

Managing the Mess by Anne Turner

Aim:

To explore and seek to understand how and why creative writing "helps humans adjust to the messy and often disturbing reality of living" (Hamadache, 30 Nov, 2020).

Process:

Build on an earlier creative non-fiction story about my family's messy reality of having a relative convicted of a child sex offence, imprisoned and then released back to us two years later.

Write a 5000 word research article for planned submission to a peer-reviewed academic journal.

Methodology:

- Practice-led research (where knowledge is gained through the process of writing)
- Ficto-criticism – writing that "utilise[s] fact and fiction to explore and analyse ideas." (Muecke, Mother's Day Protests, xvii).
- Literature review - of Affect Theory, ficto-criticism, Narrative Therapy (esp in reference to Aboriginal storytelling culture), Reader Response theory.
- Survey and interview

"Only when we are brave enough to explore the darkness will we discover the infinite power of our light." - Brené Brown

Findings:

- While not necessarily always positive, writing shame or trauma or pain creatively cannot help but have an effect on both writer and reader as we interact with story in an almost bodily way.
- Writing for therapy helps to process trauma; story helps us understand and give shape to difficult emotions and experiences.
- Creative writing goes further than processing, generating empathy or showing different perspectives: it allows the reader to be lost in art and this can be "transporting, challenging, expansive somehow" (Wood, 2021), even when uncomfortable.

"...the fact/fiction opposition was always a fiction"
(Muecke, "Postlude", 233)

"For all its sham, drudgery and broken dreams,
it is still a beautiful world." Desiderata

Challenges and Learnings:

The story is never finished. My family struggled to complete the survey or even read the story – it was either too painful to read or to talk about. This created new tensions in our relationships, it informed the shape of the story to this point, it made me seriously wonder about the potential danger of writing's "affect" (Gibbs). But family responses are evolving and so therefore will the story.

Where to from here:

Re-draft and submit "Managing the Mess" to Postgraduate Journal of English. Ficto-criticism has opened a world of possibilities that I am keen to explore in my future writing and research.

Works Cited:

- Gibbs, Anna. "Writing and Danger: the intercorporeality of affect." *Creative Writing: Theory beyond practice*, edited by Kraus, Nigel and Brady, Tess. Post Pressed, 2006, pp. 157-167
- Muecke, Stephen. "Postlude: Fictocriticism after Critique." *Writing Architectures: Ficto-Critical Approaches*, 2020, pp. 232-237.
- Muecke, Stephen. *The Mother's Day protest and other fictocritical essays*. Rowman & Littlefield, 2016.
- Wood, Charlotte. *The Luminous Solution*. Allen & Unwin, 2021.