

Writer's Note:

Art should be used as a source of exploration for the artist. Whether that exploration is a discovery of the definition of art, a discovery of the self, or a discovery of the world around them and the way it functions, it must involve some form of personal investigation. This project is important to me because I am working to discover the significance of storytelling, and the role that it has in my life. Storytelling gives language a purpose, and gives a life, devoid of meaning, reason. A person's stories define who they are and shape their identity, and without them, we would find ourselves in a world where language and creativity have no purpose. Storytelling, even when untrue, gives a deeper meaning of reality. Therefore, I feel a personal obligation to examine storytelling if I am to examine myself, and the world I live in.

I have grown up listening to stories, whether it was Alice's Adventures in Wonderland before I went to sleep, or stories of my parent's childhood when they were feeling nostalgic. However, it was not until freshmen English class when I read Salman Rushdie's Haroun and The Sea of Stories that I began to question what effect these stories have had on my life. Throughout his novel, Rushdie examines the importance of storytelling and fictional writing. I have explored the realistic, and not so realistic world of fiction, yet I never thought to ask myself how these stories have altered my view of reality. Rushdie's work has inspired me to pose questions about the purpose of fiction writing, and how it might be used to provide a truer perception of reality.

Where is the intersection between fiction and reality? Can fiction be truer than non-fiction? Can there ever be a reality without fiction? Fiction and reality have always been described as clear opposites. The term "fiction" is defined with the words "falsehood," "untrue," and "invention" suggesting that the words in it are not intended to denote any given reality in the practical world; this raises questions as to what the purpose of fictitious works of literature are, and why one would want to use fiction to find a deeper meaning of reality. To some, fiction may seem nothing more than a light-hearted novel read on the beach or a fairytale before bed, but stories provide more than just entertainment. Literature is a means of telling us something about reality that is not apparent in factual narratives or blatant observation.

Reality in its purest form without fiction is unachievable because absolute truth does not exist. However, humans aspire for that reality and have come to know it as fact. However, this "raw" reality is not what is most real to us. Rather, it is the assumptions that influence any decision we make. Author of *Fiction of Reality*, Deborah Kest, describes it as the web of beliefs that constitute our reality are more of the way we envision the world than the actual world itself. In this way, fiction becomes an intimate way for one to connect with the self and reality, as it shows how we can gain access to the inaccessible by creating our own possibilities. Fiction allows people to move beyond the objective reality of life, and reach a deeper, more internalized view of it. Language has the power to create a story and create meaning. By giving a name or a narrative to something, the writer gives it purpose. A fictional story then, shows the deeper meaning of reality because it tells not factual truths that anyone might be able to observe with their own eyes, but grander truths about life. Fiction provides a narrative to larger concepts of life that are otherwise indescribable. It speaks to the meaning of life and how one might live it, reflecting the human condition and the human experience as it is being lived.

Why does this matter? Why do we need stories, fiction, or otherwise? We need stories because each word we use comes with a complete narrative, some words can't come without them. As author, Tim Parks, of NYTimes Article "Do We Need Stories?" describes it, "to know the word 'chair' is to understand about moving from standing to sitting and appreciate the match

of the human body with certain shapes and materials.” We are able to identify what a chair is because we have a story about what a chair is. Each time we see a chair we subconsciously ask ourselves whether it fits our narrative. Its objective reality does not tell us that it is a chair, rather it is our concept of one that does. Other words have no objective reality and, without stories they become indescribable—“God,” “the angel,” “the devil,” “heaven,” and “hell” would be mere words that hold no weight in the way humans see the world, as compared how they are now when people dictate their lives by the stories that invented them. As Parks states, “God is a one-word creation story.” Stories are the only way to understand these concepts that cannot be experienced in other ways. Parks makes the claim that humans feel reassured knowing there is something to refer to. We invent more words and create more stories to comfort us from a fear of the unknown, and to provide meaning to an otherwise meaningless world.

Beyond the primary need for stories to define aspects of life, there are many other parts of fiction that intersect with reality. Because of the way humans have been trained to identify truth, there is a large misconception that reality and fiction are opposites. When a person examines a text they never approach the “pure” text. Rather, they apply a frame of reference for their analysis. However, if fiction tells us a deeper meaning of reality, we no longer need that frame of reference which makes us evaluate each text for its truthfulness. Literary scholar, Wolfgang Iser, states in his book *The Reality of Fiction*, “once we are released from this obligation [to determine what is true and what is false] the question arises as to what actually constitutes fiction. If not reality, it is not because it lacks the attributes of reality, but because it tells us something about reality, and the conveyer cannot be identical to what is conveyed.” He continues on to say that fictions, which are made to be the opposite, or the artificial side of reality, are actually settings that allow the creation of other worlds “whose reality are not to be questioned.” What is most important when reading literature is not what it means, and whether it is true or not, but what it does. Regardless of whether the literature is true or not, it is useful in understanding our reality. This is related to the idea of modal fictionalism, theorized by Gideon Rosen. It suggests that all possible worlds, whether they exist or not, may be part of a valuable dialogue. Despite this, humans have a natural tendency to want to figure out whether something is true or not. That being said, there are many aspects of our own reality that have been deemed as “fact” which actually could be construed as fiction.

Is there any truth in our reality? Can we trust it as fact? Or is it nothing more than a highly developed fiction? How do we navigate deception in everyday life? Nelson Goodman, author of *Ways of Worldmaking*, believes that there is no one principal world; rather, we live in multiple realities and continue to make new worlds out of the old. Fiction is one of the tools in which we do this. He says we do not live in any single world; rather, we live in many, none of which can ever be traced back to something emotionless. He describes this process as creating fact from fiction. Because of this, the reality we live in and call “fact,” is nothing more than a good fiction. As Deborah Kest states fiction is “inherently more ‘true’ than fact... it is through concepts, not external facts, that we know objects to be the kinds of things which they are.” Meaning that our reality is closer to fiction than fact, as it is only a web of beliefs that makes it up. She goes on to say that “what we feel is meaningful does not derive from what is true but the other way around.” We find truth in what is most real to us, and that is subjective reality, rather than objective reality. Keith Ridgway, author of the *New Yorker* article “Everything is Fiction” proclaimed that when we tell the story of our day, or the story of our life, we edit and rewrite a narrative out of our experiences. We have a perception of how life is and what things are, and then we impose that perception on our memory and remember it forever as fact. In this way,

fiction gives us our memories, understanding, insight, and our identities. Ridgway continues to say, that he “[loves] getting lectures about the triviality of fiction, the triviality of making things up, as if that wasn’t what all of us do, all day long, all life long.” We are telling ourselves fictions and calling them fact. In doing so, we undermine any piece of writing that does not follow our concepts of reality, deeming them useless to human development and ignoring that we might be living lives of fiction every day.

People dismiss fiction as reliable to tell us anything about reality, as if our reality wasn’t based off of it. Slavoj Zizek, a Slovene philosopher and cultural critic, believes that we are beholden to “unconscious fantasies” that structure reality, apparent in every interaction we have. When we converse with someone, we erase the abstract from the image. When talking to a person rationally you know “[they] are defecating, [they] are sweating, not to mention other things, but quite literally when [a person] interacts with [another] this is not part of the image [they] have of [them].” Such that when one is dealing with a person they are not dealing with the *real* them, but the imagined image, or predetermined idea of them. People are bound by false perceptions that prevent them from seeing things or people for how they really are. Zizek continues to say that people’s deepest motivations are unconscious; ideology, or a person’s beliefs, “function as a justification for the existing social order.” Therefore, reality is constructed through people’s ideologies instead of facts because they are seeing what they want to see, rather than what is actually there.

Beyond the philosophical, there are scientific studies that have shown that when something enters one of the senses it must be interpreted through the brain, which occasionally misinterprets the information. When a person’s brain attempts to generate a perception, it is essentially taking a guess at what it thinks it will see. Meaning that you see what you expect something to be, not what it actually is. This shows that everything is fiction in a sense as our brains are constantly creating assumptions of what we think we see, or of what we want to see. This, in correspondence with Zizek’s statements, demonstrates that our reality is made entirely up of perceptions of facts, rather than the facts themselves. The artist, Alvar Balasubramaniam, in the Ted Talk “Art of Substance and Absence,” continues this with his claims that everything we see is just our perception of the world, not the actual world itself. He states that meaning does not really exist in reality. Rather “being a human, the way we [have been trained] to perceive the reality creates this meaning.” This then, is why we have fictional literature, because we must bring meaning to an otherwise meaningless world.

If reality is nothing more than good fiction, why do we need fiction to understand reality? Why should we seek to find truth? Can fiction present a reality truer than non-fiction? We must find the truth in fiction because fiction brings out the invisible aspects of life that cannot be known in factual narratives or blatant reality. Fiction seeks to represent human experiences as they are being lived, as it appears in our hopes, dreams, fear and memories. Sculptor Nathalie Miebach described her purpose for creating art as an attempt to achieve the feeling of an event as it was experienced. She described that we can say that there are 40 mph winds, but that doesn’t tell us what that feels like to be in 40 mph winds. Attempting to describe an experience as it is felt rather than the facts of it is another way in which we can find a deeper meaning of reality in fiction. Ira Glass, in *This American Life’s* “On Storytelling,” tells the story of what he imagines to be the most boring narrative possible: a man gets up in the middle of the night and goes down stairs. However, Glass fictionalizes it describing the scene: “there was a man and he wakes up and he is lying in bed and the house is very quiet, just unearthly quiet, so he gets up and puts his feet on the floor and walks to the door and again its just very very quiet...” The night was

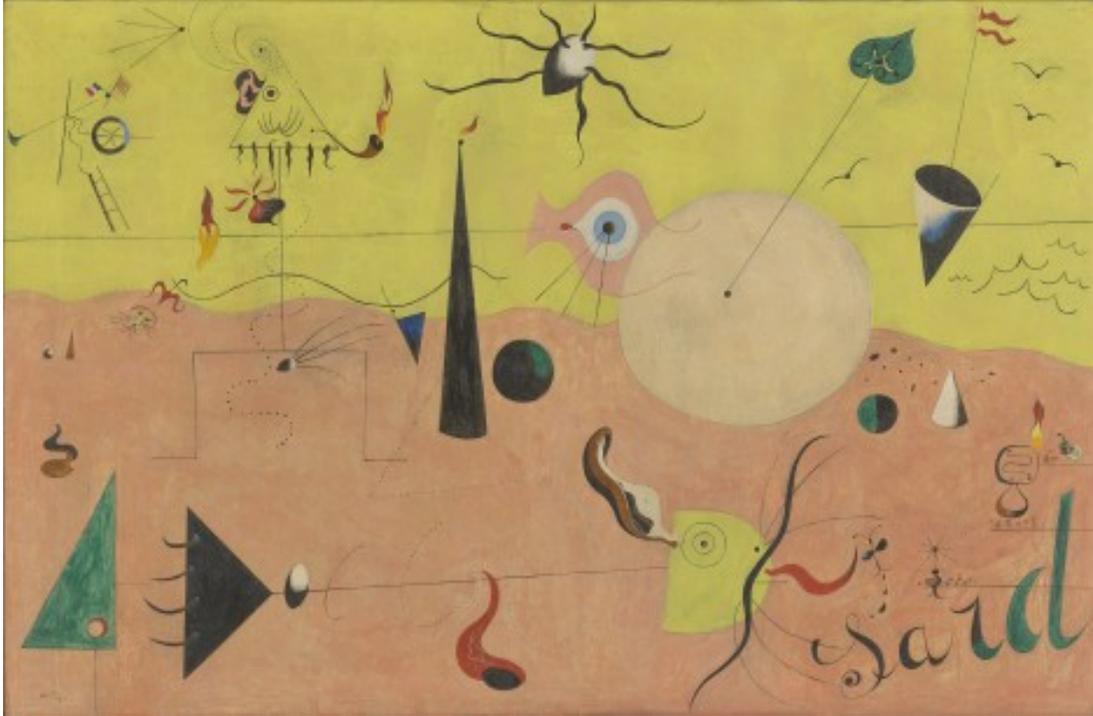
probably just as quiet as any other, and in actuality it is impossible for anything on earth to be unearthly quiet, but it conveys the emotional state of the man as he was having this experience. By fictionalizing the event, it provides the suspense and emotion that the man was feeling, that are not apparent in the raw facts.

We are able to capture the emotional aspects of an event, because language gives us the ability to create narrative which further allows us to understand human culture. The theoretical paradigm, structuralism, argues that human culture may be understood through a means of structure, modeled on language. This differs from the tangible reality we know and the complete abstract. This reality is labeled as a “third order” which acts as a mediation between the two. Jacques Lacan (who was previously mentioned) rejects the belief that reality can be captured in language, as stated in his Post-Structuralist theory. He believes that “the real is impossible because it is impossible to imagine.” And while it is a valid argument, because reality may never be fully captured through language, stories attempt to further discover what is already there. Linguists investigate how language and meaning relate to truth and the world. In their analysis they are less concerned with which sentences are actually true; rather, that kinds of meanings can be true.

Other opposing thoughts to the use of fiction as a means to understand reality include “naturalists,” such as Alex Rosenberg. Naturalism is a philosophical theory that treats science as the most dependable source of information, and scientific exploration as the best method to attain that information. Rosenberg says that while literary theory “can be fun,” neither it nor fiction qualifies as knowledge. An opposition to this is that literature has played a large role in creating the idea of reality that naturalism works to describe. William Egginton, author of NYTimes article, “*Quixote*, Colbert and the Reality of Fiction,” gives the example of Miguel de Cervantes’s *Don Quixote*, which, through prose literature, captured the changes in how people in early modern Europe understood themselves in the context of the world around them. According to Egginton, Cervantes passed down not only a new genre, but an understood worldview that has penetrated all aspects of life- fiction. He was able to capture the feelings that people during this time understood as reality. Egginton goes on to say that “the common notion of objective reality that most of us would recognize today is mutually dependent on the multiple perspectives cultivated by the fictional worldview. ” In essence, he is stating that without fiction we would not be able to understand our reality. Without possibility, which is created by fiction, we would not be able to experience reality.

Are we able to find this entrance into a deeper reality through any other modes of fictionalization? Abstract art and Cubism are both methods in which people seek to fictionalize reality to understand it from a different perspective. Abstract art is defined by the logic of perspective. It is an attempt to reproduce a different perception of visible reality. In this way, it is literally abstracting reality to make sense of it. In “Defining Abstract Art,” author, Lynne Taetzsch says that the purpose of Abstract art is to exaggerate or personalize something that is already there. “They are not trying to imitate nature, but to use nature as a starting off point... they want to give a sense or feel for the subject rather than an exact replication.” Abstract art provides freedom for the artist, as it allows them to venture into impression instead of imitation, allowing them to capture the emotion of an event instead of the facts of it, which could similarly be said for works of fiction. Cubism does a similar thing as it provides a greater sense of reality. In Cubist works, objects are analyzed, broken up and reassembled in a more abstract form. Rather than depicting an object from a single viewpoint, the artist represents the subject from multiple views to show the subject in larger framework (Moma Art Terms). It is again

abstracting reality, but providing a more in-depth look on a person or object, allowing it to be seen from multiple perspectives. Both of these could be directly related to how fiction is used, because it too provides a nonrepresentational impression of reality, allowing it to form as we see the world, rather than forcing them to replicate how we are told to see the world.



Joan Miro
The Hunter (Catalan Landscape)



Pablo Picasso
Girl With a Mandolin (Fanny Tellier)

In writing and reading works of fiction, we are able to find a deeper truth as literature provides the internal, emotional aspects of life that don't allow themselves to be available in reality. Lives are internal, and fiction has claimed the internal ground as its own, allowing the reader to understand the world from a perspective unavailable in objective reality. As author Jessamyn West says, "Fiction reveals truths that reality obscures." We read fiction because it allows readers an experience unavailable off the page. It gives us an opportunity to enter fully into another's thoughts and feelings. Stories give the image of life in motion and provide a heightened awareness of reality. By reading and writing stories we allow ourselves to enter into the world of fiction, where we are able to invent our own possibilities and dive deeper into the meaning behind objective reality—as if pulling back the curtain to the real show that was once hidden by objectivity. In doing so, we find a deeper connection with ourselves and the world around us.