EVERYTHING IS FICTION
Merle Molofsky

I am about to state the obvious: Everything is fiction. Fiction begins with words. As soon as we acquire the rudiments of language, we begin to translate our experience into words, from our own perspective.

Meet the Child Scientist. Who is the Child Scientist? Every child.

“The baby, assailed by eyes, ears, nose, skin, and entrails at once, feels it all as one great blooming, buzzing confusion; and to the very end of life, our location of all things in one space is due to the fact that the original extents or bignesses of all the sensations which came to our notice at once, coalesced together into one and the same space. There is no other reason than this why ‘the hand I touch and see coincides spatially with the hand I immediately feel’ ” – William James (1890, p. 488).

Every child encounters the “blooming buzzing confusion” of life, and uses every aspect of sentience, cognition, conation, emotion, to parse and understand what is happening. The child pays attention, gathers information, forms impressions, endeavors to learn what to expect in this great “blooming buzzing confusion” (James, 1890, p. 462), and uses the empirical evidence to form conclusions.
We encounter this every day in every situation, and those of us who are psychotherapists, psychoanalysts, encounter it in our work. We recognize the lessons learned, the efforts of the Child Scientist to understand the world, manifesting in what we call transference, or repetition compulsion, or defensive structure.

We all rely on our inner Child Scientist, consult with the Child Scientist, hoping that the Child Scientist will figure out more and more and more and more about the world, how the world works, and what we need to do to function effectively in the world and get what we want. In effect, we ask the Child Scientist to guide our ego functions and help us achieve our goals. Did I get it right this time?

We develop an inner narrative voice, and we believe our voice. As we develop more and more aspects of our personality, our character, our observing ego, our self representations, our self – we develop a repertoire of inner narrative voices, and those voices describe our “reality” – our “realities” – our fictional reality.

Language itself, so complex, so rich, so seemingly boundless, limits our perceptions. The very first statement of the very first chapter in the Tao Te Ching by Lao Tzu says, “The Tao that can be spoken is not the eternal Tao/ The name that can be named is not the eternal name/ The nameless is the origin of Heaven and Earth” (2006, p. 3). Is this sufficient to mystify, to question the use of language? Here is the remainder of the chapter: “The named is the mother of myriad things/ Thus, constantly, without desire, one observes its essence/
Constantly with desire one observes its manifestations/ These two emerge together but differ in name/ The unity is said to be the mystery/ Mystery of mysteries, the door to all wonders” (p. 3).

“My propositions are elucidatory in this way: he who understands me finally recognizes them as senseless, when he has climbed out through them, on them, over them. (He must so to speak throw away the ladder, after he has climbed up on it.)

“He must surmount these propositions; then he sees the world rightly.”

~~ Tractatus Philosophicus, 6:54, Ludwig Wittgenstein

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” John 1:1, King James Version

“Beauty is truth, truth beauty/ -- that is all/ Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know.” – “Ode on a Grecian Urn”, John Keats

Which of these wisdom teachings makes sense to any one of us? Which does any one of us believe? Why?

We hope that language can corral meaning, can corral truth, and yet we recognize that something fundamental, something we sense exists, is beyond words, is wordless, is essential and unrepresentable. We believe in something that cannot be said.
And then we say, over and over again, in vast forests transformed into paper, in electronic impulses transformed into word-images on a screen, that we can describe what we know.

\[ e=mc^2 \]

Oil and water do not mix.

Amoebas reproduce asexually, and the next amoeba generation is an exact genetic replica of the original amoeba.

We each have a mind. Part of our mental make-up is the unconscious mind. Unconscious process is a mental process of which we are unaware.

My name is Merle Heidi Molofsky, I was born in Brooklyn, New York, United States of America, in 1942, and I believe I am embedded in a symbolic universe, in symbolic reality. The world is a sphere whose center is everywhere and whose circumference is nowhere.

I rest my case. QED.
It is necessary for us to believe in our ongoing narratives, in our descriptions of the world, in our fictions – hence, our necessary fictions.
In the psychoanalytic undertaking, two minds engage in discovering the ongoing narratives of the subject, with both minds, both subjectivities, collaborating to uncover the narratives, and to agree on how to understand the meanings and uses of those narratives, and the construction of the emerging narrative. Are we looking for truths? Or are we agreeing on necessary fictions?

Does co-constructing narratives in the analytic dyad processes contribute to our understanding of truth and fiction? Are we searching for truth, or are we searching for process? Is understanding synonymous with truth?

I don’t know.

I do find a meaningful similarity between the co-construction of narrative in psychoanalytic process, and writing fiction. Story, the structure of a story line emerges. The question of what is true is different from observing the emergence of a story line, the structure of a narrative.

When I write fiction, I don’t “make things up”. I listen. What do I listen to? My experience of writing fiction is that I am channeling a reality that exists “elsewhere”, one that I cannot demonstrate, but with which I remain in touch. The “reality” of the fictional narrative unfolds as I listen to it, I hear it as an inner narrative that uses me to help it manifest. I write it because it tells me to, I write it because it asks me to bring it into awareness, and thus into existence. Should I call this
an “alternative reality”? I experience what I write as having its own integrity, its own reality, its own authenticity. I experience myself as being used by the emergent story.

When I write memoir, my own life story, I have a similar experience. I find the aspect of myself that can write, that writes cogently, easily, automatically, the extremely ego-syntonic writing self, as channeling something I believe is true – my life story, events of my life – as I remember them. As I remember them – aye, there’s the rub. Do eyewitnesses agree on what they see? Sometimes yes, there’s strong agreement, sometimes no, there’s strong disagreement. What we are predisposed to believe influences what we see. Would others agree with what I remember of my own life story?

In analytic process, do we co-create truth, or do we create useful narratives, necessary fictions, structures that help interpret the world in a way that seems coherent, useful, meaningful? How would we know?

Is empathic response in analytic process a version of creating a necessary fiction?

If I offer two narratives that I have written, one based on my observations and understanding in clinical work, and one a story I felt compelled to tell because I was visited by a “voice” asking to be heard, a “life” asking to be told, my narrative style, then my presence, will become part of the “necessary fiction” we call “clinical vignette,”
as much as it will become part of the “necessary fiction” called “fiction”, a literary genre. I offer two short excerpts. One clearly is a clinical vignette, as close to the truth I believe to be true. The other clearly is “make-believe”, fictional, as close to the truth I believe to be true.

“In session, Denis offered his memories to me, but kept his feelings to himself. He spoke emotionally only of art, and the raptures of aesthetic experience and the act of painting. He lost himself in light, contemplating artworks in museums for hours. He described the sensual ecstasies of painting with oil, feeling that he was creating skin, touching skin, as he worked.

“The aesthetic haze broke when Denis passed gas in session. He mentioned that he had eaten cabbage, and then began an anal odyssey of fart jokes and toilet jokes that lasted for weeks, culminating in his description of his holding his family hostage with his anal powers. He described with sadistic pleasure his successful anal battles…. ” (Molofsky, 2002, p. 227).

“Renata lay in bed and knew the closet door was safely closed, so that the dark beasts of closet land would not get loose. Her feet felt hot beneath the stiff woolen blanket, but she knew better than to stick even her toes out from under, or the frog-witch would pounce from off the bedstead and gobble her feet, toes and all. The tops of her feet looked like the breast of chicken. White meat. She wanted to
scream because her feet were unnaturally confined, when they wanted to be free, free in the winter air of the bedroom. Renata stuck her feet out along the side of the bed. If she stuck her feet out along the side of the bed, the frog-witch couldn’t get them.

“Renata lay in bed and felt her circulatory system glow in the dark. Blood hissed and sizzled along familiar arteries, tracing a familiar rush of pattern. Corpuscles bumped one another, hustling. Renata lay in bed and tried to ignore her blood beating its way through an interior labyrinth. Renata tried to ignore herself in the dark, and sleep. Renata tried to sleep.

“Tomorrow never remembered what happened at night” (Molofsky, unpublished).

One is clearly drawn from psychoanalytic sessions, and one is clearly an imagined entering into a child’s emotional life. Both are true, and both are necessary fictions. The first happened in ordinary sensory reality, the second in the imaginary realm.

In order to tell anyone anything, we must choose what to say, what we consider salient, and we must choose the words that we hope will communicate what we know, think, feel, and understand. This happens in psychoanalytic sessions, in psychoanalytic writings, in fiction writing, and in every aspect of life. We discover truth in fiction, and we discover fiction in truth.
Phillip Lehrman reports Sigmund Freud saying, “Not I, but the poets, discovered the unconscious”. And, further, “The poets and philosophers before me discovered the unconscious. What I discovered was the scientific method by which the unconscious can be studied” (1940, p. 161).

Freud meant the dramatic poets – Goethe, Shakespeare, Sophocles, who wrote “Oedipus Rex”, those who wrote about the great passions of life.

“Creative writers are valuable allies and their evidence is to be prized highly, for they are apt to know a whole host of things between heaven and earth which our philosophy has not yet let us dream” (Freud, 1907, p. 8).

REFERENCES


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