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LITERARY ESSAY

Techniques of First-Person Narrative Authority

The goal of creating a powerful first person narrative authority is to have readers quickly shut their *critical eye* and allow themselves to feel connected to the story emotionally, intellectually and perhaps even physically.

A powerful authoritative first-person narrator temporarily hijacks the reader's emotions and thoughts.

What makes a first-person narrative voice authoritative? According to philosopher Donald Davidson, "First person authority is the peculiar knowledge that one has about one's own beliefs, *accessible to that one without pain or penalty.*" (My italics) Why without pain or penalty? Presumably because in the privacy of one's own mind, one can be honest without having to face up to possible external consequences.

Donaldson goes on to say: "There is a presumption—an unavoidable presumption built into the nature of interpretation—that the speaker usually knows what he means. So there is a presumption that if he knows that he holds a sentence true, he knows what he believes."

The narrator opens a window in his beliefs, a window through which we, the reader, can pass. But there's more to establishing an authoritative first-person voice than simple *access* to the narrator's true thoughts. What about authority?

Authority is a necessary ingredient to the potency of a story. A strong, convincing, compelling narrative voice projects a credible authority:

- Authority has the power to be *persuasive* — believable, realistic, and forceful;
- Authority gives the reader *permission to surrender* to the story;
- Authority builds a sense of *confidence and certainty*; and
- Authority provides *organization or framework* through the repetition and grouping of sensory input allowing the reader to "tie in" like or similar *associations* and *observations* which in turn contribute to a sense of dramatic unity.

Donaldson goes on to say, "Unless there is a presumption that the speaker knows what she means, i.e., is getting her own language right, there would be nothing for an interpreter to interpret."

We, the readers, are the interpreters. It is the job of the narrator to communicate to us his or her perceptions, beliefs, and thoughts in a manner that is both understandable and relatable, to forge a bridge that reader and narrator can meet half way on, perhaps shake hands, and in doing so exchange some of the experience the narrator is attempting to convey.

Note that this does not always mean the narrator is “trustable” because he or she might be blind to the truth of the situation he is engaged in. It simply means that the narrator is being truthful *to himself*, and *his reality* is the one being described. André Gallois, in *The World Without, The Mind Within: An Essay on First Person Authority* says: “. . .Rational subjects can know their consciously held propositional attitudes without observing their own states.”

Much as a mirror reflects the external world only, the internal mirror of a narrator’s conscious is presumably reflected truthfully and accurately in his first-person voice.

The first person voice presents a particular challenge because of its immediacy and intimacy. The reader must have a stake in the story, he or she needs to care about what is happening to remain *involved*. Why else bother to read on?

Successful (published!) writers use a number of techniques to establish a powerful first person narrative authority. I have distilled five techniques from three short stories: *Communist* by Richard Ford; *The Point* by Charles D’Ambrosio, Jr.; and *Achates McNeil* by T.C. Boyle. Each of these stories reflect a child v. parent conflict. Although the ambience of each story is distinctive, many of the techniques are common to all.

The short stories I am writing are largely first-person narratives. I feel most comfortable with this approach. I have learned much about establishing a first-person narrative authority from the authors discussed below.

Richard Ford’s *Communist*

The story is told as a recollection by a forty-one year old man of an incident that occurred when he was sixteen. Les, the narrator, lives with his single mother. The father is dead and they’re living off the father’s insurance policies and his mother’s part-time waitressing. After a two month absence, the mother’s boyfriend, Glen Baxter, shows up unexpectedly and invites Les to go geese hunting with him. The mother resists—she is hurt and resentful at Glen’s sudden disappearance and reappearance; however, they all end up in Glen’s car. He drives them to an obscure location and takes off with Les to hunt the geese. Aileen, the mother, has decided to wait in the car. Les is struck by the beauty, the grace, and the sounds of the geese, all of which leave an indelible impression on him. At first enthusiastic, he is sickened by the shooting of the geese. After the geese have been startled off and raise up in a glorious raft into the sky, the mother appears. In addition to the dead geese Glen shot there is a wounded goose in the lake. The mother tries to convince Glen to retrieve it and an argument ensues. The mother realizes Glen is “loveless” and stomps off angrily. Glen, frustrated, takes out a handgun he keeps “for protection” and shoots the goose to death. They never see Glen again. The story is poetically told by Les, the sixteen year old. He seems to equate the geese and the mother’s desire for love.

Charles D’Ambrosio, Jr.’s *The Point*

The story is also told as a recollection by a man of an incident that occurred when he was thirteen, though his present age is not revealed. The son and mother live at a summer resort

community known as the “Point.” The mother is fond of giving drunken parties. The father committed suicide a few years before. Kurt, the narrator, is laying in bed, unable to sleep from the noise of one of his mother’s parties, when she enters the room. She is very drunk. But not as drunk as Mrs. Gurney, whom Kurt’s mother asks him to walk home. Kurt tells us that he is used to this, this is his “job” even when his father was alive, to walk the drunks safely back to their homes. It’s a windy moonlit night and they need to walk one-half mile to Mrs. Gurney’s house. She falls, she gets up, vomits — she is despondent over her husband — who doesn’t love her and is seeking divorce. She strips off her clothes and lets them fly away in the night wind. She makes a sexual overture to Kurt, who declines. He finally manages to get her home and tucked into her bed. He returns home where the party is still going full-tilt. Feeling lost and lonely, unable to sleep, he leaves the house and takes a letter his father had written his mother while he was a medic in Viet Nam. Kurt reads the letter while sitting outside alone on a swing. The letter describes the atrocities of the war and how it has damaged his sense of humanity. Kurt then remembers the gruesome details of how he discovered his father with half his face blasted away by a self-inflicted gunshot wound. How his father’s hands twitched involuntarily as Kurt touched his hand. Kurt realizes he can swing in any direction—he can embrace life and rise, or fall the way he has seen so many others fall, including his mother and father.

T.C. Boyle’s *Achates McNeil*

The narrator of the story is a young man, Achates McNeil, attending an unspecified non Ivy-league college. We learn early on that his father is a wildly famous author, adored by college students, and Achates (the narrator) does not wish to be associated with his father. He even denies the connection to his American Lit professor. In fact, his acrimonious resentments have been burning hot for many years—hence his desire to disassociate and attend a remote school.

No matter what Achates does, however, his father seems to be there. His last name gives him away and even his new girlfriend, Victoria, seems attracted to him because of her fascination with the father. We learn from Achates that his father left his mother while he was still in school. His mother was emotionally devastated. The father never looked back, choosing fame and recognition over his family as he lived the high life filled with money and women, ignoring Achates. Victoria chooses to ignore or is unaware of Achates’ hostility toward the father. Against all odds, it is announced on campus that the great literary figure of Tom McNeil is coming to read on this small, out-of-the-way campus. Achates realizes it is his father’s attempt at reconciliation, and is sickened by it. He receives a brief note from his father confirming his suspicions. Against his will, but because of Victoria and peer pressure, Achates attends the reading. The father makes a big show of having written a piece specifically for his son, Achates. As the father reads the piece Achates, who is humiliated and enraged, stands and leaves the auditorium, followed by the eyes of everyone—including his father, who merely falters for a moment and then resumes reading. In the end, he has broken up with Victoria and his teachers and classmates shun him. The story ends with Achates attempting to pick up another female student, who immediately identifies him with his father yet again. But Achates has come to terms with his father, having decided to relegate everything—including his father—to the past, and then able to freely admit that yes, indeed, his father is the Great Writer.

Technique #1: Narrator Directly Addresses Reader

All three of the above stories use this technique. There is a strong element of sharing a personal confidence, which is immediately attractive to the reader. Gossip and conversation are almost irresistible to the human ear. We want to hear what happened, who was involved. There is an element of discovery and investigation associated with inviting the reader to join in your world, an invitation to a private experience.

In the short story *Communist*, Richard Ford delivers three opening paragraphs describing the physical situation the narrator lives in: where he lives, with whom he lives (his mother) and how they are making a living. It is reportorial in style, with telegraphic sentences transmitting necessary information to set the stage. And then, in the first sentence of the fourth paragraph, he directly addresses the reader:

What I want to explain happened in November. (Note: All story-quote italics are mine)

Something happened. An incident, a turning point, a realization, we don't know precisely; however, an expectation is established that instantly magnetizes the reader: what happened? We know the basic circumstances of the narrator from the first three paragraphs, but where will we those circumstances take us? We are compelled to read on.

All this happened years go, but I still can feel now how sad and remote the world was to me.

Emotional color is introduced further drawing us into the story. Something bad happened, something sad, and by golly by gosh by gum we want to know what it is.

In Charles D'Ambrosio's first person narrative story *The Point*, we have an even younger narrator, only thirteen years old. This might be a problem. How are we to trust the adolescent memories of a thirteen year old boy? The narrator confronts this question head on in a scene recalling a time that Kurt, the narrator, walked a drunken Mr. Crutchfield home and Mr. Crutchfield confided his guilt about an affair. Kurt encourages him by ". . .telling him it was okay, that if he was unhappy with Lucy, it was fine to fuck around. He said, You think so? Sure, go for it."

Of course, *you might ask*, what did I know? At thirteen, I'd never even smooched with a girl, but I had nothing to lose by encouraging him. He was drunk, he was miserable, and I had a job, and that job was to get him home and try to prevent him from dwelling too much on himself.

The message is transmitted to the reader that Kurt hasn't given much thought to his encouragement of Mr. Crutchfield, that his real agenda is to pacify him and get him home, no

matter what. We learn something about Kurt – he is so dedicated to his “job” he will say anything to accomplish his mission.

In fact, the idea of “having a mission” we have already learned through backfill was instilled in Kurt by his father, who was a soldier and medic in Viet Nam and who “made it my job when I was ten, and at thirteen I considered myself a hard-core veteran, treating every trip like a mission.” Kurt is fulfilling a need to be close to his dead father by acting in accordance to his wishes. This is important in establishing credibility because we see the son’s love for his father. And even though Mr. Crutchfield dies shortly after in a freak boating accident – was it suicide (as his father had done?), Kurt wonders – Kurt doesn’t feel much guilt about it because he was on a mission at the original request of his father, whom he loved and respected. Furthermore, he had an insight into Mr. Crutchfield that other people didn’t: “Actually, the Crutchfields hadn’t loved each other – information I alone was privy to. . . Mr. Crutchfield’s sense of failure over the marriage was enormous.”

Kurt makes it very clear how he felt about his father by again directly addressing the reader:

You understand, I miss Father, miss having him around to tell me what’s right and what’s wrong. . .

Kurt cannot rely on his mother, who has sunk into a fog of alcohol and depression.

T.C. Boyle also uses the technique of the narrator directly addressing the reader. He immediately attaches feeling to it, which augments the power and credibility of the confidence. The narrator’s abhorrence for his famous writer father is so great he cannot even mention his father’s name:

You’d recognize the name if I mentioned it, but I won’t mention it, I’m tired of mentioning it—every time I mention it I feel as if I’m suffocating, as if I’m in a burrow deep in the ground and all these fine grains of dirt are raining down on me.

Deeper into the story the bond between narrator and reader has become so integrated that the narrator assumes the reader knows in advance that his girlfriend, Victoria, has betrayed him for his father:

But do I have to tell you where she really was? Can’t you picture it? The fan, the diehard, somebody who supposed cared about me, and there she was, camped outside his hotel in the Arctic wind with the snot crusted round her nose ring.

Since the narrator is not getting sympathy or recognition of his true feelings from his father or his girlfriend, he is turning to the reader for understanding. We’re in his camp: *the dirty rats, how dare she do this? How dare the father behave so coldly?*

Technique #2: Narrator Summarizes Key Theories of the World and Makes Concrete Observations

Fingerprints, DNA and opinions are the stuff of individuals. We're exposed to experiences, which mingle ethereally with thought and heredity. At certain times in our lives we believe we have reached the top of a certain pinnacle or mountain of experience, and can see clearly and far enough into the distance to concoct theories consistent with our beliefs. It is irrelevant whether these are true or false; it is enough that they observed, organized, and we believe them.

Les, the narrator in *Communist*, reaches this point twenty-five years after the incident, looking back to when he was sixteen:

A light can go out in the heart. . . Glen Baxter, I think now, only a man scared of something he'd never seen before—something soft in himself—his life going a way he didn't like. . . My mother had tried to see the good side of things. . . Too much awareness too early in life was her problem, I think. . . And what I felt was only that I had somehow been pushed out into the world, into the real life then, the one I hadn't lived yet. . . I had not been raised by crazy people, and I don't know what that could mean or what difference it could make, unless it means that love is a reliable commodity, and even that is not always true, as I have found out.

Note how beautifully Ford ties the geese into this summary by having Les, the narrator say he had "been pushed out into the world, into the real life. . ." just as a baby bird is pushed out of its nest by the mother, to fly or fall on its own. His association with the geese and the events that happened while still an adolescent left an indelible mark on his life.

What he's talking about here is resentment at his premature exposure to the harshness of life. This culminates in the acceptance of the notion, however bleak, that love is not always a reliable commodity.

From the maturity and distance of age forty-one we can see that the narrator's voice is reliable since he has come to a rational conclusion that is generally accepted.

Similarly, Charles D'Ambrosio, Jr. uses this technique in *The Point*. Kurt has had three years' experience guiding drunks home. In this time, he first reflects on how to handle them:

One tip about these drunks: *My opinion is* that it pays in the long run to stick as close to possible to the task at hand. We're just going home, *you assure them*, and tomorrow it will all be different. *I've found* if you stray too far from the simple goal of getting home and going to sleep *you let yourself in for a lot of unnecessary hell*. You start hearing about their whole miserable existence, and suddenly it's the most important thing in the world to fix it all up, right then. *Certain things in life can't be repaired*, as in Father's situation, and that's always sad, but *I believe there's* nothing in life that can be remedied under the influence of half a dozen planter's punches.

His observations have led to a rock solid belief about drinking. While certain things in life can't be repaired – such as the death of his father – while one is still alive, drinking is not the remedy to life's problems. We see how he came to accept this. His mother is unable to be there for him. The drunks who attend his mother's problems are beset by problems they feel helpless to resolve without the aid of alcohol. Kurt is disgusted by this, but nonetheless fulfills his duty to get them safely home. This has given him a sense of purpose and has enabled him, however indirectly, to perhaps steer his life in a healthier direction than the adults he encounters at the Point.

In a fascinating move, D'Ambrosio, the author, has his narrator's beliefs developed a step further into an overall theory of life:

It was that night, the night I took Mr. Crutchfield home, as I walked back to our house, that I developed the theory of the black hole, and it helped me immeasurably in conducting this business of steering drunks around the Point. The idea was this – that at a certain age, a black hole emerged in the middle of your life, and everything got sucked into it, and you knew, forever afterward, that it was there, this dense negative space, and yet you went on, you struggled, you made your money, you had some babies, you got wasted, and you pretended it wasn't there and never looked directly at it, if you could manage the trick. I imagined that this black hole existed somewhere just behind you and also somewhere just in front of you, so that you were always leaving it behind and entering it at the same time. I hadn't worked out the spatial thing too carefully, but that's what I imagined. Sometimes the hole was only a pinprick in the mind, often it was vast, frequently it fluctuated, beating like a heart, but it was always there, and when you got drunk, thinking to escape, you only noticed it more. Anyway, when I discovered this, much like an astronomer gazing out at the universe, I thought I had the key – and it became a policy with me never to let one of my drunks think too much and fall backward or forward into the black hole. We're going home, I would say to them – we're just going home.

I wondered how old Mrs. Gurney was, and guessed thirty-seven. I imagined her black hole was about the size of a sewer cap.

This wonderful passage is simultaneously amusing, intelligent and sad. For a thirteen year old to have such a bleak opinion of adult life communicates the deep disappointment he feels over his mother's condition (drunkenness) and his father's suicide which has effectively left him an orphan in his own home. The story is about abandonment, and the Theory of Black Holes describes the narrator's powerful sense of loss in a heartbreakingly clear paragraph.

The theory is ramified beautifully by the following paragraph as Les provides solid evidence for his theory in the shape of Mrs. Gurney, who's black hole is "about the size of a sewer cap." A sewer cap! Her life has turned to crap, she's barely able to contain it. D'Ambrosio uses metaphors to enable the reader to feel the connection, hence authority, to the narrator. This allows us to feel close to the narrator and believe him when he says, in effect, "This is my take on life, for better or worse."

Technique #3: Narrator Shares a Private Observation or Secret with Reader

Sharing a secret is perhaps one of the strongest ways of bonding. People love to get the “inside scoop” on what is really going on behind the scenes. Telling a secret or sharing a private thought creates a tacit understanding and trust between teller and receiver. We like to know the truth.

In Richard Ford’s short story *Communist*, the narrator reveals his sentiments toward his mother’s boyfriend:

I’ll admit that I liked him. He had something on his mind always. . . I did not like my mother being around the house so much at night, and I wished Glen Baxter would come back, or that another man would come along and entertain her somewhere else.

Les reveals his likes, dislikes and wishes. He’s opening up to the reader, saying what really matters to him, what is important to him. This acts as a buoy for the reader to mark his progress throughout the story.

It also creates dynamic tension by establishing the desire/conflict the central character is struggling with. Narrative authority does not rely on decree alone – for real authority to exist, the reader must have a deeper understanding and sympathy of the motivation of the central character. In the above paragraph we learn that Les loves his mother, he worries about her being alone, he wants her to have a man, to be happy. The reader is empathetic to Les’s desire while establishing his narrative authority. This is not manipulation by the author’s device; instead, it is capitalizing on human nature to establish credibility.

Similarly, we are privy to a glance into Kurt’s thinking in *The Point*. When Kurt’s mother admits to being “bombed,” the reader may find it somewhat objectionable that a mother is saying this to her thirteen year old son. But Kurt is quick to set the record straight:

She liked to confess these things to me, although it was always obvious how tanked she was, and I never cared.

In a single sentence we learn that the mother is close to the son, she is honest with him (even about being drunk) and either in spite of or because of this, Kurt doesn’t care. We also learn that she couldn’t have pulled the wool over Kurt’s eyes had she wanted because he is observant, “it was always obvious how tanked she was,” a counterpoint that serves to reinforce our trust in the narrator’s voice.

Further along in the story D’Ambrosio turns this technique on its head by having the narrator confess to being a confessor:

But I had developed a priestly sense of my position, and whatever anyone told me in a plastered, blathering confessional fit was as safe and privileged as if it had been spoken in a private audience with the Pope.

In the privacy of his thoughts we learn he has integrity, he is trustable, others seek his confidence and this opens the door to our own ability to believe in the narrator's authority.

T.C. Boyle also uses this technique in his story *Achates McNeil*. The first person narrator, Achates, makes it clear from the start he detests his famous writer father. Many young people have issues with their father; what makes Achates different?

It wasn't that I hated him exactly—it was far more complicated than that, and I guess it got pretty Freudian too, considering the way he treated my mother and the fact that I was thirteen and having problems of my own when he went out the door like a big cliché and my mother collapsed into herself as if her bones had suddenly melted.

Achates the narrator takes a step backwards and explains *why* he feels the way he does about his father. This admission brings the reader deeper into the story. It also establishes our trust in the narrator's voice because he can be honest with us. He is able to recognize complexities ("it was far more complicated than that") and the narrator engages in self-analysis. In fact, invoking Freud's name reveals the narrator is aware of inner issues. This in itself is insufficient to establish narrative authority, but he goes on to say, rather mysteriously, that when his father left he was "having problems of my own." Showing vulnerability allows the reader to "buy in" to the narrator's sometimes scathing observations about his father. It demonstrates his humanity.

Continuing this pattern of illustrating the narrator's humanity is one of my favorite passages in *Achates McNeil*:

When we were done [having sex], she sat up and I saw that her breasts pointed in two different directions, and that was human in a way I can't really express, a very personal thing, as if she was letting me in on a secret that was more intimate than the sex itself. I was touched. I admit it. I looked at those mismatched breasts and they meant more to me than her lips and her eyes and the deep thrumming instrument of her voice, if you know what I mean.

This odd and amusing observation leads directly to the narrator's taking us into his own bosom: "I was touched" he says. It wasn't a thing someone had said or done that touched him, but an admission about something he observed. No one besides the narrator and the reader know "this very personal thing," this "secret" he dares admit. In essence, the author is establishing opposition – the son is human and charming, the father is egotistical and cold. This opposition establishes narrative authority by forcing us (the readers) to choose sides, to throw our weight behind Achates, to deal us in to his

view, to seduce us to his authority. Plus, it's entertaining as hell the way he talks about his girlfriend's breasts that were "pointed in two different directions."

(As an aside, it reminds me of Holden Caulfield in Salinger's *Catcher in the Rye* asking the New York cab driver if he knows where the ducks from the pond in Central Park go in the winter – kind of weird, off-kilter, but charming and revealing.)

Technique #4: Narrator Introduces "New" Information

If I may be so bold as to quote John Lennon, "Life is what happens when you're busy making other plans." Crossing the street you are nearly hit by a whoo-hoo girl on a cell phone (those girls that are constantly yelling "whoo-hoo," the mating call of the college-age female) driving a Jetta forty miles above speed limit.

Unexpected elements of surprise, new sensations and experience adds authenticity to the story. First person narrators are in a particularly good position to create authority by observing, for example, something unexpected, something that sets him thinking in a new direction or reveals depth to his or other characters.

Richard Ford makes repeated use of this technique in his short story, *Communist*. Les, the first person narrator is constantly being surprised by new information:

"I'm going to college," she said suddenly, and this was *something I had never heard about before*. I turned to look at her, but she was staring out her window and wouldn't see me.

Les's mother is attempting to show her independence by making up a lie. She refuses to make eye contact with Les. The onus of understanding why it is important that Les had never heard about before falls to the reader: it tells us he *has* heard almost everything there is to hear from his mother, that they are close, and that he is surprised. We draw the conclusion she must be making it up, a white lie, when she "wouldn't see" Les.

Later in the story Les describes approaching the geese he and Glen will shoot: I stood and listened to the high-pitched shouting sound, *a sound I had never heard so close, a sound with size to it—though it was not loud*. A sound that meant great numbers and that made your chest rise and your shoulders tighten with expectancy. It was a sound to make you feel separate from it and everything else, as if you were of no importance in the grand scheme of things.

This sound that he had never heard before gives the reader a feeling of immediacy and proximity to the narrator. We are able to share in Les's wonder. He describes how it affected him physically: ". . . made your chest rise and your chest tighten with expectancy. . ." He personally addresses the reader (see Technique Number One), drawing us powerfully into his world through sensation: "It was a sound to make you feel separate from it and everything else, as if you were of no importance in the grand scheme of things." This epiphany moment is something most people can

relate to having experienced in nature. The narrator succeeds in establishing his authority by providing an incident that we can unequivocally understand and feel.

Ford repeats the newness and sense of wonder again and again, emphasizing the narrator's senses, particularly sight and sound:

"I see it," I said, still looking. *It was such a thing to see, a view I had never seen and have not since.*

And then I heard the geese again, their voices in unison, louder and shouting, as if the wind had changed again and *put all new sounds in the cold air.*

It was a thing to see, I will tell you now. Five thousand white geese all in the air around you, *making a noise like you have never heard before. And I thought to myself then: this is something I will never see again. I will never forget this. And I was right.*

The reader comes to believe in the narrator's voice. It is fresh and alive and authentic, and this helps the reader shut his critical eye.

Ford then has the narrator turn his attention to Glen Baxter and reveal another new experience:

Only at that moment he looked scared to me, and *I had never seen a grown man scared before*—though I have seen once since—and I felt sorry for him, as though he was already a dead man.

Les's compassion for Glen Baxter makes him more accessible and real. The fact that he's "never seen a grown man scared before" allows the reader to share in Les's surprise that he feels sorry for him engages our compassion. The reader submits to the first-person's authority.

Authenticity, newness and surprise work together to shore up a sense of reality that makes us believe the narrator's story.

Technique #5: Narrator Reflects Using Hindsight

As the saying goes, "Hindsight is 20/20." We can see clearly by distancing ourselves, either by time elapsed or willful thought. The reader naturally trusts the power of hindsight.

Richard Ford uses this technique at the conclusion of his story *Communist*:
A light can go out in the heart. All of this happened years ago, but I still feel now how sad and remote the world was to me.

The narrator's emotional description of how the events in the story affected him are beyond reproach. It's as if the narrator is saying: this is what happened to me and this is how I felt about it. He is reporting the truth as he sees it:

My mother *had tried* to see the good side of things, *tried* to be hopeful in the situation she was handed, *tried* to look out for us both, *and it hadn't worked*.

Similarly, the first-person narrator in Charles D'Ambrosio, Jr.'s story *The Point* observes:

And I'd noticed how, with the summer ending, and Labor Day approaching, all the adults would acquire a sort of desperate, clinging manner, as if this were all going to end forever, and the good times would never be seen again. *Of course I now realize that the end was just an excuse to party like maniacs.*

When Kurt says "Of course I now realize" we are again invited onto the mountaintop where you can see the horizon. The clarity of vision lapsed time provides us with perspective which helps build an effective first person narrative authority.

Summing Up

An author may use specific techniques to establish a first person narrative authority. Once an authority has been created, the reader can then surrender to the story itself. It is essential the reader feels connected to the first person narrator's thoughts and feelings because this heightens the impact of the story.

Each of these techniques described above carries the reader deeper into the heart of the narrator and thus the heart of the story. The techniques also allow the reader to experience the world as the first person narrator experiences it. Thus we give up our sense of self and allow the first-person narrator to guide us on a journey. As Borges eloquently states, "Writing is nothing more than a guided dream." The reader needn't know he's in a dream to accept the events as reality.