelings about Bunny are unqualified by action, dialogue, or the opinions of other characters. What the interpreter sees is Exley's vision of their relationship, and his connection of the relationship to his mental illness. It is doubtful that Bunny is the sole cause of Exley's mental deterioration; she can be considered a contributor. Though this bias is obvious to the interpreter, he must not diminish Bunny's importance in relation to the narrator. For the narrator, Bunny is responsible for the greatest downward plunge in his life. The interpreter, in manifesting Exley, must be aware that Exley's reaction to Bunny following their separation is the antithesis of his response during their courtship. When Exley is courting Bunny, he is biased in favor of her, which colors his description of her personality and her reactions to him. Once the relationship has disintegrated, Exley's references to Bunny are affected by his failure in the relationship and his resentment. He downplays her lingering importance, making his assessments of her too harsh, and unreliable as well. She continues to hold more importance for Exley than he is willing to admit.

Just as he sees Bunny as his downfall, Exley views Patience, the girl with the roan-colored hair, as a redeemer. Exley does not introduce Patience by name in the narrative

until she becomes his wife. Initially, she is only "the girl with the roan-colored hair" who brings him cigarettes at Avalon Valley and takes him for long drives in her Mercedes. She is shown briefly in scene--misunderstanding his feelings for Gifford--and is given little personality by Exley. No physical description is offered at this point. For Exley, she is a device for getting away from Avalon Valley and back into the real world; she gains her initial importance for him in this capacity. Once they are wed, a physical description, as well as a more detailed personality description, are offered:

Her lovely, shoulder-length roan hair in an upsweep, bespectacling herself in severe-looking horn-rims of window-glass, using a minimum of makeup, dressed in tailored, two hundred-dollar dresses and expensive low-heeled pumps charged to her parents, Patience looked both less feminine and somewhat older than she was; and being both a bright and smartly turned-out young lady, she had managed to get a job working for judges interviewing potential divorcees, . . . (Exley, p. 277).

While during the day she was with such unctuous compassion refereeing the nearly mortal conflicts of her marital combatants . . . , I wanted to cook up a sumptuous repast of roast loin of pork, . . . (Exley, p. 329).

For the trip she wanted to buy me a badly needed raincoat; and I instantly understood that she had sympathetic visions of my standing on some lonely crossroads in the rain, . . . (Exley, p. 330).

The relationship is viewed from a heavily one-sided perspective by Exley. Many of the passages concerning Patience serve to show Exley's failure in the relationship rather than a mutual struggle. "It wasn't so much that Patience had volunteered everything material to our relationship as that I had



been unable to give to wife or sons the emotional nourishment they coveted" (Exley, p. 328-9). Exley takes advantage of her sympathy and her money. Exley lies to her about having lung cancer (Exley, p. 298), and steals money from her purse (Exley, p. 299). The moments Exley plays for her sympathy are shown mainly in summary rather than scene. In this way the interpreter is given more of Exley's motivations for the incidents, and Exley's one-sided perspective is offered more clearly. Exley seems to purposely create this one-sided perspective in order to flaunt his control of the situation. He is intentionally unreliable in the way he depicts his treatment of Patience. By creating himself as an abominable character, he is able to rationalize his failure in the marriage, and magnify his pain and suffering. The importance of Patience in the latter part of the relationship stems from her position in relation to him. She offers a violent contrast to Exley and serves to magnify his faults. Her sympathy, concern, and general support of the family are juxtaposed with his drinking, lying, and lack of emotional concern. Though Exley does little to rectify the relationship from his standpoint, he does recognize that the failure of the relationship lies with him. Through Patience he is able to draw a self-perspective of his mental condition. This realization does not prevent Exley from taking advantage of Patience, however. Exley is able to successfully manipulate Patience to his advantage by playing on her sympathy and concern. Because Exley so desires control of a situation, the pliable

sympathy of Patience and her unremitting faith may be hyperbolized and unreliable. By depicting her in this manner Exley can appear in total control of her responses. Her sympathy and his power become too contrary to be reliable.

The character of Mr. Blue also serves an important function in Exley's narrative. He is a motivating factor, and Exley's initial comment about Mr. Blue indicates his motivating force. ". . . I had come to expect anything and hence did not know that in the end he would be the cause of my getting off the davenport and moving on yet again" (Exley, p. 234). That statement alone sets the interpreter up for an influential character. The physical description of Mr. Blue is more extensive than any other character. The interpretation of Mr. Blue's physical qualities changes as Exley's opinions change of him. Initially, the description of Mr. Blue is painted positively:

He stood five feet, three in his shiny black shoes, elevated and made of alligator. He had thin, snow-white hair splotched with an aging, uncomfortable yellow, and crinkly, sad, great-sized eyes of so penetrating a blue that when he looked directly at me I found myself fingering my face for food particles or nose phlegm; his eyes seemed a constant reproach that one did not live up to his expectations . . . . Tiny and slender, Mr. Blue weighed no more than a hundred and fifteen. Still, his strength and agility were incredible. From a stand-still position he could do either a front or back flip, in machine-gun-like succession twenty hand springs without even winding himself; and on anyone's suggestion he would drop proudly to the floor and oblige the apartment's stunned occupants with a hundred pushups. It was wondrous to watch the old codger go at these feats (Exley, p. 234).



However Exley viewed Mr. Blue initially, he was not beyond a change of opinion. When Exley becomes aggravated at Mr. Blue's treatment of the deaf woman, he sees Mr. Blue through different eyes.

He was dirty, hot-browed and weary, old--old. About him there had always been this lapse of personal care intimating slummy origins: if his shoes were shined, his collar was dirty; if he wore a spanking-new tie, his soiled three-day socks cascaded over his shoe tops. As a "factory representative" he had never been able, so to speak, to put it all together at one time and make himself convincing. On this day the brow and the face were sweaty with fatigue, the fingernails and hands smudged with dirt, the shirt and collar wrinkled and stained, the pants oil-flecked and unpressed, the shoes turned-over and scuffed, the nostrils and ears gardens for unseemly hairs--everything was wrong (Exley, p. 253).

Exley's reactions to Mr. Blue alter according to the situations in which they are involved. The interpreter must establish the polarized attitudes that Exley has towards Mr. Blue. When Mr. Blue is a positive influence for Exley, as he is when they first meet, all his characteristics are viewed positively. When Mr. Blue shames Exley, or places him in an awkward position, those same characteristics are viewed negatively. A combination of these two perspectives provides a more reliable standpoint from which to view Mr. Blue. The interpreter is able to logically assess the character of Mr. Blue by "averaging" the polarized viewpoints of Exley and viewing Exley's observations of Mr. Blue from a neutral center position. Exley enjoys drinking with Mr. Blue, but feels uncomfortable discussing Mr. Blue's sexual fixation. Though he often defends Mr. Blue, he finds himself unable to defend

Mr. Blue to Deborah. The inconsistencies serve to emphasize the instability of the relationship, and offer an explanation for its short-term duration.

The importance of the narrator's relationship with Mr. Blue is stated flatly by the narrator. "For me Mr. Blue had become the real and vivid world, and the other habitués of the apartment merely penumbral, incorporeal dross" (Exley, p. 263). Mr. Blue serves as a transition from life at Avalon Valley to the world outside the insane asylum.

The information given about Mr. Blue is equally divided between summary and scene. The interpreter can observe the narrator's opinion of Blue in summary, and is allowed to judge him on the basis of his actions in scene as well. The reactions of other characters to Mr. Blue in scene serve to clarify Mr. Blue's character even further. For example, the character Deborah, gives the interpreter an entirely different picture of Mr. Blue than the one given by Exley. The self-confident picture that Exley had of Mr. Blue is demolished by Deborah's treatment of him:

"Your supper's been in the icebox for hours," Deborah sneered. "Get in the living room, you little weasel, and I'll bring it to you."

Moaning "ah hon" and something about being embarrassed in front of "mah guest," neither of which amounted to a glimmer of real protest, Mr. Blue resignedly turned and, head weighed down with heavy and burning humiliation, staggered through the door into the living room" (Exley, p. 257).

Through scene, Mr. Blue is given a chance to react with Deborah and we are able to see Mr. Blue and Exley's response to Mr. Blue in a new setting. The perspective Mr. Blue is again



polarized, this time between Exley and Deborah. Once again the interpreter can adopt the middle ground between perspectives to obtain a more reliable view of Mr. Blue in this segment.

The major distinction between the unimportant and the important characters in A Fan's Notes lies in the amount and quality of emotional response given to the characters. Characters like the five just described force Exley to be aware of himself through the development of a relationship between themselves and Exley. The term "relationship" necessarily implies that Exley and the character have spent time together which allows Exley to evaluate them beyond surface appearances. The women that become victims to his seductions are not differentiated clearly; each becomes one of a mass which he refers to as "they" (Exley, p. 129). Exley's encounter with the copywriter's friend is strictly a surface one. He offers some physical description of her (Exley, p. 132), but gives little indication of her personality with the exception of a few lines of indirect discourse. As such, no sort of "relationship" is developed. These women are merely timely vehicles for Exley, and their acceptance or rejection of him is of no consequence to Exley. They are a part of his life, but have no lasting effect on it, because he has allowed no emotional involvement on his part. He is not concerned with their judgments of him, so his paranoid tendencies are repressed. The passages involving these characters allow Exley to exhibit more control. Exley can exaggerate the amount of

control he has over these characters to counter the paranoid symptoms he exhibits in other areas of the narrative. Consequently, the interpreter must question Exley's reliability in relation to his illustration of events involving these characters. The amount of control he is able to exert over these characters will be greater in his estimation than from the eyes of an objective observer. The control he displays in this situation is so diametrically opposed to his paranoia in other instances that the interpreter cannot consider it a reliable account. By tempering his supposed control with the knowledge of his paranoia, the interpreter can gain a more reliable reflection of the control Exley exerts.

#### Relationship of Narrator to the Action

Exley's attitude toward the action in the narrative and the amount of involvement he has with it will determine his association with the action. The various pieces of action will be approached in the order they appear in the narrative.

On the page nineteen of the narrative the bartender, Freddy, does an imitation of Exley as he is when drunk. Exley observes the imitation and sees the whole rendition as being quite humorous. "We were alone in the bar, Freddy and I, and we laughed like hell, laughed and laughed and laughed" (Exley, p. 19). But when Exley realizes that he is seeing himself as others see him, the observation is not quite as humorous.

But then, quite suddenly, quite frightfully, my laughter went cold in my stomach, and my joy and my exhilaration curdled to the point where I thought I might vomit. With a kind of omniscient clarity I suddenly recognized the truth of this vision (Exley, p. 19).



This vision accompanies an alcoholic seizure which Exley takes to be a heart attack. He becomes totally absorbed with his pain. "Still I lived, still I felt pain, and still time passed, so that each moment I lived only increased--in violent, mad proportions--my thirst for life" (Exley, p. 20). The fear of death engulfs him, and the interpreter is given his first glimpse of the paranoid Exley. This seizure has a monumental effect on Exley's outlook. The horror of death he experiences at the seizure's onset is not dismissed following the incident. "That the fear of death still owns me is, in its way, a beginning" (Exley, p. 1). The significance of the event in Exley's life causes him to accentuate that incident. The initial fear and its lingering effects prevent Exley from objectifying his outlook. The amount of emphasis given this event is purposely strengthened by the narrator to underscore its importance; reliability is stretched to enhance a thematic element of the text.

When Exley's father went to New York to meet Steve Owen, Exley and his mother accompanied him. Though Exley is involved in the major portion of the action, he is not a major participant in the action. He observes much of what happens between his father and Owen. Exley does not look forward to the meeting of the two men, and even as a small boy, is perceptive enough to see the possible outcome. "All the way there I prayed that Owen would still be 'out.' I had come to see that the meeting was undesired by him, and I feared the consequences of our imposition" (Exley, p. 51). Following Owen's

refusal of his father's suggestion, the fear leaves Exley, and the interpreter sees a totally different reaction. "At the same time I had yearned to emulate and become my father, I had also longed for his destruction. Steve Owen not only gave me identity; he proved to me my father was vulnerable" (Exley, p. 52). Thus he derives a certain amount of self-identity from the encounter. At one point Exley states that he doesn't remember "a good deal of the conversation . . ." (Exley, p. 52). The event is also presented in summary, which increases the chances for a fragmentary account. The interpreter can question the accuracy of the account based on Exley's admission to a poor memory and to the judgmental quality of his observations which are affected by his personal gain from the situation.

When Exley observes a football game, he becomes totally involved with the game and with Frank Gifford. At a Giants-Lions game Exley displays his typical reaction to a Giant's football game. "Jumping up and down and pummeling father furiously on the back, I screamed, 'Oh, Jesus, Frank! Oh, Frank, baby! Go! For Steve! For Steve! For Steve!'" (Exley, p. 63). Exley is so immersed in this action that he is beyond outside control. There is little or no objectivity on his part in this situation. The emotional fulfillment he gains from his association with Gifford surfaces. No control is evident, providing a spontaneous release in reaction to the event. All the observations of Giant's football games focus on Gifford alone, and only mention another player if he is



involved with Gifford in some way. Exley narrows the field of vision for the interpreter and the evaluations of the progress in a game become unreliable because they fail to reflect on the game as a whole.

An incident in the insane asylum shows Exley wholly outside the action. A young man, a man whom Exley fails to remember, hangs himself. Exley and the other inmates watch the activity as the doctors attempt to revive him, but fail. In the days following the incident, Exley is ashamed because he fails to remember who the boy was.

Out of embarrassment I never in the ensuing days mentioned that I could not for the life of me recall him. I now sat by the hour myself, staring at the chair he was said to have occupied, trying to call him back. But I never had any luck. And I never mustered the guts to tell the other boys I couldn't remember him (Exley, pp. 90-91).

Exley is not only physically detached from the action in this case; he has mentally alienated himself because of his shame. Because of his lack of knowledge about the boy, he can become involved neither before nor after the incident. This lack of involvement does not force any objectivity on Exley's part. He becomes submerged in self-guilt and the incident becomes disproportionately significant for him. He magnifies the incident because it separates him from the crowd and his self-imposed isolation increases the bias. The interpreter should be aware of Exley's self-pity, and the way it magnifies Exley's account of the incident and his later reactions to it.

When Exley first meets Bunny Sue, he follows her through one of her shopping sprees. Though she asks his opinion of

her purchases, Exley is more observer than participant in this action. He attempts to detach himself as much as possible, but she continues to draw him in. "It all had the quality of a nightmare that takes place under water," says Exley (Exley, p. 138). "Did I like it? 'Fine. Fine,' was all I ever said" (Exley, p. 139). This is the most reliable picture of Bunny in the narrative, because Exley is more objective in his observation of her actions. He is not yet emotionally involved with Bunny and his disinterested response to her activity creates a distancing effect for observation of the scene.

At another point in the narrative, Exley makes a phone call on behalf of a friend he met at Alcoholics Anonymous. The call is to the friend's sister, begging her to take the friend into her home for a while. Exley is hesitant about making the call:

. . . I didn't in the least want to make it. But I had no choice whatever. Having once been in Avalon Valley, one never leaves the place and finds oneself, consciously or otherwise, forever obligated to those wretched men weeping their fierce tears in the night (Exley, p. 214).

When Exley is dealing with the timid sister over the phone, he finds himself self-confident and in control. However, when the sister's husband, George, takes over, Exley loses the self-confidence and control.

My voice grew more quavering, clammy perspiration began running freely down my sides, my hands grew so slippery that it proved a monumental effort to hold the receiver, and I had to keep shifting it from one hand to the other, intermittently drying my free hand on my trousers (Exley, p. 215).



The disagreement between Exley and George eventually becomes more violent. Exley becomes so immersed in the action that he loses control. The original hesitation he experienced while making the call is gone.

"Money?" I said. "Costing me money? Why, you stupid cocksucker! I'm talking about a man's life! You know what I mean?" . . .

"May you rot in hell," I said. Then I hung up (Exley, p. 219).

The interpreter is able to distinguish between Exley with a genteel facade and Exley in the midst of a true outburst. Once he becomes totally involved in the action, the real Exley cannot fail to emerge. He has lost any controlling facade which could buffer the situation. Though Exley was initially hesitant about making the call, he allows himself to become immersed in the emotional fervor of the call. George is painted negatively for the reader because he becomes Exley's opposition in the scene. The interpreter cannot trust the ogre-like depiction of George because George is presented as Exley's antagonist, and he barricades any hope for success in Exley's mission. The juxtaposition of Exley using his facade and Exley bursting his facade creates a sort of reliability base for the interpreter. The opposition gives the interpreter a more solid grounding for determining when he can trust Exley's narration and when he cannot.

During Exley's involvement with Mr. Blue he does some canvass work for Mr. Blue's aluminum siding sales. Exley makes contact with a woman whose deafness is due to a psychological block. When Mr. Blue enters the home to promote the

sale, he begins mouthing obscenities. Exley is caught in the action between Mr. Blue and the woman's reaction to Mr. Blue, for she is not deaf to obscenities. Exley's reaction to the scene is to leave. "Jumping abruptly and wildly up, I slammed the portfolio case shut, snapped its fasteners, picked it up, and dashed into the dining room headed for the front door" (Exley, p. 252). Because of Exley's involvement in the scene, he cannot be objective in its observation. The action is told in sympathy with the housewife and Exley.

One of the major revelations in the narrative comes to Exley following a fight he has aggravated. Exley verbally assaults and later does physical battle with two men who accidentally bumped into a girl he was with. Exley evaluates his relation to the action as follows:

And though they say one loses his head in a fight, mine was clear; and I was trying to answer the question that he, who even now struck me in the face, had posed to me: why? I fought for a reason I would discover the ensuing spring--because I had that day an awful glimpse of my own mortality (Exley, p. 325-6).

Out of fear, he runs from the confrontation with the second man. The fighting has been an emotional release for Exley. During the fight Exley is unable to perceive the real reasons behind his outburst. In retrospect, he is able to discern the emotional drive behind the confrontation, and sees it as a necessary release.

I fought because I understood, and could not bear to understand, that it was my destiny--unlike that of my father, whose fate it was to hear the roar of the crowd--to sit in the stands with most men and acclaim others. It was my fate, my destiny, my end, to be a fan (Exley, p. 326-7).



This realization has emerged only as a result of the passage of time. In the midst of the fighting, his mind, though clear, could not discern the baseline reason for his reaction. Exley interjects comments on the fight scene from his present perspective. The juxtaposition of these two positions neutralizes the significance of the fight itself and brings the motivations for the fight to the forefront. There is no need for concern with reliability in the portrayal of the fight, because it is the meaning the fight acquires in the whole of Exley's life that becomes important.

#### Narrator's Relationship to the Reader

There is no question that Exley recognizes the existence of the reader. The narrative is full of parenthetical and tangential remarks, creating a certain intimacy between Exley and his reader. The philosophizing that Exley does and the admission of certain feelings toward people and events gives the reader the sense that he is having the narrative directed to him. The intimacy of many of Exley's admissions is evident in the following:

November came in cold and went; and as it went I began to grow more perceptibly uneasy; I knew-- or suspected--that I would be released any day, and in truth, though I daren't say so to the authorities for fear of never getting out, there was in all the world no place whatever I cared to go (Exley, p. 103).

Alone at the distance of time and miles I am wondering if I were as happy then as I believed I was. I know there came a time when I wept, actually wept, bawled like a baby, thinking I did so for the incredible fullness of my days; but I am wondering now if the tears weren't induced by some quite other reasons (Exley, p. 131-2).

But at that moment, with his ungloved hand exposed to the fierce cold and resting familiarly on my shoulder in apology for the words he could not utter, I was wishing he were dead. Among unnumbered sins, from that damning wish I seek absolution (Exley, p. 188).

Though each of the above passages contains a different emotional impact, they are alike in that each reveals an intimacy of the narrator that is shared with the reader. Each of the segments possesses a quality of admission. In the first quotation he admits to the reader what he could not admit to the authorities. He admits to a misperception of a situation. In the final passage, Exley confesses to what he considers a sin against his father. Statements of this sort serve to link Exley with the reader, encouraging the reader's involvement in Exley's situation. They also reflect the affect of the narrator's bias on the mind of the reader. The reader must be careful to monitor his involvement so that he is aware of Exley's bias in given passages.

The acknowledgement of the reader is also evident in Exley's use of parenthetical remarks and rhetorical questions. The text uses many parenthetical remarks, most of which serve to elaborate on Exley's feelings or reactions to a situation.

That hospital (the word is frightfully harsh) was lovely (Exley, p. 75).

(does one ever forgive the German his final solution to the Jewish "problem"?) (Exley, p. 336).

The latter of the parenthetical remarks also incorporates the rhetorical question. Even more than the parenthetical remark, the rhetorical question indicates the presence of an audience.



The narrator is essentially asking the opinion of the reader through the use of rhetorical questioning.

Did I really believe I'd get a job in this way  
(Exley, p. 43)?

Was I too insane (Exley, p. 82)?

(can one love the children and not the mother?)  
(Exley, p. 328).

Exley's extensive use of both parenthetical remarks and rhetorical questioning indicate that he is writing with the reader in mind. These remarks and questions have an inclusive effect on the reader, making him feel a privileged recipient of additional information and an opinion-worthy observer. The reader is given a false sense of security and is more willing to accept Exley's comments as being reliable, a dangerous submission.

Periodically, Exley will offer explanations for writing about something in a given way, or clarify a given detail. Like the parenthetical remark and the rhetorical question, these offered explanations acknowledge a reader's presence. They are given to further enlighten the reader, or cover for the narrator.

After Bunny, Chicago went cold and horrid for me, and the story of my dizzying descent into bumhood is the usual bleak fantasy, so I will omit the details (Exley, p. 158).

Exley makes it appear as though he is doing a favor for the reader by sparing him unnecessary detail.

Exley offers clarification for the writing that he was doing, and what eventually becomes of his literary efforts. He offers the reader additional explanation concerning the

content of his original writing efforts. "In many ways that book was this book, which I wasn't then ready to write" (Exley, p. 302). Through this explanation, the reader is given a new perspective on the content of the narrative he is now reading. Exley shatters some of the intimacy he develops with the reader by admitting to falsification of information in the text. The first indication that Exley may be altering information occurs on page forty-five. ". . . I found myself in the presence of a man I will here call Cary Grant" (Exley, p. 45). This initial admission is not an alarming one for the reader; one simply assumes that he is protecting a character's identity. The following admissions to falsification cannot be taken as lightly.

In telling the story over the years I have added such a captivating touch here, omitted such a bland one there, that the tale is now so aesthetically the way I prefer it that I'm sure the bare facts would prove inimical to my own version (Exley, p. 174).

And though Mr. Blue's way of death was fitting, I never tell anybody the way it really happened; any more than in a hundred places in these pages I have told what "really" happened (Exley, p. 271).

Once Exley provides admissions such as these, he eliminates much of the credibility he has established with the reader. The quotation from page 271 should force the reader to question all of the information in the narrative. The narrator is unreliable by his own admission.

Exley's attitude toward the reader is more friendly than intimate. Though he offers some intimacy to the reader, he spends much of his time in the narrative "playing" with the



reader. The sarcastic tones of some passages, the blatant admission to falsification, tease the reader. Just when the reader is willing to accept Exley's story, Exley himself admits to lying. The use of the parenthetical remarks and rhetorical questions promote the friendly atmosphere and contribute to the relaxed tone of the narrative. These elements in combination result in the friendly, open narrative that Exley has achieved. The manner of the narrative buffers Exley's admission to lying for the reader. It is Exley's way of appeasing the reader and allows him to present his falsifications in a tone less harsh.

#### Spatial Locus

The interpreter can best acquaint himself with location and spatial progression in A Fan's Notes by charting locations in the order they appear in the narrative (see Appendix). Location, upon examination, does affect some chapter divisions in the narrative. Several chapters do adhere to some limitation in location, but the shifts in time within the chapters rarely allow the location to remain stable throughout. Chapter Three, "Straw Hat for a Madman," is fairly limiting in location. Nearly all of the action, with the exception of Exley's brief stay at his aunt's, occurs in the Avalon Valley State Hospital. Chapter six also limits itself somewhat in location. In "Who? Who? Who Is Mr. Blue?" most of the action takes place in or around the Counselor's home. Chapter one limits itself to Watertown, New York. What is characteristic of these

limitations is the focus on a general location. A specific location is never held throughout the course of a chapter. Predominance of stress on the general location would indicate a focus on general areas more than specific areas for the narrator. In this creative autobiography general locales are associational for the narrator. He associates various periods in his life and various stages in his outlook on life with certain general areas.

The general areas that appear most frequently in the narrative are Watertown, New York, New York City, and Chicago. Watertown, being the place of Exley's birth, gains its importance as a reflective area for Exley's childhood and his relationship with his father. New York City is the site of the Giant's football games, several bars Exley enjoys, and is the scene of his employment with the railroad. Chicago, though not devoted as much page space in the narrative, is an important general location for Exley. "Almost all of the things that happened to me in Chicago aroused in me . . . giddy incredulity" (Exley, p. 126). Chicago saves Exley from the past and continually entertains him. "The city gave everything to one, and I bawled like a goddam madman to be so lucky, . . ." (Exley, p. 136). Though Chicago lets him down in the end, the magnificence it holds for him during his stay colors all later reference to the city. Retrospective references to events occurring during his stay in Chicago are generally positive, reflecting his favorable bias towards the area, and damaging his reliability in relation to the events.



Though general locations seem a more obvious concern when examining the narrative layout, the importance of specific locations to Exley should not be ignored. A specific location, the room at the farm, is given great importance. Exley spends several pages discussing how he refurbished the room and upon its completion, states: ". . . I thought it the most beautiful room I had ever seen" (Exley, p. 203). Later, following further stays at Avalon Valley, Exley returns to the comfort of his room at the farm. The importance of the room lies in the fact that Exley created it. "Then I ascended the stairs to this room. Which I created, and which I love" (Exley, p. 337). The room is a place to write for Exley, a place to create within what he has already created.

Several bars hold particular significance for Exley. An alcoholic's preference for a drinking area is understandable. Louis' in New York City gains importance for Exley because it serves as a balm for his dissatisfaction with his life. "At that time Louis' was one of the places that made my existence bearable. In the evening, Louis' was always the penultimate stop. There was Louis', then there was bed, . . ." (Exley, p. 113). The effect Louis' environment has on Exley is further dramatized when he returns to New York City several years later to find it gone.

Trying to recapture a feeling of the future, and thinking that in that place, at least momentarily, I would be able to bear myself back into a time when there had been hope, I had come back to Louis' to drink draft beer. After J. had left without saying good-bye, in panic I had fled back to the past only to discover that even the building where

Louis' had been was gone, and that another, a gaudy, whory-looking monstrosity stood in its stead. The past was not there (Exley, p. 321).

The emotional associations Exley has with Louis' prompt his fondness for the place.

Exley also has a fondness for the Avalon Valley State Hospital. Despite the dreary overtones of its reason for existence--a hospital for the mentally unstable--Exley finds life to be quite liveable and bearable behind its walls.

. . . I loved Avalon Valley and will all my life remember it the way other men remember the chance seduction of a cinema queen . . . or the Thanksgiving Day they blocked the punt to win the game against Big Bad High (Exley, p. 88).

I did, in fact, eventually come to such an equanimity that I believed I could live out my life at Avalon Valley, live it there as well as live it in any America I had yet discovered (Exley, p. 89).

His association with Avalon Valley had pleasant aspects: the grounds in fall, Dr. K., a good library. Perhaps the most pleasant aspect for Exley was its protective sheltering from the world he despised and could not, or would not, adjust to.

When Exley reflects on locations of importance, either general or specific, the associations he makes with that particular location affect his outlook on all the events that take place in that location. Chicago, though it turned against him in the end, has pleasant associations for Exley, and the events in Chicago take on that favorable outlook. Though the room at the farm was created during a period of mental instability, Exley's love for the room does not permit him to associate that negative aspect with it. He links the positive



feelings of creation and achievement with the room. Avalon Valley, in Exley's reflections, is a refuge, not a horror house.

Because of his bias towards certain areas, the narrator's reliability must be questioned in relating events that occur in these areas. His prejudice, favorable or unfavorable, will color his attitude towards the events in these locations.

In a creative autobiography the use of place names must also be examined. The towns and cities that are mentioned in A Fan's Notes are all in existence, as are several of the specific locations. Clarkes' and Louis', Exley's favorite drinking nooks, are alive and well in New York City. Watertown really does have a Parrot Restaurant. But several of Exley's locations cannot be verified. Research of telephone directories and other local listings has failed to confirm the existence of General MacArthur Towers, the apartment complex where Exley and Patience live. Available listings of New York mental health services and hospitals contained no reference to Avalon Valley. The use of well-known locations, such as cities, does lend some superficial credibility to the narrator. However, identifiable place names are found frequently in fictional material, so this type of credibility is not especially significant. The lack of verification for several specific locations should not seriously affect Exley's reliability. Inadequate listings and the twelve-year lapse between the copyrighting of the book and this study could account for the deficiency of information needed to confirm

these locations. Lack of available information in this area does not have a severe effect on the interpreter's performance stance. Exley's reactions within the confines of the locations and the biases he establishes towards the locations control the narrative more than the locations themselves.

#### Temporal Locus

The time span of A Fan's Notes focuses on the years between 1952 and 1962. The narrator does speak of several events from the mid-thirties and early forties, but they are isolated reflections of the past. Several of Exley's references to his father and the encounter with Steve Owen occur within this reflective framework. The major focus lies in the years following Exley's college graduation.

It is difficult to determine the time of the narration in A Fan's Notes. The attitude of the narrating self would suggest that several years have elapsed since the most recent event in the narrative and the time of narration. This allows Exley some time-perspective on the events in the narrative.

Exley has structured the narrative in several places indicating his foreknowledge of certain events. He tells us of the upcoming effect of his wife's pregnancy (Exley, p. 292) and also tells of the effect Mr. Blue was to have on his life. "By the time the man called Mr. Blue arrived at the apartment I had come to expect anything and hence did not know that in the end he would be the cause of my getting off the davenport and moving on yet again" (Exley, p. 234). Exley's relationship with his brother-in-law, Bumpy, is also related



incorporating the narrator's foreknowledge. "Though I wasn't to reciprocate it for years, or even understand that I cared to reciprocate it, Bumpy fell passionately in love with me the first day of our meeting" (Exley, p. 284). This foreknowledge tempers the manner the reader views the upcoming event or relationship. He is prepared to view the sons negatively, Mr. Blue positively, and Bumpy in a favorable manner. Thus Exley's bias is inflicted on the narrative and the reader.

What colors the narrative most completely is the time position of the narrator. The events of A Fan's Notes are all viewed in time-past, thus all the events are completed. This allows the narrator to reflect on the events of his life from a more mature perspective. Exley spends a great deal of time in the narrative evaluating his response to events as they occurred. The difference in the experiencing self's perspective and the perspective of the narrating self allows for much evaluation and retrospection on the part of the narrating self. Exley can look back on his treatment of his stepfather and say "I can see now that my baiting him was motivated by nothing other than the guilt I felt at accepting his bed and board" (Exley, p. 197). This perspective was not open to the experiencing self. Exley looks back on his days in Chicago and sees them quite differently than his experiencing self might have:

Alone at the distance of time and miles I am wondering if I were as happy then as I believed I was. I know there came a time when I wept, actually wept, bawled like a baby, thinking I did so for the incredible fullness of my days; but I am wondering

now if the tears weren't induced by some quite other reasons (Exley, pp. 131-32).

Exley even comments on the manner in which he views the time-past. The concept of time and viewpoint mold him and he admits it in the narrative.

All this I see in time-relived; I then believed that nothing whatever was at work, that I was drifting quite aimlessly on a davenport, when in fact that davenport was taking me on an unwavering, rousing, and often melancholy journey (Exley, p. 170).

Exley also realizes that this time-perspective may affect his reliability. He knows that his memory will not relate events exactly as they happened, and that what he remembers affects his present perception of that event. Exley admits that he may have distorted events due to the passage of time since the event occurred:

In telling the story over the years I have added such a captivating touch here, omitted such a bland one there, that the tale is now so aesthetically the way I prefer it that I'm sure the bare facts would prove inimical to my own version (Exley, p. 174).

Thus the interpreter cannot totally trust and consider reliable the events that Exley relates.

The narrative of A Fan's Notes is not written in chronological order. The time-order is developed through the associations of certain events in Exley's life and the manner in which he relates the meanings of several events. In Chapter Two Exley begins in the 1930's by discussing events which involved his father. Thoughts of his father remind him of his need for fame, which triggers the writing of his resume with friends at USC in 1953. As Exley walks along Park Avenue



in New York later in 1953, the pretense he carries shames him and he again thinks of his father. The thought of his father carries him back into the late 1930's when he and his father met Steve Owen. Then the interpreter is taken back into 1953 and the job interviews. The scene then changes to a Giants football game, and the anticipation Exley feels at viewing Frank Gifford. The thoughts of Gifford take Exley back to the early 1950's on the USC campus. After Exley tells of his meeting Frank Gifford, he brings the reader back to 1953 and the Giants game. Events of given time periods affect Exley's associations with former events. The time order of A Fan's Notes follows the associative pattern of events in Exley's mental process. Each chapter's events take on this mental ordering.

A final consideration of time in A Fan's Notes involves the configuration of the various time perspectives. Elements of time-past and time-present occur in close association within the narrative. The perspective of any given event involves a meshing of these time perspectives. What this meshing produces is time-relived. To a certain extent, Exley can again place himself in past events and experiences. But the narration of time-past is affected by his present perspective; certain important elements in time-past events will be emphasized according to the importance they have acquired for Exley since their occurrence. This creates time-relived. The positioning of time-past and time-present perspectives also effects the perception of events. If the time-present

perspective on an event is presented first, Exley exercises more control over the reader's perception of the event. Time-present observations dispersed throughout discussion of a time-past event also guide the reader, but more carefully and specifically to isolated elements and viewpoints in the action. When Exley places his time-present perspective after the time-past scene, he allows the reader more freedom of judgment in regarding the elements of the scene. These three time perspectives control not only the release of information and emphasis on given aspects of it, but also the way it is presented to the reader. The reader views actions of the past through the filtering process of Exley in time-present.



## CHAPTER IV

### CONCLUSION

The analytical format employed in this study focuses on the aspect of narrator reliability in the creative autobiography. This particular literary form magnifies ordinary problems of reliability because the author/narrator is dealing with real people and actual events. The accuracy with which he is able to portray these events becomes a focal point for the interpreter; since the information may involve events of common knowledge. The author/narrator is also attempting to gain a self-perspective, a perspective which allows for much subjectivity.

The creative autobiography encounters some special problems in relation to narrator reliability. The implied author in a creative autobiography is not a tension involving the emergence of authorial viewpoint in a fictional narrator. Rather, it is a tension created between the author and his selective narrating self. Only certain elements of the author's life can be selected for the narrative, and the bias of the author regulates the selection process. His unreliability rests in the "representative" choices he makes for the reader. His inherent subjectivity in viewing his own life affects his choice of information and the manner in which he presents it. The mental locus of the author/narrator is grounded in his

subjectivity. His self-perspective, his relationships with other characters and the reader, and his depiction of the action, are all part of a chain of subjectivity: author as human being, author as writer, and author as narrator. The spatial locus of the narrator most obviously determines various locations in the novel. But it also affects the narrator's location in regard to the action. Reliability, as connected with spatial locus, is questioned when the narrator exhibits partiality towards a given location, which may distort his depiction of the action in that location. The temporal locus affects reliability in several ways. The time difference between the narrating self and the experiencing self allows for memory distortion and a possible change in perspective. The relationship between time-past, time-present, and time re-lived also controls the narrator's story, and dictates the manner in which events are presented.

The focus on creative autobiography in this study does not eliminate it as a practical approach for fictional first-person narratives. However, certain approaches to reliability in a creative autobiography cannot be applied to a fictional first-person narrative. The implied author, for example, does not affect narrator reliability in a fictional setting as it does in the creative autobiography. It merely establishes a value system for the narrator of the fictional first-person point-of-view. The interpreter need not concern himself with these values as a valid representation of a real human being. Much of the discussion of mental locus in this study is



applicable to a fictional first-person narrator. The narrator's relations with himself, other characters, the action, and the reader all contribute to determination of reliability here. The importance of various locations and their effect on the narrative is also applicable in a fictional setting. The use of identifiable locations often adds to a fictional work, but it is not a required use. The temporal locus evaluation provides some problems in the transfer from autobiography to fiction. The concern with accurate remembrance of actual events does not affect a fictional account. The memory of the fictional narrator is controlled by the author, and is not dependent on the human being behind the author. The relationship between the experiencing self and the narrating self is not as vital a determinant of reliability in the fictional setting. What makes these temporal elements more crucial in the creative autobiography is the label of autobiography. The reader expects truth. With this expectation, the allowance for subjectivity is decreased.

This study is certainly not exhaustive. The subject of narrator reliability is open to further research. The subject is a recognized but neglected one in interpretation. Understanding of narrator reliability is crucial to the interpreter of a first-person narrative and additional study in this area is needed to provide the interpreter with the necessary tools for analysis.

APPENDIX A

SPATIAL AND TEMPORAL PROGRESSION: A Fan's Notes

<u>Page No.</u>	<u>Approx. Date</u>	<u>General Location</u>	<u>Specific Location</u>
Chapter 1: "The Nervous Light of Sunday"			
1	Nov. 10, 19__	Watertown, N.Y.	New Parrot Restaurant
13	Nov. 11, 19__	"	The Crystal
21	"	"	hospital
Chapter 2: "Cheers for Stout Steve Owen"			
29	early 1930's	Watertown, N.Y.	football stadium
30	late 1930's	"	Public Square
34	1953	Los Angeles	Restaurant on Jefferson Blvd.
36	1953	New York City	Park Avenue
51	late 1930's	"	Owen's hotel
52	1953	"	subway
55	1950-52	Los Angeles	USC campus
59	1953	New York City	Polo Grounds
Chapter 3: "Straw Hat for a Madman"			
69	1958	New York State	Avalon Valley State Hospital
83	1958-summer	Westchester, N.Y.	Aunt's home
84	1958-fall	New York State	Avalon Valley State Hospital



<u>Page No.</u>	<u>Approx. Date</u>	<u>General Location</u>	<u>Specific Location</u>
Chapter 4: "Onhava Regained and Lost Again"			
111	1954	New York City	N.Y. Central Railroad
113	"	"	Louis' (bar)
120	"	"	Polo Grounds
123	1955-56	Chicago	
140	"	"	Near North Side Exley's apt.
149	"	"	Heritage Heights Allorgee's home
155	"	"	Near North Side Exley's apt.
Chapter 5: "Journey on a Davenport"			
161	1951	New York State	train to Watertown
165	1930's	Watertown, N.Y.	
169	1957-58	"	farm
192	1956	Los Angeles	apartment
196	1956-57	Phoenix, Colorado Spgs.	
197	1957-58	Watertown, N.Y.	farm
202	"	"	room at farm
Chapter 6: "Who? Who? Who Is Mr. Blue?"			
208	1958-autumn	New York State	Avalon Valley
213	"	"	Grand Central Station
224	"	"	Counselor's home
235	"	"	neighborhood

<u>Page No.</u>	<u>Approx. Date</u>	<u>General Location</u>	<u>Specific Location</u>
Chapter 6: cont.			
243	1958-autumn	New York State	bars
249	"	"	summer camp
252	"	"	deaf woman's home
254	"	"	Deborah's apt.
263	"	"	Counselor's home
Chapter 7: "Lament for a Conspiracy"			
274	1959	Scarsdale, N.Y.	Gen. MacArthur Towers--apt.
278	"	Westchester, N.Y.	Bumpy's home
288	"	"	bars
296	"	Scarsdale, N.Y.	
297	"	"	Sam's Bar
301	"	New York State	Avalon Valley
303	"	Scarsdale, N.Y.	Gen. MacArthur Towers--apt.
312	"	New York City	Clarke's (bar)
315	"	"	One 5th Ave. Hotel
316	"	"	Yankee Stadium
321	"	"	Louis' (bar)
323	"	"	McDougal St.



<u>Page No.</u>	<u>Approx. Date</u>	<u>General Location</u>	<u>Specific Location</u>
Chapter 8:	"A Dream of Sanguinary Ends"		
328	1959	Florida	Counselor's apt.
337	1960	Watertown, N.Y.	room at farm
341	"	"	farm
345	196__?	Glacial Falls, N.Y.	high school
348	"	Watertown, N.Y.	farm

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