

STORY, STRANDING PASSION AND REASON,
IS THE PRIMARY STUFF OF HISTORY,
RELIGION-AND-THEOLOGY, AND HOPE -----

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With its emphasis on storytelling theology-and-action, N.Y. Theol. Seminary is happy with the Oct/83 INTERPRETATION, which is entirely on this subject. I'm using a copy from my neighbor Gabriel Fackre, who did the "Overview" for this issue--followed by "Story and Story-World" by my PhD mentor, Amos Wilder.

1. When is a clock more interesting than an orange? When you're more in a hurry than hungry. Story, so theology, is for the hungry, not for the hurrying. In his THE CLOCKWORK ORANGE (novel and horror film), Anthony Burgess suggests we're in deep trouble because we're trying to eat our hurry and its products, and so remain--as a civilization and as persons--profoundly, though largely unconsciously, hungry. Note the irony (I.1): "You were not put on this earth just to get in touch with God." We are made for growth and sweetness, "to ooze juicily at the last round the bearded lips of God"; and against "a mechanical creation...I raise my sword-pen" (I.2). Here, story is a sermon on a word-text, "clockwork orange," which is an audacious conflate metaphor. The metaphor is the given, and the story is spun 'round it; whereas in the case of theology, story precedes metaphor, both are given, and what is spun is idea-exposition of both together. (Contrast philosophy, which seeks to penetrate both story and metaphor and spin its idea-structures on the "discovered" essence underneath both. If this essence is itself idea, we say "philosophy"; but if it is process, then we say "science." "Process philosophy/theology" tries to wed the two.)

2. Story serves polar functions: it cosmizes (i.e., provides a psychosocial ORDER for official and acceptable sense-making and traditioning--the conservative function), and it destabilizes (i.e., provides CHAOS-relief from what, when life feels too storgic-habitual, is experienced as oppressive order--the destructive function). (Sports are another form of relief: lived stories within the sphere of an artificial order, viz, "the rules of the game." Still another form of relief is prayer-worship, participation in the supernal order whose ordering stories in *illud tempore* critique all lesser orderings of life and so, alone, are truly radical. Fiction, which is like sports in that the ordering is artificial, is like the whole of life, which is its subject. Like fiction, fantasy uses our fictive power; but fantasy lacks fiction's discipline. INSTANCES: (1) "Camelot" was the American people's fantasy of the JFK White House (including his undisciplined sexuality); (2) Ingrid Bergman was the female parallel, explaining to 10-year-old Pia that you have to do your thing and don't you want Mama to live with whom she wants to live with? In her I.B.: MY STORY (Delacorte/80) she says order is uninteresting, so news is of disorder. This in letter to Pia (2Feb50, 169 BOOK DIGEST Nov/80), while in labor pains with a bastard: "I don't know why, but human beings seem to enjoy much more the bad stories than the good ones.... (While I was a faithful wife, the press took almost no notice of me.)" As a child she had Lutheran confirmation--but filled her head with movies and decided she'd live fiction ("artificial worlds," she called them). Psychiatric term: schizophrenia. Note "clockwork orange" parallel: Burgess is saying our lives are not human lives but machine-lives--shockingly revealed in the mindless, machinelike violence of the opening scene of the film.

3. In the Greek language, story is logos when actual, as in our phrase "actual history"; and mythos when transhistorical (divine/human) or legendary. The two words converge in the word for story-telling, viz. mythologia (not our "mythology," which is story-STUDYING rather than story-TELLING). For plot, our "story-line," Aristotle said mytheuma. On our true/false:history/myth distinction: we use "story" for both (true: "Give me the straight story"; false: "Don't tell me any stories!"), as early Greek used mythos and later Greek logos. But from Socrates' time forward, both poets and philosophers needed the true/false distinction and so made logos/mythos antonyms--the former=true story, historic truth, our "history" (from which, as antonym, we get "story"); the latter=fiction, legend, our

*Unless, of course, this thinksheet is barbarous, which I fear it is.

common meaning of "myth" and "legend." So "mythopoetic" (a favorite of Amos Wilder)=story-invention or (weaker) story-shaping (literally, "story-making"): one who does it, the *mythopoiios*, is a mythopoeist, a mythmaker, a fabulist. In another direction, the uncritical use of *mythos* yields *ta mytharia*="traditions," a word coined to explain *ta myste'ria*="mysteries"(natural enough, as the great stories probe the great mysteries of life). (In-joke of the ancients: if you derive *my-st.*, you have "mystery," from shutting eyes/mouth; but if you divide *mys-t.*, you have "mouse-holes"!) So important in counseling is the connecting of counselee with story that early-Christian speech has a number of *myth*- words with the prefix *para-* ("alongside"). Christians later acquired Hebrew, and so added the rich traditions of the Hebrew root NGD, from which we get "(h)aggadic"=pertaining to the story-strand of Torah-teaching-tradition (the other strand being "halachic"=pertaining to the apodictic, commanding)...The lexical study which is this section of this thinksheet is no arcane exercise: its about the heart of how the West thinks about the subject of this thinksheet (which reminds me: the Greek-Latin roots here can mean "the heart of" a story, deeper than its plot). And, since "story" is at the heart of theology, its about how theology is done among us, what are its feel and program(s).

4. All the above ruminations were in preparation for reading this issue of INTER-PRETATION, which now I read....Now I've read it, and here are some comments: (1) Story is to the soul what sacrament is to the body: contact with the Sacred. Both story (as spoken sacrament) and sacrament (as experienced story) have the power to deliver from rationalistic reductionism (Fackre, 340: "subservience to discursive reason"). (2) Suspicious Willis must observe that one motivator to "narrative theology" is the unbelieving theologian's desperate need to evade the question of truth by slipping (a) from theology into social psychology and (b) from (S.K.) the religious to the esthetic through the ethical (a ploy from which I exclude Fackre). (3) Story:sense-making::body:soul. "Meaning" is both the intent and the content of "sense-making," which is the narrator's ulterior task (entertainment being the polar task). (4) By attracting and orchestrating attention, story conducts community from memory through present experience to vision (hope). Formulaically, story: "reality"::community:Geist(the community's soul-spirit). (5) Idea-oriented clergy (e.g., white liberal) are impotent in comparison with story-oriented clergy (e.g., black preaching: M.L.King,Jr.'s "I have a dream" oration was more than "I have an idea," for it was fleshed out as eschatological mini-stories). (6) Bow:passion::arrow:reason. "An idea whose time has come" is a passion-engined idea (and thus the history-making power of King's oration). The first duty of preaching and of theology is to sort out the stories whose time has come and relate them mutually to life now and to the Story (the world-paradigm, *die Weltbild*--for me as an evangelical-radical thinker, the biblical Story). (7) The existential nerve of world-story is decision-making amid conflict and suffering. (8) Mere scribal exposition of book-story is notrelevant storytelling. Two instances of this error: (a) the Berlin World Congress on Evangelism, 1966, which I attended (crafted by Carl Henry with help from Billy Graham and others); and (b) Terry Fullam's MIRACLE AT DARIEN (I spending seven hours with him under Cape Cod Council of Churches a few days ago: 3Dec83). In early adolescence, I, too, used the Bible as magical papyri; soon, however, the memory of my father's integrity dissuaded me from this fraud, and I have ever since sought to teach as did my Lord Jesus, "not as the scribes" (Mt.7.29: proof-texting is a hangover from my fundamentalist days, and I'm tempted to feel as selfrighteous in my freedom from Scripture as I then felt in my freedom in and with Scripture). (9) Art can be fierce, but historically it is somewhat more gentle than theology. Amos Wilder, a pious (best sense), gentle, magnificent soul, I saw from time to time at meetings of an organization originally funded by Howard and Jane Spragg and inspired by Truman Douglass. Wilder's THEO-POETIC (Fortress/76) is far more than, although, an appeal for broad-richness against narrow-heresy-hunting in theology. I distinguish between this authentic effort to inform theology with literary criticism, on the one hand, and, on the other, the inauthenticity of "(2)" above. (10) Respect for humanity entails respect for story, which entails respect for language: Wilder, sensitive to word artistry, wrote "barbarous" once on a writing of mine--once was enough.*