

# Tell the truth and then run

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## **Abstract**

The novel, *Lifting the Mask*, explores the long term effects of trauma on the individual. It is largely a character study but also investigates the complexity of family dynamics. It is also about the healing aspects of creativity; yet reveals its limitations. The accompanying exegesis contextualizes the work within a contemporary literary framework. The use of an unreliable narrator is an important component of the novel, and the exegesis discusses this, in relation to other literature and post-modern theories about the unreliable nature of truth.

## **Exegesis**

### **Tell the Truth and then Run**

#### **Juliet Jackson**

“As to the problem of fiction, it seems to me to be a very important one; I am well aware that I have never written anything but fictions. I do not mean to say, however, that truth is therefore absent. It seems to me that the possibility exists for fiction to function in truth, for a fictional discourse to induce effects of truth, and for bringing it about that a true discourse engenders or ‘manufactures’ something that does not as yet exist, that it ‘fictions’ it. One ‘fictions’ history on the basis of a political reality that makes it true, one ‘fictions’ a politics not yet in existence on the basis of a historical truth” (Foucault, 1980, p.193).

A traditional view of history is that it can be understood through texts and artifacts, and that an accurate representation of the past is possible. In contrast to this, Foucault and Lacan suggest that history can only be understood within the confines of the culture and society that constructed it (Faubion, 2000). The question I am interested in is to what extent it is possible to represent or establish a truth. This is one of the contentions explored in my novel, *Lifting the Mask*. Perhaps the other question to ask, in the footsteps of the Postmodernists, is whose truth is being told, and what purpose does it serve?

I will examine in this exegesis the unreliable nature of truth, and a related feature of literature, the unreliable narrator. I will show how the concept of an unreliable narrator applies to my protagonist Lily. This will bring me to a discussion of how trauma can distort or change an individual’s perceptions of truth. I suggest that fiction may be a particularly suitable vehicle for the articulation of trauma.

A section on structure will consider how modernist narrative conventions can be disrupted for effect in the postmodern novel, and will communicate some of the processes I went through to determine which conventions to adopt or discard. My novel aims to raise questions about the possible effects of trauma on character, as well as explore an individual’s relationship to their social and cultural conditioning.

#### **Postmodern Theory and its Relationship to Lifting the Mask**

Postmodern theory is an ambiguous and wide ranging set of ideas that is part of the philosophical and cultural reaction to the convictions of Modernism (Fry, 2012). Whilst Postmodernism emphasizes the difficulties inherent in human investigations of truth, it concedes an opening for art to probe beneath the surface. “The function of art is to incite its viewer to ask what is beyond. Art is the essence of truth: it leads us not ‘to see,’ as Lacan would put it, but ‘to look.’ For the human animal is blind in this respect, that it cannot simply see, but is compelled to look behind the veil, driven, Freud would say, beyond the pleasure of seeing” (Shepherdson, 1995).

Foucault's view was that it was dangerous to believe there are authors because we turn them into paternal authorities (Faubion, 2000). Barthes has suggested that the reader has an active role in the construction of a text's meaning (Wood, 2000).

Physicists, like theorists, philosophers and artists probe the fundamentals of reality, and examine our concepts of truth. Recent discoveries in quantum physics affirm postmodern challenges to hegemonic discourses and the belief in one authoritative truth. Amanda Geffter discusses some of the implications of new findings in physics in her essay *Dualities*:

“In physics two radically different theories might be dual to one another, that is, they might be two very different manifestations of the same underlying reality [...] Electrons have two different properties simultaneously, both wave-like and particle-like properties [...] The physicists' meaning of duality can provide us with a powerful new metaphor, a one-stop shorthand for the idea that two very different things might be equally true [...] The holographic duality: That more things are present, depending on where you look” (Geffter, 2012, p. 299).

Previously in the Western tradition we have thought of truth as singular, lies as multiple. For instance: ‘I swear to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth.’ Whilst this cultural construct is true for those who choose to believe it, and live by its values, Geffter is suggesting that truth may also be multiple.

In *Lifting the Mask*, Lily is living in a dual reality. In one reality she had a sister who died tragically, but in the world of her foster mother and boyfriend, this is perceived as a lie. On one level Lily knows the nature of the trauma she suffered, but at the same time, there are aspects of her experience she has repressed and subverted. These disconnects between her inner and outer worlds, her past and present, make up Lily's holographic duality.

### **The Unreliable Narrator**

A feature of literature related to Postmodern theory is the unreliable narrator, a device which emphasizes the narrator's subjectivity. It is intended to create a disjunction between the implied reader's assumptions and the narrator's skewed re-telling of events. An unreliable narrator focuses the attention on the narrator as a character, as it invites the reader to try and figure them out. It involves disrupting expectations, the exact opposite of the omniscient narrator with its overtones of an all-knowing God as in the Western tradition. The unreliable narrator correlates with postmodern theories on the negotiable nature of truth. It emphasizes and explores the relationship between reader, author and narrator. The reader has to have an active role, be discerning. Things cannot be taken at face value.

Lily is an unreliable narrator, and admits that some things in her past don't quite match up. She remembers fragments, but struggles to piece things together. Postmodernist fiction attempts to portray the lack of authoritative truths. It questions the relationships between history, testimony, power, knowledge and truth, for example, by showing how history can be re-invented, and exposed as multiple

fictions (Shepherdson, 1995). Lily's testimony can be seen to be controlled by power-plays and social pressures, for example, her parents' unwillingness to discuss the trauma she experienced.

I have been interested in how an unreliable narrator has been used to greater or lesser effect in the following novels. In *We Need To Talk About Kevin* (Shriver, 2003) the narrator presents a warped interpretation of her child's motives and thought processes as he's growing up. We know from our knowledge of the world that a pre-school child is unlikely to have the sinister motives his mother, Eva, attributes to him. Eva does not conform to our ideals of motherhood: self-sacrificing, nurturing, unconditionally loving. In spite of her best efforts, Eva's brought up a killer. In this novel the author explores her own fears of motherhood, as she explained in an interview (Shriver, 2006). She plays out the genuine fear that one may pass on one's worst characteristics and ways of thinking to one's child either through nature or nurture. Often, as in *We Need to Talk about Kevin*, children do act out their parents' values or unconscious expectations in extreme and destructive ways. Using an unreliable narrator who constructs a fiction, Shriver touches on a possible truth.

The narrator of *Lolita* (Nabokov, 1955), Humbert Humbert, is a forty year old man, sexually aroused by pre-pubescent girls. He develops an incestuous relationship with twelve year old Lolita. Humbert Humbert presents himself as the victim of her precocious sexuality. Part of the book's intrigue is to ascertain the extent to which Lolita's behaviours confirm or deny Humbert Humbert's view of himself.

*The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Nighttime* (Haddon, 2008) and *Room*, (Donoghue, 2010) are some examples of how a naïve narrator can form the core of how a story evolves. Haddon, in *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Nighttime*, does not attempt to present an accurate representation of the world in the usual sense, but shows the world as experienced by an autistic boy. Similarly, the protagonist, and narrator of *Room* (Donoghue, 2010) is a six year old boy who has lived all his life in a single room with his mother, interrupted only by occasional visits from her captor. He relates to the inanimate objects in the room as if they were sentient beings. He is also naïve about the nature of his mother's behaviours, commenting on her bouts of intense depression in terms of how they directly impact on his day. This makes their circumstances seem all the more poignant, as it emphasizes the boy's innocence, and the corresponding isolation of his mother.

I found *Room* a less effective novel than *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time*, as it left less up to reader interpretation, over-explaining some of the boy's emotions. The narrator was also not as convincing, verging on cute. In contrast the protagonist of *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time* was more complex and multi-layered. It was intriguing to identify with some of his bizarre thought processes, and recognize how they served him. For example, his need to determine whether it was going to be a good or bad day depending on how many yellow cars drove past.

We are all familiar with unreliable narrators. For anyone to even give an account of their day, there will be some parts that are exaggerated, others that are left out. To tell any story, we employ words. To what extent can words convey anything but a mediocre and subjective representation of events? "[on the unreliable narrator]...it is among the concepts with the most clear connection to our experience with 'real' narrators. We are constantly surrounded by 'real' unreliable narrators..." (Hansen 2007, p. 233).

Addis and Schacter claim that the neurological processes involved in memory render our memory for events as highly fallible. They propose that this fallibility may be an adaptive function designed to enable us to imagine future events. "...Memory errors can create confusion in everyday life. But for scientists studying memory, such mistakes are important because they provide critical evidence for the idea that episodic memory — the kind of memory that allows us to remember our personal experiences — is not a literal reproduction of the past, but is instead constructed by pulling together pieces of information from different sources..." (Nature, 2007, p. 27). This understanding of memory indicates that even when we want to express past events clearly and accurately, our memories are adapted to fictionalize events. In this way, we are all to a greater or lesser extent, unreliable narrators.

### **How Trauma can Alter the Interpretation of Truth**

Trauma can distort or colour an individual's understanding of reality. Murray observes, for example, "The nature of trauma complicates the articulation of traumatic experience, and fiction opens up possibilities for overcoming the representational difficulties posed by trauma" (2008, p.1).

Fiction is able to convey things that can be difficult to communicate in other ways, for instance, an epiphany, or conversely a moment of trauma. Fiction can circumvent the analytical mind, bypass logic, and offer new insights. Discussing his work, Salman Rushdie (Emory University lecture, March 7, 2012) said, "Fiction is a way to convey and discover kernels of truth."

Through the communication of ideas different to the norm, fiction enables the author and perhaps readers to come to terms with the effects of trauma (Murray, 2008). My own experience of trauma in my early teens resulted in a disconnect from others and my previous understanding of the world. I found solace, plus developed a stronger sense of self through reading *I Am David* (Holm, 1963), and *Soldier Boy* (Hill, 2001). Later as an adult I continued to explore this theme in my reading, for instance in: *Tu* (Grace, 2004), *The Outcast* (Jones, 2008), *Cold Mountain* (Frasier, 1997) and *Chinese Cinderella* (Adeline Yen Mah, 1999).

For Lily, the boundaries between fiction and non-fiction have become blurred. We are all influenced by our experiences and these change how we interpret the world. We can understand Lily's world through her need to rationalize her emotions. Lily has been labeled and in a sense marginalized due to what she's been through, e.g. foster child, abuse victim.

In Lily's fictions, the hurt is categorized into a form that is more socially acceptable. It's okay to feel grief over death, more complex to feel grief over estrangement from one's parents, and to have the mixed feelings over the abuse, including anger and self blame. Lily's fictions show her struggle to come to terms with what's happened to her. She is trying to construct a loving sister in her past. She co-opts photos, reinvents her own wardrobe to include discarded clothes of Abigail, invents projects they worked on together, for example, a game they were planning to sell. It allows her to experience the grief she feels at the loss of trust in her parents, as well as in a sense the loss of herself. For Lily there is a disconnect between the way she experienced herself before and after the sexual abuse.

Lily sometimes has difficulty distinguishing between her distant past and more recent past. For example when talking to Steven in the kitchen on the night of the attempted assault, she talks about the abuse of her Uncle and the incident that night interchangeably, fusing past and present. She isn't lying, but her account is incongruent. Lily is expressing her experience of the night's events as clearly as she is able.

There is a parallel disconnect in the mind of Patrick Bateman, the protagonist and narrator of *American Psycho* (Ellis, 1991.) In an interview about the novel Ellis said that the story of Patrick Bateman arose from his own experiences of isolation and disillusionment with a social network that emphasized material gain, body image, and personal ambition (Paris Review, 2012). Pat Bateman finds killing people pleasurable and exciting. His account of events is so extreme that he could be a sordid fantasist, rather than an actual killer. Ellis includes other indications of Bateman's unreliability, for instance Bateman gives his own interpretation of the music of Whitney Houston, Talking Heads and Huey Lewis among others. Most people familiar with these artists would not agree with Patrick Bateman's understanding of their work (Paris Review, 2012).

The protagonist and narrator of *Engleby* (Faulkes, 2007) suffered childhood trauma. Like Lily, he tries to impart the truth, but there are indications throughout the book that he may not be capable of doing so. He mentions that his memory is a bit odd, has gaps in it. He also refers repeatedly to his use of recreational drugs and heavy drinking. A girl he knows goes missing. This event highlights his unreliability, provoking the reader's uncertainty as to his involvement.

Engleby struggles with the concept of reality, saying at one point; "Until we can navigate in time, I'm not sure that we can prove that what happened is real" (p. 312). He also questions the concept of self noting that "the idea of self has become a 'necessary fiction'" (p. 323).

Knowing him to be safely fictitious, I found Engleby an engaging and likeable character. It transpires that he had killed the girl. The book shows how victim can become persecutor, and highlights human frailty.

In *Lifting the Mask*, Lily is attempting to gain self mastery, and a feeling of safety. An imaginary sister is a sister she can control, or thinks she can. Her imaginary sister gives her some power over the mother, father and uncle, making them less relevant. In her version of reality, she has a sister who was always more important to her. The façade being: 'I never loved you anyway', so therefore the loss isn't as great. Lily's fantasies also serve to invent the possibility of herself as Abigail. Her imagined sister had levels of independence and worldliness that Lily lacked. Reinventing oneself can be an attempt to regain power over an overwhelming situation.

Paradoxically, Lily wants to believe that the abuse didn't happen to her, but that Abigail is the victim. She cannot sustain the illusion, as the real world keeps intruding.

In *Lady Oracle* (Atwood, 1976) the protagonist Joan rewrites her own personal history. For instance, she was an overweight child, and constantly harassed by her mother. She felt unloved and associated this with being overweight. She loses weight in her late teens and later tells her husband Arthur that the



photo of herself as a child with her aunt is someone else. She suspects that if Arthur knew the truth about her, he wouldn't love her.

Joan is secretly a writer of popular fiction, whilst acclaimed in literary circles for a feminist volume written under another name. A reporter discovers secrets about her past: that she is the writer of the popular novels, committed adultery, was an overweight child who felt unloved. The reporter blackmails her. To escape she feigns her own death, and attempts to create yet another identity. Joan, like Lily has tried to run from her past.

Foucault developed the concept of a kind of ancestry of philosophical thinking, which he called genealogy, seeking to understand how we govern ourselves and others through the production of truth. Whereas Freud and Marx believed that we can unmask ourselves from regimes of power and knowledge, Foucault claimed that we can't escape, but simply move from one regime to another (Baynes et al., 1987).

"The exercise of power perpetually creates knowledge and, conversely, knowledge constantly induces effects of power" (Gordon, as cited in 2000). For this reason Foucault considered it necessary to be vigilant, skeptical and to question who is served by the way history is told. Retelling history can be a way of regaining power for a repressed group.

This can be seen in feminist re-writing of 'history.' This is demonstrated for example in the feminist rediscovery and re-evaluation of women artists. Until recently art history has focused on the male artist, and marginalised women's contribution. Feminists uncovered women artists working in the Renaissance, like Artemisia Gentileschi and Angelica Kauffman. They also began to reconsider what was called high art and what was not (Nochlin, 1998).

Lily's father is a lecturer in art history, with signs of a male-centric ideology. He is able to compartmentalise and deny what's happening in his own home. 'Women's issues' are for Lily and her mother to deal with. He's disconnected emotionally. In art history there is denial over the objectification of women (Berger, 1972). Men painting nudes, the uncle photographing Lily: it's all part of Lily's world. There's a link with Lily as a ballet dancer: being watched, the ideal of femininity, delicate and vulnerable. Ballets are often based on culturally informed narratives, where the princess is rescued by a gallant knight, or dies tragically.

The Romantic Movement in the arts coincided with the Industrial Revolution and can be seen as a reaction to its confines. Romanticism embraced the exotic and unfamiliar, harnessing the powers of the imagination. Lily's escape into fantasy could be read as a personal version of this - the Industrial Revolution is the abuse. In other words, escape into fantasy in the face of change is not just an oddity of Lily's, it's a recognisable social and psychological mechanism.

Lily's mother is a creator of unreality. She is constantly trying to reinvent herself through superficial change, for instance, home renovations, travel, make-up. In her book, *The Cosmetic Gaze: Body Modification and the Construction of Beauty*, Wegenstein (2012, p. 184) discusses the circular nature of the cosmetic gaze: "...it looks at itself, projecting from inside out, but it uses the imagery of ideals that

the culture craves and sells. This self projects neither what was nor what will be but what is supposed to be, it projects a desire for change and improvement.” Caught in this cycle of dissatisfaction, Lily’s mother is disengaged from other people’s realities. It is the mother and father’s inability to look at reality that causes the experience of abuse to fester internally for Lily, hidden like the box she keeps in her school locker.

Whilst *Lifting the Mask* contains some feminist elements, it is not overtly feminist, but reflects my own compromised position. Although ballet partly represents the use of the body to please others, it also allows Lily agency. Through dance Lily can express herself and feel joy. The novel is partly driven by aesthetics, a sense of poetry, and aims to convey one person’s path to adulthood. A position of compromise and a move away from black and white thinking is congruent with the view of feminism through a postmodernist lens.

### **Genre, Structure and Technique**

A major subject of my novel is sexual violation. Whilst this often affects young people, it is primarily an adult issue. There have been many books about teenagers that are in no way directed at teens, for example: *Purple Hibiscus* (Adichie, 2003), *The Outcast* (Jones, 2008), *Hostel Girl* (Gee, 1999), *Brokeback Mountain* (Proulx, 1997), *All the Pretty Horses* (McCarthy, 1992). What identifies these novels as Adult Literary Fiction is that the teenagers are grappling with adult issues. Including the mature Lily emphasizes the lasting effects of trauma, and gives the novel more scope in terms of imparting an appreciation of this.

The structure of my novel has been influenced by Postmodern theory and Postmodern literary techniques. A feature of postmodern literature is that it aims to expose literary norms. For example, *The Unconsoled* (Ishiguro, 1995) destabilizes reader expectations of what a novel should be. Its lack of logic challenges the supremacy of sequential normative storytelling. This makes the reader hang onto what remains constant, which is the protagonist’s psychology, his or her life issues and hang ups. The main character, Mr. Ryder may travel a long way: on motorways, across rivers, over an extended period to a destination. Once his engagement is over, he’ll return home by walking through a door in the next room. Mr. Ryder’s relationships are incongruent. For example, he appears to be merely acquainted with a woman and her child, observing them as if he was a curious stranger. Next, he is the woman’s husband and the father of the eight year old boy. This fluidity disregards any logical time line. There are other strange phenomena that give the text a dream-like quality, for example in his hotel room there is the rug that was in his childhood home, or he will see his parents battered old car, from twenty years ago, in a city far from where they lived. This also gives a feeling of nostalgia.

These oddities are without rational cause, for instance a recognizable mental illness. They have the effect of drawing more attention to Mr. Rider’s ongoing problem with prioritizing his own needs, and saying “no” to people. It also makes the reader focus on his recurrent insecurities and longing for approval from his parents. In this way, the child within the man is shown in a touching and convincing way. The cut and paste nature of his relationship with his wife and son could partly indicate his

personality trait towards self-preoccupation and absorption in his work, as well as indicate or point to the human tendency to see the present through a haze of the past or possible future.

Although *The Unconsoled* appears to show the world inaccurately, it cleverly presents a portrait of a character. The way Ishiguro subverts reader expectation doesn't allow for easy immersion in the story. Disrupting modernist conventions established for the novel places demands on the reader, forcing them into an active role in terms of its interpretation, and therefore its construction.

In *Lifting the Mask* I have chosen to subvert certain narrative conventions, such as a single point of view, a reliable narrator, and a sequential time-line. The novel frequently jumps twenty years and teenage Lily often has flash-backs, or memories. Steven's voice is disquieting in the novel, as he appears to have equal import in the narrative set in the past, but unlike Lily does not feature in the present. My intention is to leave the reader with a question as to Steven's role in the novel, and have him linger in their minds. This departs from many other multiple first person narratives, for instance, *The Poisonwood Bible* (Kingsolver, 1998), *Noughts and Crosses* (Blackman, 2001), or *Two Caravans* (Lewycka, 2007), where the characters inhabit the same period, and move the novel forward in tandem.

In a study at Ohio State University (Sell, 2012) a series of experiments was done to determine the power of fiction to change students' thinking and behavior. The study showed that for the influence to work, the reader had to strongly identify with the character, and feel the character's emotions, thoughts, beliefs and internal responses as their own. The researchers called this phenomenon "experience-taking." The effect was more pronounced when the subject was reading a version of the story written in first person rather than the third person. This study had an impact on my decision to write *Lifting the Mask* using the first person point of view.

Other experiments demonstrated that people were more likely to adopt liberal attitudes towards sexual orientation and race after becoming absorbed in a story that featured a likeable character of a different race or orientation (Sell, 2012).

First person's main advantage is its ability to convey character. In third person subjective it's easy to transition between multiple characters. A disadvantage with first person narration is having only one viewpoint. Writing in multiple first person enabled me to have more than one perspective, as well as retain the characters' individual styles of expression.

There are many books which, like *Lifting the Mask*, use a narrator at different ages, oscillating between past and present. Some examples are: *The Other* (Guterson, 2008), *Atonement* (McEwan, 2001), *Mister Pip* (Jones, 2006), *The Sweet Shop Owner* (Swift, 1980), *The Light of Day* (Swift, 2003), *Water for Elephants* (Gruen, 2006) *Moral Disorder* (Atwood, 2006), and *Eve Green* (Fletcher, 2004). They tend to fall into one of two categories: the adult narrator is used as a framing device (*Atonement*; *Mr. Pip*,) or the adult narrator and younger narrator have parallel stories, (*Water for Elephants*; *The Sweet Shop Owner*.) I chose to use the adult narrator as a framing device, the purpose being to give weight and meaning to the events in Lily's teens. The action happened in the past, but its significance is its lasting effect on the protagonist as an adult.

Practice based research is a term often used in the context of visual arts, but can equally be applied to the research inherent in the process of experimental writing and subsequent analysis and re-writing. It is central to my creative process. It is through the act of writing and re-writing that I make discoveries about the kind of novel I want to write, come to understand the characters, including what makes them unique, and discover how different techniques can either obstruct or serve content. Choices about point of view, for example can have a significant impact on the reader's interpretation of the text. For instance, I considered writing Steven's narrative in third person subjective, as this would highlight the question of authorship, emphasizing the exploration of an unreliable narrator. However I decided that the self-consciousness of transitioning from first person to third, and engaging the reader in questions of authorship would be an unhelpful distraction. First person also furthered my aim to evoke empathy in my reader for both Lily and Steven.

Present tense has a different timbre to past tense, being more immediate. The need for a simple past narrative versus present narrative signifier overrode the benefits of changing tense to create contrasts between immediacy, versus reflectiveness. This use of past and present tense became an important structural device. The one time I bypassed this rule was during the scene in the club, which is well imbedded in the narrative set in the past. As well as requiring a sense of urgency, this scene shows a time when for Lily past and present merge.

The plot of *Lifting the Mask* developed as I continued to work and re-work my novel. For example, originally Abigail was Lily's actual sister, who had committed suicide due to sexual abuse. I felt dissatisfied with the potential of this premise. The decision to make Lily the abuse victim and Abigail imaginary arose from a desire to give my protagonist a rich inner world, and a more complex psychological make-up.

The interplay between technique and creativity is fundamental to my writing practice. Technical experimentation can generate new imaginative possibilities. I became interested in the second person point of view after reading the *Brief and Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* (Diaz, 2007). There is an exquisite passage in second person at the beginning of chapter two. Second person is a less commonly used point of view than first or third. Experimenting with second person inspired me to include the direct address. Lily began to talk to her dead sister. For example:

"I sat on the sofa, holding the photo of you and me, the one of us in our communion dresses, the one where you are nine, and I am seven. You'd be nineteen, now. Maybe we'd go clubbing, and you'd take me to bars, buy me drinks, introduce me to your older friends, and I'd be cool."

This has the effect of intensifying Lily's relationship with the imaginary sister.

In *The Road* (McCarthy, 2007) the author uses parataxis for emotional impact. I decided to try reworking a paragraph from my novel that might lend itself to this technique. I wanted the scene first introducing the mysterious box to be more streamlined and emotionally charged. I found that using parataxis did convey a character's emotional state effectively. Later in the novel, I used this technique to develop subsequent scenes.

I admire original and poetic use of language. Experimentation with language is part of the definition of literary fiction. Words are like genes. Linking words in unusual ways can lead to conscious recognition of previously unconscious knowledge. On the other hand, can it?

“What then is truth? A mobile army of metaphors, metonymies, anthropomorphisms: in short, a sum of human relations which became poetically and rhetorically intensified, metamorphosed, adorned, and after long usage, seemed to a nation, fixed, canonic, and binding; truths are illusions of which one has forgotten that they are illusions: worn out metaphors which have become powerless to affect the senses, coins which have their obverse effaced and are now no longer of account as coins, but merely as metal.” (Nietzsche, as cited in Fry, 2012, pp.355-356).

In his lectures on the theory of literature, Fry (2012) poses the questions: Do the words we use dictate to us what we come to believe as true - do we skid from speech into belief? Does the verbal realm have real exchange value? He proposes that language is not made up of natural signs that attach themselves to the real world. Language is warped, it's hard to mean exactly what we say. We make sense, not language, by wrestling with words to suit our purpose. Language itself can only be used to approach reality with words, bringing figures of speech to bear on reality. Reality is elusive, language unreliable (Fry, 2012).

Tell the truth, and then run.

## **Conclusion**

*Lifting the Mask* is a character study that aims to convey truths about the effects of trauma. Fiction is a powerful vehicle for the representation of trauma, as it outwits many of the complexities inherent in its articulation. The nature of trauma is that it's disruptive; it often disturbs the subject's cognition and sense of reality. This makes its testimony inherently fraught with dissonance. I have used first person narration, and have demonstrated that my protagonist cannot be relied upon to present events at face value. This makes the reader work to understand her. An unreliable narrator affirms postmodern conjecture that there is no one universal truth. The nature of truth is instead complex and may be more subtle than we once believed. It can come in many guises. It's up to us to tease apart the layers, and recognize truth in its varied forms. “The acceptance that all that is solid has melted into the air, that reality and morality are not givens but imperfect human constructs, is the point from which fiction begins” (Rushdie, 1990, p. 9).

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