

This thinksheet is some observations on my reading of "Story and Story-World" (353-64, Oct/83 INTERPRETATION), by AMOS WILDER, under whom I wrote a PhD thesis on the motivators early Christian leaders used as control-sanctions (to get believers to be pious and good). Behind these motivations are the motives of the leader (e. g., gratitude, faithfulness)...My title distinguishes between why a particular story is being told (i.e., what is the storyteller "up to") and, on the other hand, why are stories told (i.e., what is the human narrative drive)?

1. When more than dilettante, literary (here, story) criticism asks: (1) Does the story "transcribe not only the true texture of living but its transcendent horizons and promise"? (2) Does the story have "a taproot in the real," as we humans have and so can wrestle with "phantom worlds" (story worlds whose roots are only in dream or paranoia)? (3) Does the story dispel the sway of inferior story-worlds in which one has been held captive? (4) Does the story pander either to the appetite for sensationalism, which cheapens true feeling, or to the romantic-escapist reader who refuses to deal with the difficult, preferring wish-fulfillment to life-fulfillment? (5) How searching is the story's exploration of "happening"? (6) Does the story avoid the traps of language inertia, the constricted patterns and habituated channels of conventional narrativity, the seductions in imaging/imagining, and the idols of the heart? (7) Is the story distorted by illusions as malice distorts gossip and destruction-lust heightens violence? Is the storying robust or anemic? if the latter, "the storyline will be directed by wish and wish fulfillment, by syndromes and dramas of the psyche, rather than by engagement with the actual." (8) "How rooted and urgent is the impulse to world-making? To what parameters of our human nature is the storying responsive?" (9) What orientation-and-survival values does the story have (in light of the fact that these values lie in the root of storytelling wherever it has come into existence)? (10) Does the story help to clarify life's uncertainties--challenging mental habits, expanding our awareness of the possible in human experience, and so "orienting us more searchingly in the real givens of life"? (11) How does the story deal with specific life-assumptions and horizons, helping us in the qualitative human task of discriminating good from bad, better from good, best from better? (NB: Wilder is too good an artist merely to list this battery of questions, which I derived from his text--with some commentary of my own.) (12) What's in/out: is this the whole story (whether true/false)?

2. The fundamental motivation to story-making/telling is our profound interest, "which is much more than curiosity," in what happened. It's why we have reports and annals, legends, myths, fiction. Story, especially world-story, charts our way as does internalized memory the way of migratory birds. Yes, story entertains, fascinates, spellbinds; but, deeper, it speaks to "our own wrestlings with necessity and fatality."

3. Not all cultures have included story, which is only one means of communication. But developed storytelling correlates with two other developed senses: time and morality.

4. No art, including story, can be brushed aside as unreal. Story should not be reproached for departing from "actuality and realism. We should rather recognize that daily life itself is mysterious and dynamic." Indeed story's basic scenarios are so true-to-life, real, that they seem "dictated,...imposed." Further still, true story weaves familiarity (recognition) with surprise (novelty), as life does; and so the reader participates in the world-making, life-enhancing process. Imagined and remembered sequences converge. Again, there're no watertight compartments labeled "Record," "Fiction," "Imaginative Reconstruction": "Just as imagination shapes actual memory and factual recollection, so empirical experience enters into even our most fancied fabling."

5. Russell Hoban's RIDDLEY WALKER (on which see my #1600) is a story about story-making as connection-making and thus about the lifelong human project of sense-making. Story is one of many tools to help us understand "the web of 'happening'" in which we are caught. We grasp for connections to aid us in self-location in the flux of

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Additional distinctions: **GENRE** (folktales, fairytales, legends, parables, allegories--on the last, Mel Yosso's "trans-cultural allegories"); **THEATER OF ACTION** (ancient/modern, East/West, hut/palace, war/peace); **PLOTTING** (comedy/tragedy); **THEMATICS** (didactic, heroic, hagiographic).

time and the flood of being, in (Eliade) "the terror of history." Story helps memory structure impermanence and so provide "reassuring pattern or chart or story which can thus also illuminate the present and the future." As truly as does fact-recital, fiction-recital speaks to our deep demand to know the patterns of transactions; to understand connections, causes, consequences. Such a sorcerer as Carl Sagan, in his book (and subsequent TV series) COSMOS (Random House/80), weaves fact and (his world-story, atheist) fiction together with biographies of scientists--taking us out of ourselves while illumining our own experiences of, and powers to perceive, connections-causes-consequences--and so without really taking us outside of ourselves: would that the electronic church (if it had a worthy message) had such a genius storyteller! So poets are accounted magicians, and the poet-storyteller a double magician: I've just finished Longfellow's enchanting TALES OF A WAYSIDE INN, whose "Interlude"s let you see the effects the fabulist was trying to achieve. Important distinction: WORDSWORTH implies his stories are true-to-life but not necessarily true-to-"fact"; SAGAN is without any modesty in this matter: mystery is only undisclosed fact that science is on the way to disclosing--unlike the great Jacob Bronowski, whose TV series "The Ascent of Man" was spiritual as well as magical, Sagan would deny Wilder's assertion that even so-called scientific history floats in the "same ambiguous world of fabulation" as does poetry and fiction; it's all exploration at least of inner world, "responding to and organizing an inchoate fund of longings, anguish, obscurities, dreams," orchestrating "our most urgent impasses and gropings." "The story holds us because it lights up our own adventure." Fiction's "sequences and vicissitudes are woven of the same contingencies, surprises, and reversals which attend our own uncertainties." "Magic and miracle reflect our wrestlings with the bonds of the usual and with fate and limitation and transcribe the wider order of possibility which haunts our necessities."

6. Are the linguistic positivists right in saying that our only access to reality is by language, that "there is no 'world' for us until we have named and languaged and storied whatever is," that "our language worlds are the only worlds we know"? No, say Sam. Beckett's plays. No, says Wilder: while "in depth the really real is mysterious, elusive, and inexhaustible," there is "a prior sense for the real which pervades and tests all language and all stories." (NB: I judge this to be an implicate of biblical religion; and Wilder has been, as have I, primarily a biblical scholar.)

7. Since "control-literature" appeared in my PhD title, Seward Hiltner (during the oral) asked "Is all literature control-literature?"--the same trick-question type as Ernest Cadman Colwell's public question after a lecture of mine: "Does the NT have in it anything but problems?" No matter how we cut it, control is a motive and factor in all the arts. In the plastic and graphic arts, what is being controlled is SPACE (primarily by sight and touch): fabulation, the other control-orientation, seeks to master TIME. "All stories posit a scheme or order in the nowhere of the world." In the beginning,....": scene/horizon/succession in time are all set in the first words, promising to "answer to our gropings and light up our obscurities and confusions" as to who and where we are. It seems a fact of our nature that extensions in space and time must be brought under control; experience must be mapped. We must know what happened and how and why and (critically) whether. Religion deals with this fact and its severe limits: my PhD split "sanctions of consequence" (and thus calculable on the basis of *prag-ma*, which is Greek for "action-results") from "ultimate sanctions" ("musts" no matter the consequences--e.g., "the will of God"). As language, especially story, provides "a richer grasp" on reality (known and unknown) and jeopardy, articulating "the inchoate" and giving "a landscape for the cry," so --each in its own way--tool-making and building, dance and music, ritual and custom are controls. (Command, codified as law, is the most direct control-use of language.)

9. The *sine qua non* of oral or written narrating is the getting of attention and the holding of interest (the latter being Wilder's key word for the origin and performance of story). The ordinary, unusual, marvelous, creepy, or ridiculous unfold: we're interested in the unfolding, its beginning, its end, its intention (meaning). Interest is held by staging-setting, verbal rituals, body gestures, tone, rhythm, pace. Story-world "is our own world in a higher register."