

## *BIAS IN FICTION*

J.B. Drori

There's a notion abroad that writers are obliged to refrain from incorporating moral messages in their fiction. It's a form of preaching, reflecting personal bias, thus resulting in the manipulation of the reader.

That's remarkable, considering that down the ages the thrust of the greatest works of fiction has been cogent lessons of morality.

Furthermore, they claim, writers should guard against allowing their personal prejudices from polluting the characters they create.

That is a laudable objective but, alas, not a doable one.

Prejudice is ubiquitous and permeates all aspects of human behavior. Well aware of this, scientists go to great lengths to account for it in their scientific experiments. Double blind controls are among the strictest means employed to neutralize the influence of bias in medical investigations. Both investigators and subjects are 'blinded' as to the identity of the placebo and the item under study. Even then total elimination of bias is rarely achieved.

Bias, a life-adaptive defense mechanism, is a form of conditioned reflex (famously demonstrated by Pavlov to rest on sound scientific principles). In its absence, encounters would be re-experienced as if it were for the first time. This would necessitate re-checking for danger signals at each encounter to differentiate friend from foe (as when a dog sniffs to identify an intruder). Reconditioning of the reflex allows for rational modification of undesirable behavior.

All creative art originates in the artist's mind, in the matrix of the brain, irrespective of the source of its inspiration whether it is a memory, a dream, a narrative, a subliminal urge, or some other stimulus. In fact, everything about fictional characters – emotions, ideas, dreams, aspirations, as well as bias – arise from the author. To make his characters credible, and his narrative meaningful, the writer must pay meticulous attention to all aspects of their construct and behavior. Just as he has to deal with the forces of love and hate, fear and sorrow affecting the protagonist, so must the author also attend to the issue of bias. Suppressing this potent force will subvert the entire work.

Although the potter's imprint always remains in the clay pot, he forever is distinct and separate.

I can't recall a work of fiction chiefly dealing with an author's bias. Perhaps one of us should write one?