HIDDEN MEANINGS: CREATIVE FICTION, NON-FICTION, AND FACTS

SESSION THREE—READINGS

Read these to think about the writing of information and disinformation:

https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2017/10/09/likes

https://granta.com/the-rememberer/

https://tech.newstatesman.com/feature/astroturfing-twitter-bots-amplification-inside-online-influence-industry

INTRO:

Every story we write or tell is, by nature of memory, an interpretation. You experience a moment and then you record the moment: in the act of recording, you can only give an interpretation of the experience. It shifts. Someone else hears this interpretation and in the retelling, can only give a further interpretation. Another shift. As writers, can we ever create a totally accurate re-telling of an original experience? This topic is endlessly fascinating to me. As a writer, I love to try to find the best way to represent an experience, whether it be through nonfiction, fiction, or a mixture.

This week's readings include two short stories and one piece of investigative journalism. They all face the same struggle expressed above—how to best present their story—and each uses a different approach. The theme pulling these pieces together is this idea of approval: thumbs-up, heart/love, happiness, attention, understanding, empathy, compassion, feeling/being heard and known. The question grounding all these pieces is: *at what price?*

In *Astroturfing*, the authors investigate the literal price of "likes" (it's cheaper than I'd imagined) as well as the prevalence of purchasing ideas and identities over the internet.

In *Likes*, we'll take a deep dive into the (fictional) experience of a family toiling with an unseen fourth character—social media—and its influence on a pre-teen girl (and her family). I am drawn at once to this writing: Bynum's language is modern and exciting, her theme is relatable, and she does not shy away from switching voices—moving between the telling, the showing, and the immersive voice.

And, finally, we encounter a more existential character and are asked to consider what memory itself is truly made of, how it changes over time, and the risks of knowing too much—in *The Rememberer*. There is so much in this story (which is almost a fable) to excavate and consider. You'll notice this is written from an omniscient point of view. Characters are known not by name, but as *the girl* and *the masters—a philologist, philosopher, cryptanalyst,* and *poet*, to name a few.

As you read these texts, it may be helpful to focus on how the stories are being told. Think about who is narrating, what their perspective is, and how that determines or changes the reader's experience of the story.

Note: I really enjoy reading work aloud and would especially encourage this for these two fiction pieces: they both have rich dialogue that is only enhanced by being read out loud (in fact, you can listen to Bynum read her story in the link if you'd like—be sure to listen around the 13-minute mark, where she gives a perfect imitation of those YouTube personalities!).