

Mackenzie McAnear

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Annotation on “Some Dreamers of the Golden Dream”

Joan Didion manages to write as both a reporter and as a creative writer in “Some Dreamers of the Golden Dream.” She uses facts and creative license to create an authentic story while braiding the two together to make it compelling. In this paper, I will be dividing “Some Dreamers of the Golden Dream” into three sections: fact, creative license, and braided, and discussing how Didion manages to do this in a way that draws the reader in and keeps them engaged.

Didion paints a picture with facts and fills in the gaps with some creative licensing. Here is one passage that is all fact:

There is some confusion in Lucille Miller’s mind about what happened between 12:30 A.M., when the fire broke out, and 1:50 A.M., when it was reported. She says that she was driving east on Banyan Street at about 35 m.p.h. when she felt the Volkswagen pull sharply to the right. The next thing she knew the car was on the embankment, quite near the edge of the retaining wall, and flames were shooting up behind her. She does not remember jumping out. She does not remember prying up a stone with which she broke the window next to her husband, and then scrambling down the retaining wall to try to find a stick. (126)

This information can be found in a police report. It is by the book and reads like an episode of Dateline. It is interesting how facts can be so gripping all on their own. This factual passage paints an image for me as the reader. If this were an episode of Dateline, then this passage might

bring to mind grainy security camera footage of a small room containing Lucille Miller and an investigator. Then, there would be a shot of a car pulling sharply to the right and ending up on the embankment near the retaining wall. Everything is easily imaginable until I get to the part about trying to find a stick. A stick? The trance I was in broke, and I remembered that this was a true story, and as a true story, all the facts must be included, even the ones that are weird.

With most of this story being facts, the creative license is slim. The following are two of the most extensive sections of creative license I found. “Here is the last stop of all those who come from somewhere else, for all those who drifted away from the cold and the past and the old ways. Here is where they are trying to find a new life, trying to find it in the only places they know to look: the movies and the newspapers” (123). It is evident that this comes from the mind of the writer, not a factually based report. It is whimsical and thought-provoking. Facts can sometimes be considered thought-provoking, but it all depends on who the reader is. I, for one, love murder mysteries. I love going along with the story and getting invested in figuring out “who did it” before the narrator announces it. Sometimes, facts need creativity to engage a person. This is what lawyers do in the courtroom. They pull on the heartstrings of the jury and/or judge to sway them. That is what Joan Didion is doing here. “...a reasonable little dressmaker and who had come out of the bleak wild prairie fundamentalism to find what she imagined to be a good life—what should drive such a woman to sit on a street called Bella Vista and look out her new picture window into the empty California sun and calculate how to burn her husband alive in a Volkswagen” (128). What Didion does with this passage is she gets into the mind of Lucille Miller and goes through the process of what makes her tick and what might have led her to kill her husband.

With what little creative license Joan Didion uses, the way she braids it with facts is seamless.

This is the California where it is possible to live and die without ever eating an artichoke, without ever meeting a Catholic or Jew. This is the California where it is easy to Dial-A-Devotion, but hard to buy a book. This is the country where a belief in the literal interpretation of Genesis has slipped imperceptibly into a belief in the literal interpretation of Double Indemnity. (123)

This passage includes information that is only possible to include from someone who lives in California might know, or they might be well-known stereotypes. That is what makes this passage so unique. You cannot tell if it is all fact or just something that Didion made up for the story.

Since the passage above is so short, I included another section. The following is another passage of braided text. “Unhappy marriages so resemble one another that we do not need to know too much about the course of this one. There may or may not have been trouble on Guam, where Cork and Lucille Miller lived while he finished his Army duty. There may or may not have been problems in the small Oregon town where he first set up private practice” (125). It is clear to me that there are facts in this passage. A random person walking along the street would not have access to information like Cork and Lucille being at Guam, Cork being in the Army, or they once lived in Oregon. The braiding in this passage is not as smooth as in the previous one, but it is still braided. The fact that it is not braided smoothly means that I can also pick out where Joan Didion used creative license. The sentence about unhappy marriages is creative; no facts are given that state that all unhappy marriages resemble one another. The phrase “may or may not”

indicates a lack of evidence; therefore, the sentences “There may or may not have been trouble on Guam, where Cork and Lucille Miller lived while he finished his Army duty. There may or may not have been problems in the small Oregon town where he first set up private practice” have some amount of creative license in them (125). While both passages are braided texts of fact and creative license, the first shows how smooth the weaving was when I could not separate fact from fiction. The second passage is an excellent example of poor weaving. I could point out the facts, the fiction, and the places where Didion manages to braid them together.

What Joan Didion does with “Some Dreamers of the Golden Dream” is impressive. She recreates the story of a wife killing her husband using facts and a splash of creative license. The facts are facts, yet she manages to add an underlying layer of emotion to it. This is where the creative license comes in. Didion was meticulous in where she put it and weaved it into some of the facts. This was a fantastic piece to read and dissect.

Worked Cited

Didion, Joan "Some Dreamers of the Golden Dream." 1966.