

GRACE NOTES IX

DR SALMA SIDDIQUE considers trauma and the retelling of different stories

NIGELLA LAWSON HAS been reported in the press as 'freeing herself from a brilliant but brutal man' (Myers, 2013). There have been a number of stories told as versions of the same event. As psychotherapists we need to remind ourselves how trauma can produce fragmentation as well as powerful stories. One story is the social encounter, the second is the version experienced through body and the third, how the self recognises the event and the body as being one integral narrative.

In the novel *Life of Pi* (Martel, 2002), Pi, when recalling his version of events, is challenged as to their accuracy by the insurance investigator. Pi subsequently acknowledges that he has two stories and queries which one the investigator/reader wants to believe. Different versions or memories of events are particularly evident with trauma and its associated fragmentation – when things fall apart they rarely fall together. While the memory fragments one version of events, dissociation separates or discounts one's capacity to feel or think. Splitting (black and white thinking) can be experienced as a defense mechanism (Klein, 2002), keeping apart the positive and negative qualities of the self and others in order to cope with traumatic experiences. This splitting can happen between mind, heart and soul within individuals as well as between individuals.

The transgenerational theme (Noriega, 2009) gets repeated through our oral culture of stories and songs. Songs can be used as a means in expressing fragmentation from trauma. They can be well crafted short stories with a self-contained performance, vocalising a universal theme which resonates with the listener. The latest single download by Lady Gaga featuring 'Do what you want with my body' describes the phenomenon of separating out the body as object and thing. The narrative of the song includes the lines 'you can't have my heart and you won't use my mind but do what you want with my body...you can't use my voice cause you don't own my life.' The narrative of the lyrics challenges the distortion of Lady Gaga's image in the media, her status as a woman and artist through constant negative referencing of her as an hermaphrodite, gaining

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weight, drug addiction, and negative comparisons with other women.

Emotionally challenging thoughts can be transmitted to our culture through songs, they become acceptable without much attention being given to the lyrics. Earlier in the year another singer Robin Thicke in the song 'Blurred Lines' advocates that 'you know you want it' with accompanying imagery of naked size-zero models. The 1983 song written by Sting and sung by Police 'Every Breath You Take' is a favourite at weddings and other romantic occasions. However Sting (2005) later acknowledged that 'I think the song is very, very sinister and ugly and people have actually misinterpreted it as being a gentle little love song, when it's quite the opposite.'

Another example is the story of the Wizard of Oz (Baum, 2008) which can be seen as an allegory for understanding the position of the marginalised and oppressed within society, in this instance girls and women. Each of the characters of the witch(s), munchkins, scarecrow, lion, tinman, Dorothy, Toto can represent aspects of these women's stories of looking for a way home.

As I sit and write this piece I can interpret my journey through life as a black, muslim, gay woman as idealised projections from the characters in the Wizard of Oz . We could see the Wizard as a projection of the Cultural Parent (Drego, 1996) and the Controlling Parent (Stewart and Joines, 2012). In the Oz story you move through the flames, the smoke and the holograph of the ageing white professional male and Toto tugs at the veil/curtain to reveal a venerable old man. Lacan (2003) would interpret this scene as the unveiling of the phallus and thus removing its threat by its exposure.

Characters and the story need to be shrouded in mystery and speculation if the reader is to survive from beginning to end. The mind can make itself a fantastical truth while we shelter in the heart.

In time we find the courage to imagine and make a better story. Sometimes the only thing we need in a nightmare story is another person along the yellow brick road of a journey. The Canadian singer Alanis Morissette sings that 'Trauma happens in relationships, so it can only be healed in relationships.'

Art can't provide healing on its own. However, it can be cathartic and creative and be used to offer insight in the retelling of the story in the psychotherapeutic relationship.

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