

*"Truth versus Fiction"*

Gary L. Stuart

December 9, 2002

From my perspective, there is no conflict between "fiction" and "truth." There is an enormous conflict between "facts" and "truth". Just as sworn testimony is often divergent, truth is many-sided. Emerson said the greatest homage we can pay to truth is to use it. But truth, like a bird, is always poised for flight at the approach of an author.

Some people see facts and truth as synonymous. They are not. In writing a historical novel, which is more important, literal truth or emotional truth? Which is the most ethical? While the answers vary depending on one's perspective, the biggest barrier is time. Literal truth spoken before its time is often harmful. Emotional truth spoken at the right time is often healing.

Honesty differs from truth. Truth is a matter of experience whereas honesty, like beauty, varies in its fashions. Any educated observer of political or cultural change knows how the nature of truth is changed by the garb it

wears. When clothed in friendship, truth is soft. But, wrapped in reproof, it sours.

The debate narrows nicely if one elects honesty as a guide rather than either emotional or literal truth. I believe that honesty, as an attribute of history, is essential. Especially when I'm writing historical legal fiction, I use real names, real facts, and real events in the telling of an honest legal story. Avoiding either the literal or the emotional truth by changing names or altering facts to protect feelings is not honest to the story.