

## *From the Kitchen*

23 March 2013

● This product is a precise and optical instrument,pleasing watch for to defeng the tide dust palliative, Doing not want to point to get in touch with the optical glass by hand,do not fall off to fall or hits.  
● In case that the immodesy makes dirty the optical glass,please use first to blow,the breeze brushes to use the dust clearance, then the soft and clena cloth wipes lightly,ifstill not clean, can use the lens puer try paper be stained with a little amount lens the pure trying the liquid wipe lightly.Besides pure try liquid excluding,the other do not use.

In the entertainment we watch on TV, we are used to there being a sliding scale between fiction and non-fiction. ‘Fictional’ stories are often ‘based on true events’ and documentaries can be ‘dramatised’ to make them more interesting.

This slide away from dispassionate reportage also exists with the written word. There is pure fiction: stories made up from the writers’ or other people’s imaginations. Such stories (whether short or novel-length) can also consist of material dredged up from, or skimmed off the top of, the unconscious, in which case they may be ‘based on true events’. There are also historical novels, which may be a dramatisation of documented historical events (akin to the dramatised documentary) or be concocted stories set amongst historic events, or using historical figures.

And then there is creative non-fiction, a relatively modern term for documentary writing with a touch of creative flair. It may be travelogue with interspersed passages of the writer’s subjective impressions or using a style that makes it a page-turner. It can also include speculation, authorial reminiscences and side-tracking. A master of creative non-fiction was David Foster Wallace (1962-2008), in, for instance, his collection, *Consider the Lobster* (2005, Little Brown & Co.); his writing style is as much an adventure as is the content of his essays.

I would class equipment manuals as non-fiction writing. I expect them to be the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth. However, some I have seen read like (bad) fiction; some use indecipherable language. One I have in front of me is for a special eyepiece for my camera. I quote from it:

- “This product is a precise optical instrument, pleasing watch for to defeng the tide dust palliative, Doing not want to point to get I touch with the optical glass by hand,do not fall off to fall or hits. [No, I’m not making this up.]
- In case that the immodesy makes dirty the optical glass, please use first to blow, the breeze brushes to use the dust clearance, then the soft and clena cloth wipes lightly,ifstill not clean, can use the lens puer try paper be stained with a little amount lens the pure trying the liquid wipe lightly.Besides pure try liquid excluding,the other do not use.
- The outward appearance pleases use the soft and clean cloth to wipe lightly,do not use the organism melting agent cleaning absolutely.”

The above is an extreme example of the difficulty many non-English speakers have when trying to render another language into comprehensible English. I am sure we could easily create similar nonsensical prose in converting English instructions into, say, Spanish, using only a dictionary, when a single word can have multiple meanings and idiomatic language is beyond our grasp.

Most autobiographical writing is creative non-fiction – we cannot guarantee that what we ‘remember’ actually happened. ‘Remember’, after all, means to ‘put back together’ (re-member). Clive James probably had it right when he called his contribution to the genre, *Unreliable Memoirs* (1980/2009, W W Norton & Co.).

Sometimes it is easier to turn ‘true’ events into a fictional account, especially if the ‘true’ events are hard to believe. If they involve people we know and who know us, especially if they are family or friends, a fictional work allows us to declaim, “I made it all up. If you see yourself in what I wrote, that is not my doing.” If you write a nasty character based on an ex-partner, it is unlikely that s/he will sue you – doing so would dispel all doubt in the minds of those who may suspect you are telling the truth.

Whether something is fiction, non-fiction or something in between, would only matter to a reader who wants to rely on it to make sense of the world. Imaginative writing can probably do that better than the other sort.