

Reading Response #1  
Lies and the Author's Voice

“Unlike types of writing that aspire to objectivity, concealing that a person produced them, works of creative nonfiction wear their making and makers on their sleeves. Still, we assume their writers are making every attempt to tell the truth.”(Hesse and Bradway 3)

Chapter one of Hesse and Bradway's *Creating Nonfiction: A Guide and Anthology*, discusses the difficulties in classifying creative nonfiction (CNF), as a genre, while also attempting to establish what CNF *is*. With other labels simply being too narrow, unable to accurately display the various sub-genres that compose CNF, along with the adoption of CNF as a label within the university system, the term itself is one that will stick, in spite of the complications associated with naming the genre. What is CNF? Lots of things, according to the authors—a type of writing that crosses genres like memoir, essay, and journalism, with an intense focus on the subjective, personal retelling of events and memories as interpreted by the author through an authorial voice. It is this emphasis on the subjective and personal voice that separates CNF from the less “creative” types of nonfiction. The primary difference seems to be one merely of intent. Creative nonfiction isn't as interested in what is said—the factual information presented—as in how it is said. Still, the emphasis is on the truth, within the limits of human ability and understanding. That last part is important, I think, because at the heart of the genre (at least based on what we have read of it so far, and the memoirs/essay's I've read on my own) is the celebration of a subjective way of knowing and being in the world, while at the same time wanting to share that idiosyncratic way of knowing with others. This may also be a critique of the type of objectivity found in traditional nonfiction—that is, as unbiased, non-human, author-less text, which presumes to present no special point of view or biases.

It seems, then, that this division between nonfiction and creative nonfiction is one that deals specifically with truth in a post-modern era. It is a celebration of the subjective, of the personal interpretation of the world, one which invites multiple ways of seeing the world. The hope of the reader is to experience the world through the unique lens of an other, and the goal of the writer is to distill and select events in a way that their own subjectivity is displayed on the page. They try to build a way out of the isolation of the self and let the reader climb into that space, even if only for a little while—and it can only be a little while, but creating that briefly shared space of understanding seems to be at the heart of the work. Of course, nothing changes: language is still inept, and we are all still isolated within ourselves. Creative nonfiction is not a denial of this in as much as it seems to be a mutual space of goodwill and hope between reader and writer. It is the temporary willingness to put those feelings aside, and pretend (or hope) that we can understand the other, that we can experience their life in a manner resembling their own experience.

Even though heavily subjective, the emphasis is still on a presentation of truth. To stray from the truth in the form is to break the bond between the reader and the writer, it is a violation of the mutual hope contained within this type of writing—although the anger of the reader is something that I still don't fully understand. I remember hearing about James Frey's *Million Little Pieces* debacle when it was occurring and not understanding the outrage that people felt over the fact that he had lied in his memoir to serve story. The expectation for the genre seems to be veracity over story, or story through truthfulness, but never story at the cost of the truth. But what I still am struggling with is seeing the line (which to me appears very thin and shaky), between the selective retelling of factual events to create a feeling, effect, or point of view for the reader, and the selective retelling of mostly-factual events to serve the same purpose.