

Telling the Wrong Story: Authenticity, Relatability, and Queerness in Dennis Cooper's *Frisk*

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The prime directive of the story economy to tell your story has long been a guideline in parts of the literary field that are by nature engaged with questions of identity. When in his classic queer novel *Frisk* (1991) Dennis Cooper told the story of a gay writer named Dennis who just happens to also love torturing and murdering young boys, the queer fiction community was not amused. Seemingly connecting queer sexuality with serial murder and pedophilia, the novel incited intensely angry demands for censorship. The controversy culminated in a very public death threat against Cooper from members of Queer Nation, a gay rights group known for its shock tactics.

Cooper's novel is carefully designed to interrogate and transgress against the demands of the story economy already incipient in the field of queer fiction in the early nineties. It is ostensibly a prototypically autofictional story about a budding writer coming to grips with his art and his sexuality—but there is deliberately nothing representative or relatable about Dennis and his homicidal inclinations. While the novel does set Dennis's experience of coming to terms with his bloodlust as a metaphor of queer experience during the HIV epidemic, the queer community was scandalized and repulsed by both the novel and the author who had penned the book. Yes, Cooper's telling his story, but it's the wrong one.

In some ways Cooper is a veteran author whose career prefigures the demands of today's story economy: not only are the vast majority of his literary works based on his life and his identity as a queer artist, but he's also been using his life as fodder for his regularly updated blog that he started all the way back in the early 2000s. Yet, in other ways, his work is all about undermining conventions of what autofictive writing is expected to be. He uses his identity as narrative capital not to speak for the queer community, but to shock his audience and deconstruct what queer identity even means.

In this paper I examine how *Frisk* subverts questions of authenticity, representability, and relatability that have become central concerns not only in queer fiction but in the story economy at large.