

**‘Imaginative literature
is about listening
to a voice’**

Al Alvarez
in
The Writer’s Voice

The Psychologist’s Voice
D.W. Winnicott, case study extract

interview. There were present two psychiatric social workers and two visitors. The boy did not immediately give an abnormal impression and he quickly entered into a squiggle game with me. (In this squiggle game I make some kind of an impulsive line drawing and invite the child whom I am interviewing to turn it into something, and then he makes a squiggle for me to turn into something in my turn.)

The squiggle game in this particular case led to a curious result. The boy’s laziness immediately became evident, and also nearly everything I did was translated by him into something associated with string. Among his ten drawings there appeared the following

lasso, whip, crop,
a yo-yo string,
a string in a knot,
another crop,
another whip.

After this interview with the boy I had a second one with the parents, and asked them about the boy’s preoccupation with string. They said they were glad that I had brought up this subject, but they had not mentioned it because they were not sure of its significance. They said that the boy had become obsessed with everything to do with string, and in fact whenever they went into a room they were liable to find that he had joined together chairs and tables; and they might find a cushion, for instance, with a string joining it to the fireplace. They said that the boy’s preoccupation with string was gradually developing a new feature, one which had worried them instead of causing them ordinary concern. He had recently tied a string round his sister’s neck (the sister whose birth provided the first separation of this boy from his mother).

In this particular kind of interview I believe I had visited

Extract from:
***The Observations* by Jane Harris**
(2006)

My missus she often said to me ‘Now then Bessy, don’t be calling me missus.’ She said this especially when the minister was coming for his tea. My missus wanted me to call her ‘marm’ but I always forgot. At first I forgot by accident and then I forgot on purpose just to see the look on her face.

My missus was always after me for to write things down in a little book. She give me the book and pen and ink the day I arrived. ‘Now then Bessy,’ says she, ‘I want you to write down your daily doings in this little book and I’ll take a look at it from time to time.’ This was after she found out I could read and write. When she found that out her face lit up like she’d lost a penny and found sixpence. ‘Oh!’ says she, ‘And who taught you?’ And I told her it was my poor dead mother, which was a lie for my mother was alive and most likely blind drunk down the Gallowgate as usual and even if she was sober she could barely have wrote her own name on a magistrates summons. But my mother never was sober if she was awake. And when she was asleep, she was unconscious.

But wait on. I am getting ahead of myself. Let me begin nearer the beginning.

Extract from:
***The Shock of the Fall* by Nathan Filer**
(2013)

the girl and her doll

I should say that I am not a nice person. Sometimes I try to be, but often I’m not. So when it was my turn to cover my eyes and count to a hundred – I cheated.

I stood at the spot where you had to stand when it was your turn to count, which was beside the recycling bins, next to the shop selling disposable barbecues and spare tent pegs. And near to there is a small patch of overgrown grass, tucked away behind a water tap.

Except I don’t remember standing there. Not really. You don’t always remember the details like that, do you? You don’t remember if you were beside the recycling bins, or further up the path near to the shower blocks, and whether actually the water tap is up there?

I can’t now hear the manic cry of seagulls, or taste the salt in the air. I don’t feel the heat of the afternoon sun making me sweat beneath a clean white dressing on my knee, or the itching of suncream in the cracks of my scabs. I can’t make myself relive the vague sensation of having been abandoned. And neither – for

There was no underbrush in the island of pine trees. The trunks of the trees went straight up or slanted towards each other. The trunks were straight and brown without branches. The branches were high above. Some interlocked to make a solid shadow on the brown forest floor. Around the grove of the trees was a bare space. It was brown and soft underfoot as Nick walked on it. This was the over-lapping of the pine-needle floor, extending out beyond the width of the high branches. The trees had grown tall and the branches moved high, leaving the sun this bare space they had once covered with shadows. Sharp at the edge of this extension of the forest floor commenced the sweet fern. Nick slipped off his pack and lay down in the shade. He lay on his back and looked up into the pine trees. His neck and back and the small of his back rested as he stretched. The earth felt good against his back. He looked up at the sky, through the branches, and then shut his eyes. He opened them and looked up again. There was a wind high up in the branches. He shut his eyes again and went to sleep.

It is spring, moonless night in the small town, starless and bible-black, the cobblestreets silent and the hunched, courtiers'-and-rabbits' wood limping invisible down to the sloeblack, slow, black, crowblack, fishingboat-bobbing sea. The houses are blind as moles (though moles see fine tonight in the snouting, velvet dingles) or blind as Captain Cat there in the muffled middle by the pump and the town clock, the shops in mourning, the Welfare Hall in widows' weeds. And all the people of the lulled and dumbfound town are sleeping now.

Hush, the babies are sleeping, the farmers, the fishers, the tradesmen and pensioners, cobbler, schoolteacher, postman and publican, the undertaker and the fancy woman, drunkard, dressmaker, preacher, policeman, the webfoot cocklewomen and the tidy wives. Young girls lie bedded soft or glide in their dreams, with rings and trousseaux, bridesmaided by glow-worms down the aisles of the organplaying wood. The boys are dreaming wicked or of the bucking ranches of the night and the jollyrodgered sea. And the anthracite statues of the horses sleep in the fields, and the cows in the byres, and the dogs in the wetnosed yards; and the cats nap in the slant corners or lope sly, streaking and needling, on the one cloud of the roofs.