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Telling Stories: An Interpretive Exploration of Telling Stories and of Stories Told

by

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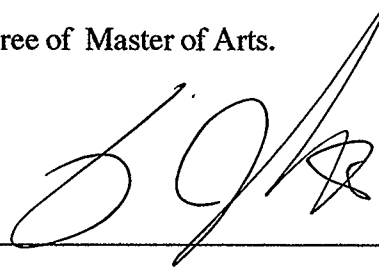
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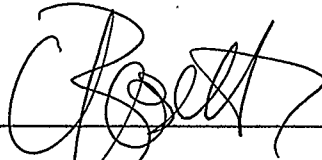
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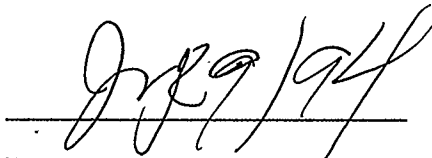
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ABSTRACT

I will tell you a story... begins the storyteller. And for an instant, there is silence-- an expectant, hopeful silence.

This paper is about the magic that is in the middle of that hopeful silence. It explores how stories are "telling" for those who hear them. It explores the ways in which stories seem to invite and involve its hearers. It explores also how stories are played in the "telling" of the story, by the tellers of story.

And it is about the ways in which the magic of the story has been banished in classrooms and churches, by those who would style "telling stories" as "telling lies."

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Chapter 1

Prelude

The organist takes his place. Chords from his prelude resound through the church. The people are arriving. The ushers hand them a service folder at the door; they take their seats. The folder will tell them about this day in the church year, it will list the hymns and the prayers. And it will say who is preaching today; it might give the title of the sermon. Satisfied, they close the service folder, settle the children with Cheerios and coloring books, and wait for the service to begin.

This is the prelude to *Telling Stories*. Some chords will be sounded; some that may be heard later in the paper. A sort of "service folder" will be provided; a menu of the acts that this paper will "act out." The menu is no substitute for the meal, but it does give an idea, a hint, a foretaste, maybe even a warning of what will come. On with the prelude.

I am the speaker in *Telling Stories*. I am a Lutheran pastor, familiar with organists and congregations and children with Cheerios. I am a Christian, a follower of Jesus. What will be said in this paper comes from that Lutheran tradition, that Christian pathway. So, I will not be the only speaker in *Telling Stories* but also the officiant who determines whose "turn" it is to speak. Speakers in the paper will include Biblical writers and religious scholars near to my own traditions. That is not to say that the paper is traditional. In part, it does revere that tradition. In part, it does protest against that tradition.

But this paper does speak from within that tradition quite intentionally. It speaks from that tradition intentionally because I believe the Christian narrative is, in David Smith's (1991) terms, a "suffocated narrative" (p. 199). It may be that the narrative of Christianity has been suffocated in response to the Church's own past attempts to be the only "truth," the "orthodoxy"--the "right belief" by which other narratives have been suffocated. But suffocated it is.

And the narrative needs to be heard. It needs to be heard because the world is constantly speaking words from the narrative without being willing to hear the narrative in which they are conversing. I am convinced that public schooling in Canada is deeply involved in the Christian narrative--or at least in the narrative that existed when the schools still knew that they were speaking it. For instance, the valuing of the mind/spirit over the body appears on every report card and in every time table; it is a valuing that has roots in the old Christian narrative of the "denial of the flesh." But such connections are not voiced, nor challenged. Even more significantly, while the Christian narrative has been changing, education, in refusing to hear the story it has been telling, remains entangled in the once unquestioned narrative of the denial of the flesh. Education is only one of the many institutions so entangled. The narrative needs to be voiced to give life to the places in which it is already entangled.

That same Christian narrative has also been separated from the other narratives by its own "people." The church has "ghettoized" herself, locked herself behind the walls of its own "Mighty Fortress," its own brick buildings dotting this country. Behind the walls, by itself, the Christian narrative is stagnating. This paper will attempt to escape those walls. This paper will attempt to hear the Christian narrative in conversation with other voices. Speakers are summoned from an array of other fields: educational researchers, psychotherapists, tribal chiefs, novelists, biblical scholars, linguists, historians, and anthropologists. The Christian narrative needs to be heard in the midst of other voices.

The paper is about "telling stories." Is it about the act of "telling stories?" Or is it about stories, that are "telling" --profound? Yes and yes. Each chapter is about the act of telling stories. And most chapters begin with a story in italics, a "telling story"--a telling story that is for telling.

The paper is interpretive research. The paper will not appear as the research that begins with a thesis statement, proceeds to a literature review, etc.. The paper is

interpretive research. It begins with a "telling story," a "hap," a profound "instance." It moves from the instance to explore the strands and the texture of the "instance." In the exploration, other "telling stories," other "haps," and other "instances," happened. This paper presents that exploration.

The nature of interpretive research is a part of this paper. For now, it is enough to say that this paper is about the importance of stories, tales, yarns, rhapsodies. So the exploration begins not with a thesis statement and a literature review, but it begins with, a story, a tellable, telling story.

So the organ music fades away and the people set down the service folder, the story teller moves to the center, and for a moment, the children set down their coloring books. The story breaks the silence....

Chapter 2

Setting Out: a telling story

There was once a home. In the home lived a father with his two sons. The younger son said to his father, "I am sick of this place. I am sick to death of you. Give me my inheritance now, so I can leave." So the father did. The father gave his son the share of the home property that would be his at the death of the father. The young man sold the land and the equipment. He bought a cherry red Corvette, packed into the car three things: his saxophone, his Television, and his stereo system --and at the last minute, he slipped a picture of the farm into his now bulging wallet--and drove away from home. The young man drove into the city. There he rented a penthouse. There he threw parties every weekend. There he met many people that he would call, "good friends." There he would spend money on himself and on his good friends. There he would find work playing music for local night clubs and bars. But then it began to happen. The economy failed. There was no work in the bars. His wallet emptied. His good friends disappeared. He had to give up his penthouse and found himself on the street, sleeping on a park bench at night, asking passers-by for a few dollars during the day. Then one day he opened his thin wallet and took out the old picture of the farm home. He said to himself, "Back home even the hired hands live in buildings; they eat a good meal each day. What if I go back to the old man and tell him: 'I'm real sorry;' tell him, 'I've been a bad sinner;' tell him, 'I'm not good enough to be called his son;' tell him, 'I'll be your hired hand if you'll let me.' Then maybe I can live better than this." So the son found a local clergyman and told him a story of how his father was dying and how he needed to get home but how he didn't have any money because you see, he had cancer and the drugs were expensive, and his wife was sick, and his baby boy

needed food. The pastor took him to the Greyhound bus station and paid his fare. On the bus the young man practised his lines. "Father, I have been wrong. Father I have sinned against you--no, lets say, against God and you (Dad always was into that religious bunk)--Father I have sinned against God and against you and am no longer worthy to be called your son. But let me come back as a hired hand." All the way home he practiced. All night the bus travelled. In the early morning the bus stopped at the side of the highway, and let off a ragged looking young man. He walked the mile of country road toward the farmhouse, practicing, practicing. "Father I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Let me be your hired man. Father I have sinned against heaven and against you. Let me be your hired man." Over and over. Then the young man looked up. A man was running toward him. He wore a house coat and slippers. Half his face was shaven the other was covered in shaving cream. He was crying. It was his father. The young man began, "Father, I have..." --but he made it no further. Strong arms embraced him. A familiar hand patted his back, stroked his hair. "My son. My son. You are home."

I have told this story in church. I have told it to children. I have told it to a class of Grade 11 students at Lester Pearson High School in Calgary. I tell it because it moves me--and I suppose because the movement feels good, or right or true. I tell it because it has to do with leaving and going home. It has to do with forgiveness and hope. It has to do with living and dying and living again. It has to do with God. I tell it because it quite apparently moves those to whom I tell it--though not everyone who hears it feels good about that movement. I tell it because it is a "telling" story.

It is a story based on a story or parable from the remembered stories told by Jesus, recorded in the Gospel according to Luke (15:11-32), lodged in the New Testament of the Christian Bible. I tell it not with the same words as Luke's Jesus told it. Because I notice

that it is more moving for myself and for the hearers in my own words. I am not sure why.

At the beginning of this exploration stands the experience of being a story teller, a religious story teller, telling religious stories often, but not always, in religious places. At the beginning stands a sense of the power that religious story has in influencing, educating the tellers and the hearers of story. At the beginning stands the experience of stories powerfully speaking different words to different people. I think also that the stories do not accidentally mean to speak different words--they mean to speak differently.

At the beginning I also have a sense that there are different kinds of stories. The parables of Jesus usually come without explanation--hearers are to find their own 'message'. The stories from 30-second television advertisements seem to provide one direct message, without apparently intending on a variety of responses from the hearers. Stories can and have become a technique in the exercise of power only, not in power with hearer-freedom that the parables seem to invite. What types of stories show themselves?

Two early conversations began to make some sense of story for me. One was with an article by Connelly and Clandinin (1990) who quote Stephen Crites in discussing research and narrative:

Crites [1986] wrote that a good narrative constitutes an "invitation" to participate.... Tannen (1988) suggested that a reader of a story connects with it by recognizing particulars, by imagining the scenes in which the particulars could occur, and by reconstructing them from remembered associations with similar particulars. It is the particular and not the general that triggers emotion and moves people and gives rise to what H. Rosen (1988) called authenticity (p. 8).

A second conversation on story came unexpectedly to me from the car radio. I was listening to Morningside on CBC. The host, Peter Gzowski was speaking to an Iroquois chief who had recited the Iroquois "Great Law" (Thomas, 1993). The recital would take

several days. The chief was asked if the constitution was written down anywhere. The chief replied that stories should not be written down because when you write down a story then the next one who tells it must tell it the same way. He can no longer make it his own story. Fascinating.

So, at the beginning, I am most interested in turning story over, exploring story. I am most interested in exploring how other people--from Iroquois chiefs to educational theorists--have told stories or thought about stories. I am interested in exploring how stories find their power. I am interested in exploring how stories are also able to be not-powerful, to allow the hearer a certain freedom to choose. I am interested in exploring the kinds of stories that people have noticed. I am interested particularly in exploring how this talking and thinking-about stories relates to religious story. And I am interested in how these conversations may be "telling" to me.

This is where I am, like a certain father's son long ago, as I set out.

Chapter 3

The Hyena: the meaning of the story

The hyena story began it all. It came up in class one morning, a simple story from the Nyanja people of Eastern Zambia. Like all hyenas this one was greedy but it had some reason to be because it had not eaten for several days. It ambled along the bush path desperate for food. The track divided. Which way should it go? The hyena hesitated. Then it lifted its head and sniffed to the right. Distant smells of food made its nostrils tingle. It began to move forward, then hesitated. Turning, it raised its head and sniffed the air again, this time to the left. There was food in that direction, too. What should the hyena do? It paused, turned right, hesitated and turned left, then right again...It could not decide, until finally it tried to go in both directions at once, split itself in two and died (Priestly, 1983, p. 378).

The meaning of the story

A story is told. As the last phrase of the story falls a question bubbles to the surface: "What does it mean?" The story seems to be a story about morality. It seems to have a sort of "point," or at least there is a sort of edge to the story that a listener feels. This chapter explores the sense of meaning in story.

Priestly's article tells the story of how the hyena story came to birth in his own context. The context was the Malcolm Moffat Teacher Training College at Serenje in the central province of Zambia. The school was made up of two main groups. One group of students was from the Copperbelt; they were "Westernized," wearing European suits, carrying briefcases. A second group of students was from the bush; they arrived in tribal dress, carrying no briefcases. The two groups listened to the story in the classroom. Priestly tells the story of the response to the hyena story:

It was truth we were talking about that day. Was the story true? It was greeted with mirth from the Copperbelt students who knew better than to listen to this old tribal nonsense. But their laughter caused consternation to others in the class.

"Yes, it is true," murmured one or two of the students from the bush. "Of course it is true." At this the joy of the homo Copperbeltus was complete. Tears ran down their cheeks as they saw the increasing discomfort of their fellows who continued to say only, "It is true, it is true." How was it true? Did they believe it actually happened once upon a time? The question was received with bewilderment. Such a thought had not even occurred to them (p. 378).

Fascinating. Somehow, the tribal story had existed without a "moral" in the style of an Aesop fable. Yet the story was told and was passed on, because the story was valued. Something in it mattered. Priestly observed that the discomfort of the bush students continued to build until:

Finally it came in a rush. "It is true," exploded one student in some agitation, "It is true. Greed kills " (p. 390).

What happened? Did the bush people not understand the story before, and now they finally did? If that were the case, why would they tell this then-meaningless story to their children for generations? And now that the story meant, at least to these students, "Greed kills," was there any further need for the story? Priestly again:

I stood at that moment at the parting of two cultures, the process of demythologising at work before my eyes. A story that had conveyed its truth indirectly to countless generations had had to be translated into the direct propositional language of a new, scientifically based culture. The hyena might continue to exist for a little while but his status was severely diminished. From being a conveyor of moral truth he would become at best a piece of harmless

entertainment..."Greed kills" was the essential message, its articulation regarded as the high point of moral cognitive development (p. 381).

Priestly explores in education and particularly in religious education, how story is mistrusted. Something that is "only a story" is suspect. If someone is said to "tell stories" it is implied that he exaggerates, distorts, or lies. Something else is apparently more reliable than stories. Priestly says that for Western culture, that more reliable *something* is the propositional statement. "Greed kills" is assumed to be more dependable than the story of the hyena. There seems to be a trust in the West of the intellectual idea, such that education in general undertakes the task of analyzing a story to discover its main idea, its truth. Priestly's argument is particularly with religious educators who would analyze the story to its "truths" and communicate the truths to children. For these educators, the truth-- read "propositional statement"-- is reliable. The story is not.

Priestly says that there is a striking difference between encountering a story and encountering a propositional statement. A propositional statement separates, "the intellectual from the affective, the moral concept from the moral action" (p. 384). But, Priestly adds, knowing the moral concept may simply widen the gap between what I know to be morally right and what I actually do in moral situations. Priestly adds this telling statement about the effect of a story that is well told:

I have been the hyena, felt his hunger, experienced his greed, known his inner state of mind and have been destroyed (p. 384).

"I have been the hyena." Priestly argues that hearing stories, "enables us to experience life vicariously and holistically" (p. 385). Being the hyena allows listeners to the story to grow in, "self-knowledge acquired within the total context of doing and being " (p. 385). Priestly argues that his own insistence on having the students speak the "meaning" of the story after it was told, had moved the story from learning by "experiencing life vicariously" into learning by remembering a propositional statement. He

argues that the story of the hyena would be a more effective *method* of delivering the meaning "greed kills" than the propositional statement itself.

Story as method

Story as an effective method of teaching is a common theme in the literature on story. Vitz' article in the *American Psychologist* (1990) begins by noting the decline of morality in the United States.

Consider the following findings only for Whites--our more advantaged population--because these shifts are unrelated to racial discrimination or to poverty.

Specifically, the rates of male adolescent death by homicide and suicide increased by 441% and 479% respectively, between the mid 1950's and 1984...During roughly the same years (1940-1985), the rate of out-of-wedlock births to adolescents rose by 621% (p. 709).

He also cites enormous growth in the use of drugs, pornography, and high levels of sexually transmitted disease as further evidence of "social pathologies."

Vitz then examines the nature of moral education as one falling, "generally into two components: the method of teaching and the content of what is taught " (p. 709). He then advances the use of stories as a more effective method for moral education.

Vitz notes that Jerome Bruner (1986) had proposed that mental life is characterized by two qualitatively different modes of thought: "propositional thinking" and "narrative thinking."

Propositional thought consists of logical argumentation aimed at convincing one of some abstract, context-dependent truth... By contrast, narrative thought presents concrete human and interpersonal situations in order to demonstrate their particular validity. It is a description of reality, and it is a way of seeing that aims at verisimilitude (Vitz, p. 710).

Put differently, the story and the propositional statement Priestly noted in this view belong to two different modes of thinking: the hyena story to narrative thinking; "greed kills" to propositional thinking.

Vitz continues to explore psychological works on stories. Vitz draws on social psychologist Theodore Sarbin (1986) who makes a "strong case for the relevance of story as a general metaphor for understanding human conduct"--over the "limited utility" of mechanistic model of social psychology. Sarbin, says Vitz, argues that "people typically interpret their life as a story or narrative " (p. 710). Vitz then cites Robinson and Hawpe (1986) concerning the special importance of story:

First where practical choice and action are concerned stories are better guides than rules or maxims. Rules and maxims state significant generalizations about experience but stories illustrate and explain what those summaries mean...Stories also can be used as tests of the validity of maxims and rules of thumb...Stories are natural mediators between the particular and the general in human experience.

(Work cited in Vitz, p. 711.)

His conclusion from these and other studies, is that the moral life of people operates in the context of personal narrative rather than in the realm of maxims and propositional statements. Given that conclusion, working with narrative is promoted as a more effective method of teaching the content of morality.

In other areas the powerful method of story is also coming to be affirmed. In education, Kieran Egan's (1986) work sets out to use stories:

This book is an attempt to design a model that draws on the power of the story form and uses that power in teaching (p. 2).

In the work, Egan portrays how a story model could be applied "across the curriculum." In the work on Social Studies for example, the story of the conflict of capitalism and communism is to be taught by designing the lesson around the "binary opposites" of

freedom/equality. The lesson would explore--through the use of story-- capitalism tending to value freedom more than equality, with communism tending to value equality more than freedom (p. 67).

All-- Priestly, Vitz and Egan-- call for the use of story as method--even as superior method--to the use of non-narrative methods. The content each would deliver still could be summarized in some form of a propositional statement: Homicide, suicide, pregnancy out of wedlock, and pornography are forms of social pathology; communism values equality more than freedom, capitalism values freedom more than equality; Greed kills. All call for story as a more effective method of delivering a certain more or less definite proposition.

But Priestly said that when the story is heard: "I have been the hyena." Experiencing life vicariously as the hyena may indeed mean "greed kills." For one of the bush students at least, and for Priestly himself the story was experienced as "greed kills." But if "I have been the hyena" other experiences are possible.

I told the hyena story to a colleague in Canada. For him hearing the story meant something about the importance of making choices as someone at a crossroads in his career. It meant something of the tension of making choices. It meant something about needing to choose in spite of how limited the knowledge of the future along either path. It meant dire consequences for being unwilling to choose.

If, "I have been the hyena," the hyena-that-is-me may experience the story in strikingly different ways. If, "I have been the hyena," the hyena-that-is-me could experience "greed kills." But the hyena-that-is-me could also experience something of the importance of making career choices. The hyena-that-is-me may also experience the danger of living in a country where two different pathways, two different cultures are beckoning. It could mean something about trying to be Western and Zambian at the same time--ironically a situation Priestly described within his own classroom but isolated from the hyena story.

As a method of delivering content, the story may be more "effective" as Priestly argues. But it is also *less* reliable. Story as method may not produce the content anticipated. The hyena story may deliver anything from "greed kills" to the importance of career decisions, to the difficult struggle of being Zambian. "Greed kills" delivered as a propositional statement will deliver "greed kills." It is a controlled message (however less effective than story the propositional statement method may be). The method of story may be a powerful method of delivery but the content delivered may be wildly different from the content intended. Story as a method is rather wild and unpredictable--like a wild hyena at the crossroads.

Still, story also has a certain vitality. Priestly noticed that his own insistence on the students speaking the meaning of the hyena story drained the story. The story interpreted into the propositional statement no longer had its vitality. It loses the ability Priestly describes as allowing a listener to "experience life vicariously and holistically." A separation from life happens.

The movement toward story as a preferred method by Priestly, Vitz, Egan and others, recognizes the power of the story and also recognizes the flatness of the propositional statement. But, it is a strange and twisting logic. On the one hand, story is to be preferred as method because of its vitality, its capacity to grant the vicarious experience of life over the flatness imposed by the methodical use of the propositional statement. But for these writers, story is to be the preferred method to deliver the flat propositional statements of content: greed kills; homicide, suicide, teenage pregnancy out-of-wedlock, and pornography are forms of social pathology; communism values equality more than freedom, capitalism values freedom more than equality.

But something is happening with story well beyond the use of story as simply a more powerful *method* of delivering *content*. The nature of story seems to also challenge

the delivery of flat propositional content. Indeed, the nature of story seems to preclude the delivery of a given propositional statement.

The nature of story

"I have been the hyena," said Priestly. Connelly and Clandinin (1990) have earlier in this paper cited Stephen Crites (1986) on participation in story:

Crites [1986] wrote that a good narrative constitutes an "invitation" to participate (p. 8).

It is in Stephen Crites exploration of story that both the "I have been the hyena" of story as well as the "greed kills" of story, become more readable.

Crites (1971) work weaves its way around his conviction that "the formal quality of experience through time is inherently narrative" (p. 292).

The argument begins with Augustine's distinction between remembering and recollection. For Augustine, in each person exists a well of memory in which are the collected images of things seen and experienced. Crites (1971) calls this the "chronicle" of memory (p. 299). It is out of this chronicle that recollection, and story happens.

Detached from things and lodged in memory, along with inner impressions of feeling and mood, these images are susceptible to the uses of thought and the play of imagination. Called up by the activities of the mind, they can be dismantled and reassembled or combined in original ways (p. 299).

Recollection is the re-collection of these memories into a meaningful order.

The most direct and obvious way of recollecting it [memory] is by telling a story, though the story is never simply the tedious and un-illuminating recital of the chronicle of memory itself. . . .I can abstract general features and formal elements of it [memory] for purposes of theory, or suspend it in order to draw a picture, or splice episodes from it in a way that gives them new significance (p. 300).

Crites (1971) attempts to recount an incident in his childhood, trying he says, to be "as faithful as possible to the memory itself."

I measure out "a long time" and recall an episode from my childhood...In an impetuous fit of bravado I threw a rock through a garage window. I recall the exact spot on the ground from which I picked up the rock, I recall the wind-up, the pitch, the rock in mid-air, the explosive sound of the impact, the shining spray of glass, the tinkling hail of shards falling on the cement below, the rough stony texture of the cement. I recall also my inner glee at that moment, and my triumph when a playmate, uncertain at first how to react, looked to me for his cure and then broke into a grin...Then I recall that moment in the evening when I heard my father's returning footsteps on the porch and my guilty terror reached a visceral maximum the very memory of which wrenches a fat adult belly--for remembering is not simply a process in the head (p. 301).

The details of the event, he says, have been a part of many stories that he has told of his own life. The details are re-collected with other pieces in the chronicle of memory to form stories. And the story of the event changes as other events are added to the chronicle of memory and added to the story. As a result the story of the rock-throwing changes in the re-collecting after other events occur. The story would change after the author read Freud's work on the relationship of sons and fathers. It would change after the birth and childhood of his own children. The story would change after the death of his own father (p. 301). Crites observes that even in his attempt to simply recount the chronicle of memory in the paper, a story begins to form, "recollection" intervenes, a re-ordering of the events happens by itself.

Crites is speaking for the "narrative quality of experience." He does not speak for the narrative quality of actual events. But the "narrative quality of experience" means that

when those events are re-collected, ordered, and spoken of as "experience," the form is naturally that of narrative. The form of experience is the story.

Crites' work portrays story as basic, fundamental, primary. The story is grass-roots; it resides intimately with the experience of the event. Its proximity to experience gives the story a nearness to reality that is not available to the propositional statement. Crites (1975) would call story the "first-order language" of experience (p. 31).

Within Crites' discussion of story as "first-order language" other facets of story become visible.

Facets of story

Stories are laden in meaning. Their very purpose is for people to "articulate and clarify their sense of the world " (Crites, 1971, p. 302), whether that is in the daily story of where I have come from and where I am going, or in a story told in ancient myth. The story may be the teller's making sense of himself in the world. It may be one offering a sense of discovered meaning to another: the father telling a story to his children, the teacher to her students, the singer to his audience, the pastor to her congregation. The story may be deeply laden in meaning, or may be content to play at the surface.

The language of story is concrete rather than abstract. It uses the ordinary language of pathways and hyena and rocks and windows. It is the language that describes what we ordinarily recognize as real, and with which we are trying to live.

Story can articulate the unexpected, the temporary, the not-yet-here, the this-might-or-might-not-be, of experience. There is a tension in story. The hyena stands at the crossroads. Which way will he choose? Or which way will the hyena-that-is-me decide to choose?

Crites pictures in telling his childhood event what David Smith (1988) calls "the fundamental ambiguity of narrative " (p. 281). The story of the rock through the window

would change in meaning even in the mind of the teller of the story. The hyena story may mean many things to different listeners, even to different cultures. The meaning of the story, even the way the story was shaped would not stand still in time. The story is ever interpretable.

The story is or at least, may be evocative. The story teller, "delivers over in their stories what they knew in their bones. Insofar as their stories have evoked a shock of recognition in the audience, it is clear that this bone-knowledge is not a private idiosyncrasy of the storyteller " (Crites, 1975, p. 30). Evocation also brings the possibility of non-evocation. The stories come out of experience and may or may not evoke recognitions in the listener.

The story is "populated" (Crites, 1975, p. 26). Even death or Eros must appear in the story as a person.

The narrative form...is precisely what evokes for us the sense that we are encountering real persons...Persons are incarnated in stories. Let a genuine story unfold and the flesh and blood will materialize of itself (p. 30).

The story seems to make persons, "come alive." The hyena comes alive in the Zambian story. The young Stephen Crites rock-in-hand comes alive even in his restrained story. Something is happening in the story which may well be beyond description let alone explanation. Beings come alive. There is a sort of magic in story.

Even the common words about story reveal an involvement in magic.

To represent means to have a kind of magical power over appearances, to be able to bring into presence what is absent, and that is why writing, the most powerful means of representation, was called "*grammarye*," a magical act (Tyler, 1986, p. 131).

Story may be magical; story may cast a spell (Doty, 1975).

Story has magic: *mu*, mythos--sound of the lips, into "world," "tale," and then "mythology"--the spellbinding of Hermes...The magic--spell-ing (Anglo-Saxon *spel*, a saying, tale, charm (p. 94).

Story may be magical; story may cast a spell. The story may cast a good spell, white magic; or an evil spell, black magic. The story may enchant you. It may haunt you. Regardless, the power of the story--for good or ill-- is reflected in the background to "grammar" and "spelling."

Also within the word "tale" the magic is felt. The fairy tale. The ugly duckling is really a swan. The frog is really a prince. The drudge Cinderella magically becomes a princess. Gullible Jack's fall and fortune come to him in the magical bean-stock. Magic. Enchanting. Yet also in wondrous enchantment of the "tale" the difficult-to-believe nature of story is seen. Can this magical tale be true?

Story may rather easily be described as a "first-order language of experience" that uses ordinary simple words to evoke meaning, tension, ambiguity, and temporality. What may not be easily described is the story's magical ability that brings to birth living beings. The lost son. The hyena. The young Stephen Crites. This magic is what brings Priestly to make this nearly unbelievable statement:

"I have been the hyena."

It is a nearly unbelievable statement, yet also --strangely -- a common experience for those who have listened to stories.

"I have been the hyena."

Interpretation

But what of interpretation? What of "greed kills?" In two articles Crites handles the interpretations given to story in somewhat different ways. In his 1975 article, Crites describes interpretation of stories as a "second order" language.

Of course we do sometimes don our white coats or philosophical mantles and employ abstract language. Then we do not speak of things in our immediate experience, bottles boards, or the neighbourhood grouch, but of quite different kinds of things, e.g., the chemistry of the blood, Being itself, logical fallacies, the genre of the realistic novel. But such second order language is employed in order to interpret or explain phenomena to which we gain primary access in first-order language, in narrative language in particular (p. 31).

Second order language, says Crites, is legitimately applied to the first order language of story. (He admits that the very article he has written is "second order" language about the nature of story.) But second order language is always second. If a theorist pronounces a certain story to be illusion based on his particular study, the "acid test" of his pronouncement, says Crites, will be the study's effectiveness, "in explaining the vivid appearance of the illusory phenomena we can tell stories about " (1975, p. 31).

Consequently the second order interpretations and explanations and meanings given to stories are constantly giving way to the next new second-order theory of each new generation. While the stories remain.

In the 1971 article Crites insistence on the secondary nature of interpretation becomes more readable, also more urgent. Stories because of their direct connection to the "illusory phenomena" of the real world are in a privileged position to portray the real world. But this privilege also gives the story its "fundamental ambiguity" that gives rise to difficult questions. If the story is all that is true then what can be said with certainty? What can be said today that will be true tomorrow? What if there are other stories different from this one? Crites portrays the use of abstract language here as a modern strategy of gaining certainty over the "relentless temporality" of story through the strategy of "abstraction."

Abstraction is to detach images and qualities from experience to become "data" for the formulation of generalized principles and techniques. The power to abstract makes, "explanation, manipulation, control possible" (p. 309).

The temporal stories are studied, analyzed, and separated into their own elements. The stories are abstracted into "data," which can be controlled and manipulated.

Abstraction means that the hyena story now may be analyzed to mean, for all times and in all places: "greed kills." Now it becomes possible to simply teach "greed kills" as a propositional truth. It becomes possible to test a classroom of students on their ability to explain the maxim "greed kills." Various methods may be experimented with to produce the desired result. And story itself may be returned to as a method of delivering "greed kills." So "greed kills" could be manufactured in students. This fictional scenario in one way or another has a familiar ring.

Hillman (1983) criticizes the use of the image in psychotherapy in a similar fashion, here using the language of iconoclasm:

The iconoclast attack upon the image...takes place not only in the concrete smashing of statues, burning of altars, defacing of icons. We continue the iconoclast habit and destroy images in religion and literature through allegory and in psychology through conceptual interpretation. (This kitten in your dream is your feeling function, this dog, your sexual desire, this great snake coiled in the corner is your unconscious, or mother, or anxiety.) The image is slain and stuffed with concepts or vanishes into an abstraction (p. 71).

The kitten, the dog, the great snake of dreams, and the hyena of story are "slain" or "stuffed with concepts" or "vanish" completely in the process of abstraction.

Abstraction gives to experience a coherence that is apparently resistant to change. Greed kills; greed always and in all places kills. Money talks. Money at all times and in all places talks. Coke adds life. Columbus discovered America in 1492. Water is two

parts hydrogen and one part oxygen. Jesus saves. Facts. Slogans. Propositions. Truths. Slain images.

The abstract language of interpretation appears as a threat to story. Crites calls for holding back abstract interpretation as a second-order language. If interpretations are spoken they need to be spoken with the understanding that the story is first-order language. Otherwise, abstraction moves even to capture the story in the interest of permanence and controllability. And the story, as Priestly noticed at the beginning of this chapter, is drained of its life-blood.

Pathways

A story is told. As the last phrase of the story falls a question bubbles to the surface: "What does it mean?" The story seems to be a story about morality. It seems to have a sort of "point," or at least there is a sort of edge to the story that a listener feels.

A hyena stands at the pathways. It does seem to mean something. And it does seem to mean more than "greed kills." Propositional statement, abstraction, and second-order language seem to do little service to the story, or to the people who wonder about it.

A hyena stands at the pathways. Evoking. Enticing. Seducing. Promising possibilities greater than the learning of maxims, facts, truths, meanings.

To understand a text is not to find a lifeless sense which is contained therein, but to unfold the possibility of being indicated by the text (Ricouer, 1981, p. 56).

Inside the story, we are aware of danger. Stories invite us in, to be a wild hyena. A story invites us in to stand on the pathway and peer ahead. A story alerts us to the mouth-watering wonders and perhaps the dire dangers ahead. And warns us that the consequences of not choosing a path are the most dire of all.

Then again, the story invites us also if we wish, or if we must, or if we can, to decline the invitation.

Come with me to 1492-- if you will.

Chapter 4

1492: and the story to end all stories

In 1492 Columbus discovered America.

This statement appears at the head of this chapter. Of course it is "not a story." I learned this statement as a fact in about 1962. I memorized it. We all memorized it. My friend, Ted, a native Indian from the Muskoday Indian Reserve who sat across from me in class, also memorized it. We memorized it together so that we would be able to write when asked, "Who discovered America?": Christopher Columbus. "When did he discover it?": 1492. We both wrote it down, Ted and I. And we had to write it down. We would be marked on it. It was a fact. It was part of Social Studies. We needed to memorize it with all the other facts in order to move on to the next grade.

The fact of 1492 is turned inside-out by Kurt Vonnegut (1973) in his often bizarre novel *Breakfast of Champions*.

Teachers of children in the United States of America wrote this date on blackboards again and again, and asked the children to memorize it with pride and joy: 1492. The teachers told the children that this was when their continent was discovered by human beings. Actually, millions of human beings were already living full and imaginative lives on the continent in 1492. That was simply the year in which sea pirates began to cheat and rob and kill them. Here is another piece of evil nonsense which children were taught: that the sea pirates eventually created a government which became a beacon of freedom to human beings everywhere else...Actually, the sea pirates who had the most to do with the creation of the new government owned human slaves. They used human beings for machinery, and even after

slavery was eliminated, because it was so embarrassing, they and their descendants continued to think of ordinary human beings as machines (p. 11).

As Vonnegut portrays so pointedly the facts of 1492 are not as clear as the statement on the teacher's blackboard. Granted, the 1492-Christopher Columbus-America discovery fact has no doubt been questioned on more recent school blackboards and in more recent school texts--although there still was a huge 500 year anniversary celebration of the discovery by Columbus in 1992. This chapter is not as interested in debating the fact or not-fact of 1492, but rather in exploring how the statement may be a telling story.

Storying 1492

1492. In teaching religion to teen-age students, I have often been engaged in the telling of the stories of the Bible, and in particular those of Jesus. Involved in that telling, is answering this question: "When did Jesus live?" I ask them in return: "What year is it now? " They reply with the year, 1994. I ask, "When did Christopher Columbus sail?" 1492. "What does that mean?," I ask. "1994 what? 1492 years since when?" With few exceptions the reply is, "I don't know." They have heard of 1492 in school, but have never heard of A.D. *Anno domini* is not a familiar term. Nor was it for me, or for Ted in our school, nor apparently in the school of the young Kurt Vonnegut. Fascinating.

To say 1492 A.D. would be to place the event of Columbus inside a certain story, even a certain Grand Story, the story of the Christian era. It is a story that begins with a child born in Bethlehem of Judah. It is a story that views itself also as belonging with the stories that are in Judaism's Torah--that are numbered B.C.. It is a story that includes the adventures and mis-adventures (including "piracy") of the Christian church. It is also a story that includes stories that the teller knows came after 1492: the reformation, the settling of North America, and the rise (and often fall) of the television evangelists, and many more. It is also a story that awaits the second-coming of the same Jesus, while numbering

the years along the way. Placing the story in "A.D." relates the event intimately to the story of Christianity, to stories past, present, and future. But A.D. is not written on the blackboard. Only the number: 1492.

But the un-saying of A.D. may be told as a part of still another sort of story. Not-saying A.D. bespeaks a certain reluctance in the story-teller to acknowledge Christian roots. It bespeaks a movement away from the *anno domini* of 1994 for reasons that remain generally unspoken.

And that silent and unexplained un-saying is also telling. Apparently this Grand Story that perhaps is difficult to speak is also difficult for the teller to finally and explicitly discard.

Very strangely the statement "1492" speaks the number of A.D. but not of the story from which the number finds its meaning. 1492 that had sounded so factual and numerical now appears as having a part in many stories including at least the story of Christianity, and the story of the movement away from Christianity, and the story of the difficulty, even of the hesitancy of that movement away.

Telling 1492 A.D. as a story within a Grand Story may include many stories that I would rather not tell. Some of the stories are of the cruelty of the Christian church that is my home. Some of the stories are of kin that I would rather not acknowledge. Some of those kin are closely involved in the story of 1492 as Bob Rock and Paul Hyde put to music.

The universe is a bulging purse,
for greedy little hands,
the conquerors have stole away
the gold from far off lands,
And God was there, yes He was there
the flag held high his name,

and all men would be civilized,
And murder's the game.

The unexplored was to be deplored,
for they were savage men,
to pagan shores the ship set sail,
all evil to condemn,
and He was there, yes He was there,
seeking wealth and fame,
and all men will be civilized,
And murder's the game (Rock & Hyde, 1987).

There are many tales bound up with the very factual sounding 1492. Tales that the schoolroom blackboard could not or would not tell.

Storying "discovery"

Discovery is also 'tellable'. As Kurt Vonnegut raised, how can a land be discovered when there are already millions of "human beings" living there? How could Ted sit beside me and learn that when my European people came to the land where his people had been living, the land was then discovered? Again the story of discovery is untold. And the story of why "discovery" is not told is also untold. "Discovery" is written on the blackboard. We were to memorize it. We were after all learning facts, not stories.

Storying "discovery," very like storying "1492" also places the statement, "Christopher Columbus discovered America in 1492" within a Grand Story. Morris Berman (1981) notes that this Grand Story is "in the air we breathe." He calls the story "the Cartesian paradigm" after the Renaissance philosopher Rene Descartes (p. 24).

It is of course impossible to summarize Berman's work here--even as it would be impossible to tell all of Christianity's story in telling the story of A.D. But a sense of the work may be in Berman's telling of another story within the Cartesian paradigm, the experiment by Galileo at the Tower of Pisa.

Galileo is popularly remembered for conducting an experiment at the Leaning Tower of Pisa. He is popularly remembered for dropping two objects of different weights from the top of the tower. He actually did not conduct that experiment (Berman, 1981, p. 38). He did conduct an experiment about falling objects of different weights rather in a laboratory experiment using two inclined planes, juxtaposed. The ball would be set at the top of one plane to roll down that plane and up the other, and back again, and so on. Berman tells the tale:

The experiment Galileo designed to measure distance against time was a masterpiece of scientific abstraction. To drop weights from the Leaning Tower, Galileo realized, was absolutely useless. Simon Stevin, the Dutch physicist, has tried a free-fall experiment in 1586 only to learn that the speed was too fast for measurement. Thus, said Galileo, I shall "dilute" gravity by rolling a ball down an inclined plane, made as smooth as possible to reduce friction. If we were to make the slope steeper by increasing the angle α (of the plane)...we would reach the free fall situation that we seek to explore at the limiting case, in which $\alpha=90$ degrees, and let it serve as an approximation. Galileo first used his pulse as a timer, and later a bucket of water with a hole in it to drip at regular intervals. By running a series of trials, he finally came up with a numerical relationship, that distance is proportional to the square of time. In other words, if an object--any object, light, or heavy--falls a unit distance in one second, then it falls a distance of four times that in two seconds, nine times that in three seconds, and so on. In modern terminology, $s=kt^2$, where s is distance, t time, and k a constant (p. 39).

Galileo's experiment embodies the sense of reality that reflects the work of Rene Descartes--the Cartesian paradigm, which also reflects a view of reality dominant today.

Galileo's experiment set out to determine with certainty the relationship between falling balls of different weights. Descartes:

There is a conviction when there remains some reasons which might lead us to doubt, but scientific knowledge is conviction based on an argument so strong that it can never be shaken by any stronger argument (Letter to Regius cited in Bordo, 1987, p. 24).

The knowledge that is sought is to be certain, unchanging, and undoubtable. "Fact are facts." "You can't argue with the facts." "Hard data." Scientific "fact" is to be rock solid, unshakeable, un-arguable, permanent.

Galileo's experiment begins with the assumption that all previous stories and wisdom were questionable, uncertain. Berman quotes Descartes:

I had the best education France had to offer ... yet I learned nothing I could call certain...As far as the opinions which I had been receiving since my birth were concerned, I could not do better than to reject them completely for once in my life time" ...Descartes' goal is not to "engraft" or "superinduce" but to start anew (p. 32).

Today's Cartesian paradigm still is dominant. "Debunking" by discarding "old wives tales" and "folk remedies" and "primitive myths" by starting from "scratch" remains a default approach to questions from how to build a better house, to how to find a mate. Knowledge that is "unscientific" tends to be discarded.

Galileo set out to examine the relationship of falling balls of different weight by contriving a machine of inclined planes, by manipulating the balls into the machine, and by distancing himself from the action of the balls in the machine. Berman describes Descartes view of "objectivity."

Subject and object are always seen in opposition to each other...everything is an object, alien, not-me; and I am ultimately an object too (p. 17).

Today's research still attempts to preserve the "contamination" of the result by the interest of the experimenter. The Cartesian paradigm requires objectivity, which means making "objects" of the entities under scrutiny and of the experimenter, and keeping them apart.

Galileo's experiment in treating the balls as objects, placing them in a machine, and in submitting the "objects" to a method of repeated tests assumes that other balls of the identical shape and weight and in the same "machine" would behave identically. Berman again describes the "atomistic" and "mechanistic" nature of Cartesianism.

Man's activity as a thinking being--and this is his essence, according to Descartes--is purely mechanical. The mind is in possession of a certain method. It confronts the world as a separate object. It applied this method to the object, again and again, and eventually it will know all there is to know. The method, furthermore, is also mechanical...Subdivide, measure, combine; subdivide, measure, combine....The method may properly be called, "atomistic," in the sense that knowing consists of subdividing a thing into its smallest components. The essence of atomism, whether material or philosophical, is that a thing consists of the sum of its parts, no more and no less (p. 35).

The Cartesian paradigm today operates in the laboratories where inclined planes and other machines are still used. It arguably operates also in the treatment of labor at factories. It may operate also in the treatment of students in educational institutions. "If student x is given curriculum y then learning z should occur."

Galileo's experiment set up the observation of the relationship between the free fall of different weights without actually observing free fall. The relationship was considered by measurement and by the application of reason and mathematics. Berman again on Descartes:

Science, says Descartes, must become a "universal mathematics"; numbers are the only test of certainty (p. 33).

Today's faith in quantitative research in one form or another continues. "Number don't lie." "We need to do some number-crunching." "Statistics say." And so on.

Galileo's experiment allowed the involvement of the experimenter only as mathematician and as thinker. Otherwise the experimenter was an object separate from the other objects of the experiment. This "objectivity," is also reflected in Descartes. For Descartes participation of the mind is allowed because of "dualism," the assumption that mind and body were radically separate as subject and object. Berman on Cartesian dualism:

Thinking, it would seem, separates me from the world I confront. I perceive my body and its function, but "I" am not my body. ...To Descartes, the mind-body split was true of all perception and behavior, such that in the act of thinking one perceived oneself as a separate entity "in here" confronting things "out there " (p. 35).

Today's Cartesian dualism is evident enough. My son came home from school angry that because they had misbehaved in math class gym class had been cancelled. "If math is a subject and gym is a subject, how can they take away gym because we were bad in math. Would they take away math because we were bad in gym?" But the body is an object while the mind is of supreme importance, says Cartesianism.

Berman summarizes the Cartesian paradigm (which he does describe in his work as the combined effect of the work of Bacon, and Galileo, and Newton, and which builds on among others, the work of Plato and Aristotle).

The combination of (philosophical) atomism, positivism, and experimental method --in short the definition of reality--is still very much with us today. To know something is to subdivide it, quantify it, and recombine it; is to ask "how" and

never get entangled in the complicated underbrush of "why." It is above all, to distance yourself from it, as Galileo pointed out; to make it an abstraction (p. 45).

The tale of Galileo's experiment is profoundly illustrative of the modern view of reality. It tells of the commonplace, the Cartesian paradigm. It is in every school curriculum. It is in every business, every corporation, and every church I have ever known. It is behind Crites' observation that abstraction suspends narrative experience. It is behind Priestly's concern with the reducing of stories to abstract propositions. But the experiment story has more to tell.

Galileo used his pulse as the time piece! What kind of world is it that has no wrist watch, no pocket watch--only the sun rising and crossing the sky to its setting. There is Galileo watching a ball rolling down a plane, and timing the ball with his own pulse--discovering $s=kt^2$. Surely something was there before? Surely time was not simply not as well measured but was also differently valued in a world where a desperate scientist must use his pulse to time rolling balls? What was there? Nothing--or nothing that mattered?

If there was "nothing there" what would provoke the fierce opposition to Galileo that left him living under house arrest? Would a discovery about a "fact" about the speed of falling object--a fact that apparently was of as little interest to that world as time measurement lead to that house arrest? What was at stake? Or is it simply a tale-- like 1492--we cannot tell? Just chalk on a board. Fact. Galileo measured weights free-falling from the Leaning Tower of Pisa.

The most telling part of Berman's tale is his setting out of the inhabitants before the discovery by Descartes, Bacon, Galileo, Newton. And his setting out of the time before Descartes, to re-use Vonnegut's terms about the discovery of "America," "millions of human beings were already living full and imaginative lives," before the discovery of the Cartesian Paradigm, the scientific revolution.

It was a world with a distinct view of time-- Galileo's "pulse time-piece" becomes readable.

For the people of the Middle Ages the seasons and events of life followed one another with a comforting regularity. The notion of time as linear was experientially alien to this world, and the need to measure it correspondingly muted (Berman, 1981, p. 56).

It was a world with a particular view of nature--and of all the participants in nature as living, purposeful entities.

The view of nature which predominated in the West down to the eve of the Scientific Revolution was that of an enchanted world. Rocks trees, rivers, and clouds were all seen as wondrous, alive, and human beings felt at home in this environment. The cosmos, in short, was a place of *belonging* (Berman, 1981, p. 17).

The *Medieval Reader* includes a letter by Abelard of Bath (dated the early twelfth century) titled "Questions of Nature." The letter includes a list of various questions that the author would discuss for his nephew. Among them are these:

74. Whether the stars are animated.

75. What food the stars eat, if they are animals (Abelard of Bath, 1949/ twelfth century, p. 578).

The world was a place in which every entity had its purpose and virtue. St. Francis of Assisi wrote in the thirteenth century:

Praised be my Lord, for brother wind
 And for the air and clouds and fair and every kind of weather...
 Praised by my Lord for sister water,
 The which is greatly helpful and humble and precious and pure.
 Praised be my Lord for our sister, mother earth,

The which sustains and keeps us

And brings forth diverse fruits, with grass and flowers bright (St. Francis of Assisi, 1949/thirteenth century, p. 517).

Berman (1981) sums up the view of the Middle Ages:

Man is at the center of the universe that is bounded at its outermost sphere by God, the Unmoved Mover...All other entities are endowed with purpose, being partly actual and partly potential. Thus it is the goal of fire to move up, of earth (matter) to move down, and of species to reproduce themselves. Everything moves and exists in accordance with divine purpose. All of nature, rocks as well as trees, is organic and repeats itself in eternal cycles of generation and corruption. As a result the world is ultimately changeless, but being riddled with purpose, is an exceptionally meaningful one (p. 51).

Nature was alive, "the rocks as well as the trees." Not even the rocks were mere objects.

Now the reason for Galileo's experiment with weights becomes also somewhat readable.

The belief that large or dense objects should strike the ground faster than light ones follows as a direct consequence of Aristotle's teleological physics and was widely held in the Middle Ages. If things fall to the ground because they seek their "natural place," the earth's center, we can see why they would accelerate as they approach it. They are excited, they are coming home, and like all of us they speed up as they approach the last leg of the journey. Heavy objects drop a given distance in a shorter time than light ones because there is more matter to become excited, and thus they attain a higher speed and strike the ground first (Berman, 1981, p. 37).

Now the fierce opposition to Galileo's experiment becomes readable. There indeed was something there before. The opposition to Galileo's experiment was not primarily

over whether one object dropped faster than another--a debate that was not of interest to that world--but over whether the material itself was animate or inanimate, whether the world was "enchanted" or "dis-enchanted." The world was at stake. The natives put up a fight.

The result of the change in world view of which Galileo's work was profound and revolutionary. Berman describes the change in world view following Descartes, and the Scientific Revolution in this way:

The universe, once seen as alive, possessing its own goals and purposes, is now a collection of inert matter, hurrying around endlessly and meaninglessly, as Alfred North Whitehead [1948] put it. What constitutes an acceptable explanation has thus been radically altered. The acid test of existence is quantifiability, and there are no more basic realities in any object than the parts into which it can be broken down. Finally, atomism, quantifiability, and the deliberate act of viewing nature as an abstraction from which one can distance oneself--all open the possibility that Bacon proclaimed as the true goal of science: control. The Cartesian or technological paradigm is, as stated above, the equation of truth with utility, with the purposive manipulation of the environment. The holistic view of man as a part of nature, as being at home in the cosmos is so much romantic claptrap. Not holism, but domination of nature; not the ageless rhythm of ecology, but the conscious management of the world (p. 46).

Now to move on to the most difficult part of the tale--or perhaps the most magical. Was Descartes right? Did Galileo (and others) prove that the Cartesian world view worked? Does the fact that something 'works' make it true?" Or was it simply the emergence of industry that needed nature--both the rocks and the trees--to be inanimate in order to be used as raw material that made Cartesianism "work," that made it a working truth for the industrial world? Did industry's need for human bodies to be objects, to be

machine-like in order to be employed as machines make the Cartesian dualism true? But did not Galileo prove that weights are mere objects? Does not medical science as well prove that physicality exists separately from mind? Pills work. Operations cure.

Or do they? Are "old wives tales" false? Are magic and ESP quackery? Are religious conversions psychologically explainable? Is there is no such thing as luck?

Berman (1981) again--at the risk of having his sanity questioned--continues examining the discovery of Cartesianism against the world view of the Middle Ages.

The delusion of modern thinking on alternative realities is rarely exposed....For now, the reader should be aware of how stark the choice really is. Either such realities were mass hallucinations that went on for centuries, or they were indeed realities, although not commensurable with our own (p. 94).

Berman also quotes anthropologist Paul Riesman who, he admits, is not part of mainstream thinking on the subject:

Our social sciences generally treat the culture and knowledge of other peoples as forms and structures necessary for human life that those people have developed and imposed upon a reality which we know--or at least our scientists know--better than they do. We can therefore study those forms in relation to "reality" and measure how well or ill they are adapted to it. In their studies of the cultures of other people, even anthropologists who sincerely love the people they study almost never think that they are learning something about the way the world really is. Rather, they conceive of themselves as finding out what other people's *conceptions* of the world are. (Work cited in Berman, p. 94.)

Fascinating. Either there were mass hallucinations for centuries, or else the animated world was real and "worked" for them. It is hard to argue with the choice. And it is hard to come down solidly on the side of the Cartesian paradigm containing all reality.

One more turn of the Grand Story of Cartesianism, and the crumbling of the middle ages, but this time, not as seen in the work of Galileo.

The full rigged ship appeared, better able to harness the wind...The first maps designed with compass knowledge...began to appear, as did new models of the globe. The image of boats hugging the coast, almost a perfect metaphor for the tight mental horizon of the Middle Ages, was crumbling. It was now the age of Magellan, and Columbus and Vasco da Gama. The expansion of consciousness, and territory, made the closed medieval cosmos seem increasingly quaint (Berman, 1981, p. 53).

The Grand Story of Cartesianism has led us far afield. Now we have found within the fold Columbus himself. He, too, was part of the discovery that did leave an old world behind—not just the world of the native Americans, but also the world of the Middle Ages. Neither previous world is remembered in the usual blackboard tale. All that is written on the blackboard is: In 1492 Christopher Columbus discovered America. The old worlds are left behind without story, and without explanation for the lack of story. Silently the tale of discovery is un-told on the blackboard.

The story to end all stories

Berman is one of many intellectual historians that identify and question the Cartesian paradigm. Susan Bordo (1987), for one, explores some of the same deep criticisms of the Cartesian paradigm. But as she begins the exploration, Bordo begins with this telling statement.

But even if the dominant mood were not that of crisis and critique, a decisive rupture would still be signalled by the fact that we are now grasping "modernity," "the scientific paradigm," "the Cartesian model," as discrete, contained, historical entities about which coherent "closing" narratives can be told (p. 2).

The natural and unquestioned acceptance of the Cartesian model as a way of living is called to question simply in its naming, and in its being given a narrative quality. Or to put it differently, Cartesianism becomes named as a story itself. Cartesianism which as Berman (1981) said, regarded itself not as a "metaphor of reality...but as the touchstone of reality" (p. 193) is tellable as a story. Cartesianism, with all of its rejection of every story as subjective, interpretable, uncertain, with its starting anew, with all its objectifying the world, mechanizing the world, may also be told itself, as a tellable and interpretable story, a story among other stories, a story that may pass, a story with ambiguity. In an ironic twist, Stephen Crites would name Cartesianism itself, "the story to end all stories." (Work cited in Wiggins, 1975, p. 4.)

The Cartesian Story is obviously also an important story--a magical story. As I sit typing on a computer, in a centrally heated house, with the voice of the late Harry Chapin singing in the background, the power of that story is not in doubt. It has been, and remains a productive story. But it is the sweeping application of the paradigm as a "story to end all stories" that is in question here.

The fact that begins this chapter is locked within the Cartesian paradigm--caged. The fact would simply be one real object in a world of real objects. If 1492 A.D. is a fact, how can a teacher tell the fact of A.D.? It would sound as though the teacher was saying that to be educated in this world it is necessary to accept the Christian dogma. If "discovery" is a fact how can the teacher tell the fact of discovery? Then the teacher would tell my friend Ted, that the life of the native Indians in this country was not significant, or that their life was primitive and savage before the land was finally discovered and civilized.

But if the statement that began this chapter is a story, a tale, a way that we try to make sense of the world in which we live then A.D. may be told. It may be told with all the acid of Rock and Hyde, and with all the reverence of a Mother Theresa for her church. Told like the hyena story. Making a claim for truth. Asking to be told.

With "abstraction" and the "propositional statement" in tow the Cartesian paradigm has nearly ended story, caged the hyena. The deep questioning of Cartesianism by Berman, Bordo and others are loosening the bars on story that the Cartesian paradigm had forged.

And the "fact" that begins this chapter is one of those stories, telling A.D., telling the story of the Christian church, telling stories of piracy, telling stories of discovery, telling also of a "story to end all stories"--or one that tried to end all stories. The "fact" is rather a story to be told--a fascinating, wondrous, meaning-laden, magical, interpretable tale.

In 1492 Columbus discovered America.

Chapter 5

Confessions: the protestant iconoclast

The Lutheran Confessions: The Smalcald Articles, Part II, Article 1:

The first and chief article is this, that Jesus Christ, our God and Lord, "was put to death for our trespasses and raised again for our justification" (Rom. 4:25). He alone is "the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29)...Moreover, "all have sinned," and "they are justified by grace as a gift, through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus, by his blood." (Rom. 3:23-25)...Nothing in this article can be given up or compromised, even if heaven and earth and things temporal should be destroyed...On this article rests all that we teach and practice against the pope, the devil and the world (Luther, 1959b/1537).

This article states the "chief article" of Lutheran Christianity: justification by grace through faith. It addressed all people as sinners, as being made right with God by grace, by gift, by the cross of Jesus, not by any deserving or work of the individual. It remains the chief article of faith of Lutherans today. I memorized this doctrine as a teenager.

Several years ago, while sitting in the auditorium of Augustana Lutheran University I heard Martin Marty say these words--or words similar to these:

I hear in our Lutheran churches this message, "Your good works will not save you." But I wonder. Who is trying? (Marty, 1987)

For me, the statement and others, rattled the "chief article" of the Lutheran church out of its moorings. What in the world (literally) was our church speaking about? Why are we still speaking to the terrified world of the Middle Ages?

The church--of which I am a part-- in many ways has gone senile. It may be that the churches of which I am not a part have also gone senile. I do not know. The church is still speaking of the "good old days" when it had something important to say against the

requirement and measurement of good works; something to rescue terrified consciences. And it has locked itself into that world. And now it speaks senile words. It has often even gone about the business of "terrifying consciences" with dire accusations of sin in order to be able to speak to the now-terrified, its cherished freeing words of forgiveness. Senile.

I wonder why? And for that matter, I wonder why somehow, sometime, someplace it doesn't speak senile words.

Iconoclasm

The article of faith that emerges from the story brings the destruction of many things. On the basis of this "main article" Luther explained in the Smalcald Articles the Lutheran rejection of: the Mass, purgatory, vigils, pilgrimages, fraternities, relics, indulgences, (Article 2), the invocation of the saints, (Article 2), monasteries (Article 3), and the papacy (Article 4). These are, for Luther, "human inventions," "idolatries," "illusions of the devil," "contrary to the fundamental article that Christ alone, and not the work of man, can help souls." (all in Article 2) Put differently, either the idea "fits" into the main article or it is rejected.

Into the middle of this familiar telling of this Lutheran story comes the voice of Stephen Crites (1975):

The iconoclast smashes the image in order to worship the most abstract thought he can conceive (p. 51).

Crites does open the concept of iconoclasm beyond the usual. Iconoclast is from the Greek *eikon*, image, and the Greek *klastes*, breaker. Iconoclast means literally, "image breaker" (Oxford English Dictionary, O.E.D.). Iconoclasm within Protestantism is usually connected with the actual image-breaking that happened among the Puritans. Roland Bainton (1952) tells of the Puritan Reformation in Zurich that acted on the belief (among others) that God was to be worshipped "in spirit and in truth." Consequently the

Puritan reformation was iconoclastic, characterized by: the destruction of relics, the removal of images, and the smashing of the organ in the cathedral, the rejection of the real presence of Christ in the sacrament. Says Bainton: "Here plainly was a reformation much more puritan than that of Luther " (p. 86). But, hear Crites again:

The iconoclast smashes the image in order to worship the most abstract thought he can conceive.

Iconoclasm, in Crites' opened sense, destroys the image because the image may say something else, something more than the pure abstract idea. Iconoclasm as the destroying of image is involved in the story of Luther, in particular, and in protestantism is general. Based on this Article, on this abstract thought, these things are condemned says Luther, because they do not conform to "justification by grace through faith." The things destroyed are different than the puritans--as the abstract thought is different-- but iconoclasm as a destroying of images because of the idea is part of the story.

Iconoclasm was a story that Protestantism came by naturally enough. James Hillman (1983) discusses the "Great Iconoclast Controversy" of 787 at the Council of Nicea.

At Nicea, a subtle differentiation was made between adoration of images (idolatry) and the veneration of images...It concluded that the divine was not inherent in the image; images were not repositories of power. Rather, they were useful for didactic purposes...they were...illustrations and allegories to remind the faithful of abstract theological figuration transcendent to the image (p. 71).

The iconoclasm was then born into Protestantism and grew.

Iconoclasm, the destruction of everything that doesn't fit the "chief article" brings with it a leanness. Everything, and everyone somehow must find their way into that lean idea, or be shut out.

One wished to express Christian belief in doctrinal propositions; moral teaching became of central importance, with biblical stories invoked for illustrative purposes only...Again, a rationality of an abstract sort, alien to the traditional religious imagination, combined with a characteristic spirituality which sought a purified fulfillment in the sober adoration of the high God alone. Recognizing that the medieval Church was pagan to the ears, but without recognizing in this fact the exigencies of a living tradition, Protestant iconoclasm set out to purge its own house of everything that moved (Crites, 1975, p. 51).

What didn't move was the propositional statement, the abstract thought. The sermon as the exposition of the abstract thought has characterized many of the sermons I have heard--some out of my own mouth-- within Protestantism.

And often it is ideas that are taught; the stories are not told. The introduction to the Large Catechism in the Confessions describes the document as the "layman's Bible" (Luther, 1959a/1537). It is characterized by storiless exposition. The Small Catechism is used for the instruction of children. It is traditionally memorized in Lutheran instruction. It also tells no stories. Both are doctrinal explanations. Abstractions. They do not move.

And because they cannot move, they are able to find Luther's world but not our own. They are senile. Unlike the story of the hyena which may well be timeless, the abstractions are dying.

Crites (1975) again:

In fact, it is only a slight exaggeration to say that in the more liberal, "secularized" wings of Protestantism, and of other Western traditions as well, the first-order language of religious belief and practice had been largely replaced by the second order language of analysis and interpretations (p. 52).

Ideas. Abstraction. The stories, the shepherds, the angels, the lost sheep, the wicked kings, the blessed stranger, even the Christ, were somehow to be carried by ideas.

The protestant mind was dedicated to ideas; the protestant mind was "no longer peopled" (Crites, 1975, p. 51). Iconoclasm kills the stories.

As "Greed kills" sat in front of a wondrous story, so does "justification by grace through faith."

Backgrounding the article is the story of Luther's life, and particularly one story. It is the Tower story, the Tower being a study room in the tower of an Augustinian monastery. Luther tells the story:

I greatly longed to understand Paul's Epistle to the Romans and nothing stood in the way but that one expression, "the justice of God," because I took it to mean that justice whereby God is just and deals justly by punishing the unjust. My situation was that, although an impeccable monk, I stood before God as a sinner troubled in conscience...Therefore I did not love a just and angry God, but rather hated and murmured against him. Yet I clung to the dear Paul...Night and day I pondered until I saw the connection between the justice of God and the statement that "the just shall live by faith." Then I grasped that the justice of God is that righteousness by which through grace and sheer mercy God justifies us through faith. Thereupon I felt myself to be reborn and to have gone through an open door to paradise (Bainton, 1950, p. 49).

It is the Tower story that surely lies behind Luther's writing in the article. Roland Bainton (1950) describes the experience as Luther's "Damascus road" (p. 48) which relates Luther's story to the Apostle Paul's own story of conversion on the way to Damascus (Acts 9).

As I hear this story of Luther in this paper the story of the son and the father that begins this paper returns. Luther's story is somehow in my retelling also of the experience of finding the "not senile" in Lutheranism: of turning away and returning, and desperation and hope, of lostness and foundness.

But if the hyena means only "greed kills" and if the Tower story means only, "justification by grace through faith," the hyenas are slain and the towers are flattened.

Confession

The chapter began with a doctrine, not a story. The doctrine is taken from the Confessions of my church. Confession is from the Latin *confiteor* -- to own or acknowledge (O.E.D.). Confession is acknowledging a certain faith, as in a confession of faith. It also carries the sense of confession of sin: a confession of limitedness, finiteness, and blindness. Both meanings are a part of the intention of Confessions.

Luther(1959b/1537) writes, in the Preface to the Smalcald Articles:

Nevertheless I have decided to publish these articles so that, if I should die,...those who live after me may have my testimony and confession...to show where I have stood until now and where by God's grace, I will continue to stand.

Confessions are the statements of the "where I stand," of faith in a context of limitedness.

The introduction to the Formula of Concord (the "Epitome") also writes of itself as well as other writings (except the scriptures) "as merely witnesses and expositions of the faith, setting forth how at various times the Holy Scriptures were understood in the church of God by contemporaries with reference to the controverted articles, and how contrary teachings were rejected and condemned (Andreae, 1959/1577). Confessions, in spite of their outspokenness and harshness, are intended to be seen as limited and changeable statements of faith.

The confessions intend on being "second order language," leaving the stories of the Scriptures as "first-order." They intend on being changeable, temporary, finite, confessional. But-- they have not changed in over three centuries.

So this chapter begins not with a story from the Scripture, nor with the Tower story, but with a doctrine that is the "chief article" of Lutheranism. The right and true and Scriptural and chief article--of our iconoclasm. And of our senility.

Chapter 6

The Kicking Game: the field of play

Some woman had sewn up a sealskin ball that she stuffed full of caribou hair. It was bigger than a man's head in size, stiff and hard. I watched with pleasure as everyone laughed and pushed and rushed back and forth, wildly kicking at this ball, and I imagined myself running and laughing and kicking with the rest of them.

Some others came up from below. The old woman, Ningiuk, and her shy young daughter passed by the place where I sat. Ningiuk was puffing and blowing after the long climb and rested at the edge of the plain. Then she joined in the kicking game, and I was surprised that she could still run so fast. Young mothers carrying small children on their backs soon found them too heavy for running, and they let out of their hoods those old enough to walk. In no time these young children were running, half naked, among the players, squealing in delight, and everyone laughed....

In a little while Pilee [Billy] and Portagee [the Portugese] set up two stones, side by side, at each end of the plain and divided the people into two groups. Then they showed each group how to go against the other. They showed the players how to kick the ball violently and fight their way through their neighbors to reach their goal. It was rough and unpleasant, puzzling to watch, and when my people understood this new game, they were shocked, for it was not a game of pleasure (Houston, 1971, p. 68).

The above is an excerpt from what James Houston describes as "the first written account" of the saga of the fate that befell the crew of a small whaleboat whose harpooner struck a whale that towed them far beyond return to their mother ship to the camp of the *Sikusalingmiut* (literally, "the people of the sea ice") in 1896. The saga was told to

Houston during the twelve years he lived as an administrator in Baffin Island in the 1960's. Houston's fictional story tells of the ways of play.

And it becomes also a telling story about stories in general.

Telling of play and game

The kicking game begins in one kind of play and ends in another. The second sort of game is familiar to anyone who lives in North America. It sounds like soccer, but it may indeed describe most sports. The second sort of game is the background that highlights the fascinating play of the people of the sea ice.

The story-teller speaks of a game as happening around a home-stitched ball. The play is full of activity, and full of energy, and full of laughter. Men are playing. Children are playing. Young mothers are playing while carrying their children. Later, the children old enough to walk are "let out of their hoods." They play too. And the aged woman, Ningiuk plays as well.

The "kicking game" story becomes more readable in light of J. Huizinga's (1950) exploration of play.

- "Child and animal play because they enjoy playing" (p. 8). Once play is ordered it is not play. It is never a task. Play is voluntary.

- Huizinga notes the "dressing up" and the putting on masks of play. "Every child knows perfectly well that he is 'only pretending.'" Yet the devotion and absorption of the play "abolishes the troublesome 'only' feeling." (p. 8) The child in heels would say she "is" Mommy. Play in all its forms is stepping out of the dailiness of "making a living." Play is to consciously step out of ordinary life.

- "The arena, the card-table, the magic circle, the temple, the stage, the screen, the tennis court, the court of justice, etc., are all in form and function play-grounds " (p. 10). Play is distinct from ordinary life as to location.

- "Play begins and at a certain moment, is 'over'" (p. 10). Yet it can be repeated at any time, whether it is "child's play" or chess. Play is distinct from ordinary life as to duration.

- Huizinga mentions puzzles, jig-saws, patience, target-shooting, gambling, competitive games. All have a tension, uncertainty, chanciness. "The player wants something to 'go', to 'come off'; he wants to 'succeed' by his own exertions " (p. 10). And he wants to succeed within the rules of the game. All play has order, has its own rules (p. 11). The rules of play are part of the magic of play, creating an orderly world into which one may step from the confusing world of reality.

The characteristics of play are at "play" in the kicking game story. The game is not a task to be undertaken. Players come and go. The players enter the game on the field, and leave it when they go home. The kicking game is not about making a living--or even about preparing to make one. There is a magic to the game: players are drawn in. The rules of the game seem to be few. But the rules are implicit in that the actions of Pilee and Portagee violate the rules.

Huizinga's study also makes the conflict in the story more readable. It becomes more readable in the words used by various cultures for play.

Greek possesses a curious and specific expression for children's games in the ending *-inda*. In themselves the syllables do not signify anything; they merely give to any word the connotation of "playing at something." *-inda* is an indeclinable and, linguistically speaking, underivable suffix. Greek children played *spairinda*--at ball; *helkustinda*--tug-o'-war; *streptinda*--a throwing game; *basilinda*--king of the castle (p. 29).

In the Greek world, the object may become an object of play and may be spoken as an object of play with the suffix *inda*. Such word play is also akin to the Blackfoot, says Huizinga, though in a slightly different way:

A very singular feature is the possibility of giving any verb a secondary meaning of "for fun," "not seriously" by adding the prefix *kip-*, literally "merely so," or "only." Thus, for instance *aniu* means, "he says," *kipaniu*, "he says for a joke," or "he only says" (p. 33).

For the Blackfoot, an action may be meant playfully, and the verb can express this playful action by the prefix *kip*.

The people of the sea are, in Greek terms, playing *spairinda*--playing with a ball. Put differently, for the people of the sea-ice, the kicking game would be "*kip*-kicking," playful kicking.

In the story, when the Europeans, Pilee and Portagee, join the game the game begins to change. They set out goals, divide up teams, and show the people "how to go against the other." Now the game becomes rough and violent. Surely the children "let out of the hoods" are now unable to play. Now only the strong ones dare play this violent kicking game. The story-teller says that the people are shocked; "for it is not a game of pleasure."

Huizinga also argues that in the Greek world the word *αγωρ*, which describes matches and contests, belongs also with play against opinions to the contrary (p. 31). "Agoristic" play showed the characteristics Huizinga had noted in other forms of play. But Huizinga allows that the contest is capable of losing its playfulness. In modern culture Huizinga suggests, agoristic sport has lost something of the sport of earlier days.

Ever since the last quarter of the 19th century games, in the guise of sport, have been taken more and more seriously. The rules have become increasingly strict and elaborate. Records are established at a higher, or faster, or longer level than was ever conceivable before. Everybody knows the delightful prints from the first half of the nineteenth century, showing the cricketers in top-hats. This speaks for itself (p. 197).

The increasing systematization and professionalization of sport has undermined the playfulness of the game. Spontaneity and carelessness ever diminish. "Scientific thoroughness" and "technical organization" ever increase. The professional plays for pay. The amateur shrinks back with a sense of inferiority. "The real play-spirit is threatened with extinction " (p. 199).

The play of agoristic sport and playful play is also told in the kicking game story. The kicking game story tells of play. It tells of play that can lose its sense of play. It tells of a game changing so that the pleasure of playing was lost. But set in prominence is the nature of play that Huizinga explores. It is playful yet effortful, "pretend" yet requiring whole devotion, unreal yet important.

Huizinga's work is called *Homo Ludens*. *Ludens* , comes from the Latin *ludere*, to play (O.E.D.) and is still visible in English in *prelude*, and *interlude* and *postlude*. Significantly, Huizinga characterizes humans as "homo Ludens" rather than "homo sapiens." The nature of people, he says, is to play more than to reason. Play, he says, resists analysis. We do not play for the exercise. We do not play for the "social value." We play because we want to. We play because we are alive. But at the conclusion of the work, he adds this comment on play, which becomes also a most telling comment on the two previous chapters of this paper:

The human mind can only disengage itself from the magic circle of play by turning towards the ultimate. Logical thinking does not go far enough. Surveying all the treasures of the mind and all the splendors of its achievements we shall still find, at the bottom of every serious judgment, something problematical left. In our heart of hearts we know that none of our pronouncements is absolutely conclusive. At that point, where our judgement begins to waver, the feeling that the world is serious wavers with it. Instead of the old saw: "All is vanity," the more positive conclusion forces itself upon us that "all is play" (p. 212).

Play here tells of a possible way of being with stories, an alternative to the absolutism of Cartesian abstractions, and to the absolutism of the Church's doctrinal iconoclasm.

Can stories be played? Can one do the hyena-*inda*? Can one *kip*- tell the hyena story? Is the kicking game, is Huizinga's "all is play" a way out of being with stories in abstraction or iconoclasm? And are there dangers that lurk in the play with stories, threatening to destroy that play too, making that play also, "not a game of pleasure."

Chapter 7

The Sons: the play of the exegetes

The Parable of the Lost Son:

11. Jesus continued: "There was a man who had two sons.
12. The younger one said to his father, 'Father give me my share of the estate.' So he divided his property between them.
13. Not long after that, the younger son got together all he had, set off for a distant country and there squandered his wealth in wild living.
14. After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country, and he began to be in need.
15. So he went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed pigs.
16. He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything.
17. When he came to his senses he said, 'How many of my father's hired men have food to spare, and here I am starving to death!
18. I will set out and go back to my father and say to him, Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you.
19. I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired men.'
20. So he got up and went to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him.
21. The son said to him, 'Father I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.'

22. But the father said to his servants, 'Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet.
23. Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let's have a feast and celebrate.
24. For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.' So they began to celebrate.
25. Meanwhile, the older son was in the field. When he came near the house, he heard music and dancing.
26. So he called one of the servants and asked him what was going on.
27. 'Your brother has come,' he replied, 'and your father has killed the fattened calf because he has him back safe and sound.'
28. The older brother became angry and refused to go in. So his father went out and pleaded with him.
29. But he answered his father, 'Look! All these years I've been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders. Yet you never gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends.
30. But when this son of yours who has squandered your property with prostitutes comes home, you killed the fattened calf for him!'
31. 'My son,' the father said, 'you are always with me, and everything I have is yours.
32. But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found'" (Luke 15:11-32).

The story above is the text that backgrounds the opening story of "Setting out" in chapter one of this paper. This text arises here foregrounding the story of the work of the prominent experts in New Testament studies on the Biblical stories called parables.

Parables and exegesis

Exegesis is the theological word for working with Biblical text. It comes from the Greek *ex* out and *hegeomai*, to lead. Exegesis means literally to "lead out" (O.E.D.).

Biblical stories like that of the "Lost Son" have long been studied by Christians and in a distinctive way by Christian Biblical exegetes. One of the most influential scholarly works on the parables is that of Joachim Jeremias (Tolbert, 1973, p. 19).

Jeremias (1972) begins his work on the parables with this general statement about working with the parables:

The parables confront us with the difficult problem of recovering their original meaning. Already in the earliest period of all, during the first decades after the death of Jesus, the parables had undergone a certain amount of reinterpretation. At a very early stage the process of treating the parables as allegories had begun, a process which for centuries concealed the meaning of the parables in a thick layer of dust (p. 13).

Jeremias then begins the task of dusting off the parables, of peeling off the layers of interpretation to arrive at the original story and its original meaning. Jeremias lists the ten "laws of transformation" (p. 113), in which the parable can be seen to gather "dust" and obscure their original meaning. Among the laws of transformation, Jeremias argues that the early church shaped the parables of Jesus to relate to their actual situation which was far removed from that of the life of Jesus in Galilee. He argued that the early church added allegorical interpretations to the parables. He argued that the early church changed the addressees of the parables from opponents of Jesus to the disciples so that the parable would again speak to the church's situation. These added layers, Jeremias argued, obscured the meaning of the parable as spoken by Jesus. Jeremias sets out to identify when such transformations appear in each of the parables, to strip off that interpretation from the text, and so recover the original single meaning of the parables of Jesus.

His work on the Lost Son Parable demonstrates this sort of "dusting"--here by his decision not to "dust." The parable, says Jeremias, has two parts: verses 11-24 is about the "lost son," verses 25-32 about the "elder son." The first half is about the proclamation of the gospel to sinners, but the second is about the criticisms of the elder levelled at the welcoming of the sinner. Here Jeremias applies the "laws of transformation."

Since the first half is complete in itself, the second part appears at first sight superfluous. But it is erroneous to regard, for that reason, the second part as an addition. In language and content it fits the pattern of the story...it has a foundation in v. 11, and the contrast between the two sons finds an analogy in Matt. 21.28-31. Why did Jesus add it? There can be only one answer, because of the actual situation (p. 131).

Here the parable is considered and is attributed to the life of Jesus. It is free of "dust." In the life of Jesus the criticisms of the Pharisaic party and others were levelled at him for his table fellowship with sinners. As such the parable is preserved as the words of Jesus within the Galilean situation. Jeremias calls these originally two-part parables "double-edged," and argues that double-edged parables (p. 131) place the emphasis on the second "edge"--in this case on the story of the father and the elder son. The parable, says Jeremias, is then clearly an apologetic parable, it is a defence of Jesus in his historical setting against the opposition who question the table-fellowship of Jesus with "sinners." The parable, says Jeremias, should not be called the Prodigal Son or the Lost Son but the "Love of the Father" because the emphasis is not on the younger son but on the elder. (p. 128) Often in Jeremias' work, the traditional titles of the parables are criticized as "inaccurate and misleading designations" of the parables of Jesus (p. 128). The title "the lost son" is the "dust" here "peeled away," rather than verses within the parable.

In other parables Jeremias often finds the "dust" within the biblical text. With this particular parable other exegetes have found "dust" within the biblical text. This short

paragraph from I. Howard Marshall (Senior Lecturer in New Testament Exegesis at the University of Aberdeen, Scotland) gives a sense of the activity of the exegetes.

Despite the proposals of Wellhausen, 81-85, and (cautiously) J. Weiss, 483f., to separate the parable into two parts, vs 15-24a and 24b-32, Bultmann, 212, is justified in maintaining the unity of the parable; cf. Manson, Sayings 284. More recent dissection has been attempted by J.T. Sanders on the grounds that no other parable is *zweigipfelig* and that there is a concentration of Lucanisms in the second part of the parable. He proposed that an original parable that defended Jesus' association with the lost was altered by Luke into an attack on the Pharisees so as to make a bridge with the development of this theme in ch. 16. But while the parable has two parts it has one point. Above all, Sanders' linguistic arguments have been completely refuted by J.J. O'Rourke and J. Jeremias 172-181(1978, p. 605).

It is impressive activity--if somewhat incomprehensible to most readers. The words do indicate something of the nature of New Testament Biblical exegesis. It is an argument with various claims to victory. Tolbert (1973), in surveying the study of the parables, comes to this puzzling conclusion:

Competent scholars using essentially the same methods can apparently arrive at equally valid, though different, interpretations of the same parable. The differences often seem to be at least partially related to the characteristic presuppositions or views of the individual interpreter which influence his or her application of general methodological principles (p. 30).

The exegetes despite using the "same methods" cannot generally peel off the layers of the parables to arrive at the single original shape and meaning of the parable.

Also indicated in Marshall's paragraph is the intentional language of exclusion. What is *zweigipfelig*, among other things? Within the brief technical paragraph of the commentary and the work of Jeremias may also be heard other stories.

Jeremias aims to remove the "dust" that has collected both inside the text and outside the text in the titles that become attached to them. The "dust" is previous understandings and interpretations of the text. Descartes began anew, rejecting the old stories in order to arrive at something certain, incontestable. The dust is removed by a sort of study of the text that appears laboratory-like. Marshall noted that often the parables are "dissected." Later interpretations for Jeremias need to be cut away, so that the essential story is discovered. The text is known as "object," the sum of its parts--again familiar to Cartesianism. The text is studied intellectually--even dualistically. The story is not responded to personally, emotionally or even, strangely enough--spiritually. It is read and studied--as though it were two balls rolling down juxtaposed inclined planes. And the result is the "correct" reading of the story, the "original," the "essential," the single meaning of the parable.

The lost son is worked over by the Cartesian paradigm.

The lost son is lead out and caged like the hyena to say one word.

The lost son is worked over, studied, analyzed, and driven to produce.

Postlude

If there a sense in which the parables are played by the exegetes it may be in the way of another story.

In a little while Pilee [Billy] and Portagee [the Portugese] set up two stones, side by side, at each end of the plain and divided the people into two groups. Then they showed each group how to go against the other. They showed the players how to kick the ball violently and fight their way through their neighbors to reach their goal. It was rough and unpleasant, puzzling to watch, and when my people understood this new game, they were shocked, for it was not a game of pleasure (Houston, 1971, p. 68).

If the commentators do play--and there does seem to be a to and fro-ness to Marshall's paragraph, it is the agoristic play of Pilee and Portagee. It is a play that is characterized by arguments about the correct interpretation--"playing against the other." It is a play to be played only by the strong men of the village--in this case the educated with command of several languages as well as the technical tools of the professional exegete. The mothers with children, the children themselves, the elderly, or the non-professional theologian can scarcely stay on the field. The play is kin to Huizinga's (1950) characterization of modern sport as a game of increasing systematization, increasing scientific thoroughness and increasing professionalization. In modern sport, say Huizinga, this has undermined the playfulness of the game. The professional plays for pay. The amateur shrinks back with a sense of inferiority (p. 199). With the Biblical texts a similar observation has been made:

The gap between scholarship and the church often is great...The results of critical scholarship have made the Bible a strange, unused, and even silent book (Smart, 1970, p. 15-31).

In a sense Jeremias and the exegetes are not playing at all. The parables are worked very hard for a production of meaning. They are worked to discover their single, incontestable meaning. As though--if they could only be worked perfectly then the true meaning would be discovered and they would never need to be worked again. Then one could write the meaning on the blackboard as a fact--plain and simple.

The lost son means that Jesus is right in accepting sinners.

A cold, hard, fact.

Chapter 8

Nativity: the play of the story-tellers

Retelling Luke (2:1-20): *"In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus, that all the world should be taxed. So Mary went with Joseph, the man to whom she was engaged, to Joseph's home town, to Bethlehem, to fill out forms for the census. Mary and Joseph headed out in Joe's pick-up, an old Ford, with 'Joe's fix-it,' hand-painted on the doors. Now, Mary was pregnant. When they arrived in Bethlehem the town was a-buzz with people. Joe checked out every hotel he could afford, but they were all full. Finally, one hotel offered them a place to throw up a shelter in the parkade. That night the baby was born, in a shelter, under the stars, beside a Ford pick-up truck, in a parkade in Bethlehem."*

Retelling Matthew (2:1-18): *"In those days, there were wise-men, who were attached to the court of kings. It was their task to keep in touch with the happenings in the world so that the kings could make wise decisions based on their wisdom. The wise men saw a new star in the sky, a new King was coming. They studied the new star's placement in the sky to determine which country was signified. Then they boarded Air Canada bound for Judah. There they met with Judah's ruler, King Herod. They said, 'Where is the new king that has been born? We have come from the East to see him and pay homage.' Herod said, 'I don't know. But I wish you good luck in your search. But do come back this way when you find him so that you can tell me where he is. Then, I can go and pay my respects as well.' But Herod thought, 'This throne is mine. I'll kill whoever is trying to take it away.' The wise men left Herod, found the child Jesus in Bethlehem, and offered their gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. But while*

Herod paced in his palace, the wise-men were warned in a dream not to return to Herod. Herod, when he understood that the wise-men had not returned, sent orders to his forces to kill all the male babies born in the Bethlehem area. But Joseph was warned in a dream to take the mother and the child and flee to Egypt."

The retelling of Nativity stories

The Nativity story of Mary and Joseph, the baby-in-the-manger, no room in the inn, shepherds watching their flocks, and wise men with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh, finds its way into churches, stores, homes, and front-yard creches each year. But the story is really not a single Biblical story. It is two stories told by two different writers in two distinctly different ways. One story is told in the Gospel according to Luke. Retelling Luke is about that story. In the story a child is born to a young and poor couple. The town is little. The hospital is a stable. The cradle is a manger. The first visitors are also poor-- the shepherds. It is a Silent Night when the baby is born Away in a Manger. It has a hymnic, pastoral feeling.

The other story is told in the Gospel according to Matthew. Retelling Matthew is about that story. In Matthew there is no manger, no stable, and no shepherds' visitation. Matthew tells of a king and of king's wisemen. He tells of the scheming king Herod, and of the narrow escape of the new family. He tells of brutal infanticide. He tells of all the mothers in Bethlehem weeping for their children. The Christmas "story" is really at least two Christmas stories. Somehow in most Nativity scenes the wealthy wisemen have slipped into the stable, to quietly visit with the baby with the shepherds. And King Herod and the slaughter of the innocents has nearly vanished in this culture's telling of the story.

Retelling Luke and Retelling Matthew above are also separate retellings of the two Biblical stories that I have found myself speaking to the church community. Pick-up trucks slip into the story. Wise men board Air Canada. Something happens to stories.

It is not a new happening. Father Brebeuf in his carol for the native Indian in early Canada wrote these lines:

'Twas in the moon of wintertime when all the birds had fled,
That God, the Lord of all the earth sent angel choirs instead.
Before the light the stars grew dim, and wond'ring hunters heard the hymn:
Jesus your king in born! Jesus is born! In excelsis Gloria! (Brebeuf,
1982/seventeenth century, p. 44)

Where did the hunters come from? The shepherds of Luke? The wisemen of Matthew? The birds had flown south replaced by angels. Canada geese? How did the Canada goose enter ancient Palestine? The ancient story manages even to be sung in the Cree language to a French folk tune, but with angels suddenly breaking into Latin in the refrain, as they are singing to Hebrew shepherds-- all translated into English. The stories themselves are alive with activity. Matthew and Luke wrote two separate stories of the Nativity of Jesus--itself a happening to a single event. Today's Western culture wound the two stories together in its telling of Nativity in pageants and creches. Brebeuf sang in the wondering hunters and Canada geese. And in my own retelling of the story, the stories move also. Sometimes the poverty of Mary and Joseph seems to take on more voice. Sometimes it is the peacefulness of the night, as in Brebeuf's hymn. Something is happening to the stories of Christmas. Something happens to the Nativity stories that seems more than simply a modernizing of language. Brebeuf contemporizes his carol with hunters, yet makes the carol archaic with Latin angel-song. Something happens of its own. The Nativity story seems to give birth to new stories.

Speaking stories of native Canadians

Driving out to British Columbia to see my father for the last time--though I did not know it at the time-- I listened to a CBC radio show hosted by Peter Gzowski. Chief Jake

Thomas, the chief of the Kayuga nation, was being interviewed. Chief Thomas had recently recited the Iroquois Great Law on the Six Nations Reserve in Ontario. The recitation lasted nine days. The conversation moved around the recitation and around the subject of the stories which made up the Great Law.

Gzowski: Is the Great Law written down anywhere?

Thomas: No...you don't write anything down. You don't write down your traditions--because once you write it down it's structured one way now--and that is the way people know it. If you have people that are knowledgeable, it can be put a different way. Because if you write it down, you can never change it. It is always just one way. But if you have knowledgeable people in oral tradition, everybody confirms what they say. They might all say a little different. But it doesn't mean that this guy knows any better. It just means that the other is a better speaker. He can put things in better ways what he means or what it means. This is why you can have a Great Law, and some ways that you can brighten a people (Thomas, 1993). "If you write it down you can never change it. It is always just one way." So the Great Law was to be passed on through voices, through speaking the words.

The reciting of the Great Law one would think would be more accurate with written text. But Chief Thomas argued from his tradition that to write the stories down would be to make it too structured, too solid. If it were written down it could only be just one way. The story needs to be capable of being told more than one way. The children would need to tell the story so that it mattered to them, so that it connected with them, so that it was their story. The ancient stories were still old, but not antiquated because they were retold by each generation. And the stories, said Chief Thomas, meant something, they were a way to "brighten a people."

As I listened, I did wonder at what point does the story cease to be. At what point do the young destroy the story by telling it too differently, so that the story is really lost

completely. In the midst of the dialogue another chord sounded. These were words that came unbidden; the interviewer did not ask a question about the limits of retelling. But the chief made his way to this statement:

It also says in the Great Law that you've got to have respect. Respect your elders, your father, your mother, respect your children, never neglect your children. But now today we don't have that kind of respect...no appreciation of who we are as families (Thomas, 1993).

What prevents the old story from being completely remade so that nothing of the old is present? It would seem to be respect for the elder. What prevents the old story from being written down and retold in exactly the same way as it was originally? Respect for the children. The limits of the retelling were not the written text, not the possession of an authorized version, but were given in the context of family, the respect for the old and the respect for young.

The words of Chief Thomas spoken over the radio of my car were echoed by 'studies' of oral story. Ong (1981) comments on story tellers in general, in particular, on the singers of tales.

The singer is not conveying "information" in our ordinary sense of a "pipeline transfer" of data from singer to listener. Basically the singer is remembering in a curiously public way--remembering not a memorized text, for there is no such thing--nor any verbatim succession of words, but the themes and formulas that he has heard other singers sing. He remembers these always differently, as rhapsodized or stitched together in his own way on this particular occasion for this particular audience....The song is the interaction between him, his audience, and his memories of songs sung (p. 17-18).

Like Chief Thomas, oral stories, sung in these cases, changed in the telling. They were rhapsodized, literally, "stitched together" (The Greek *rhapsodein* means to "stitch together

song" (Ong, p. 16). Also Ong argues that the singers and tale tellers do not compose original works of imagination.

Thought in oral cultures develops, but it develops with glacial slowness, for individuals cannot move far from the tradition in which oral culture stores its knowledge without losing both the auditors and themselves (p. 20).

The old must be respected or the tellers and listeners lose themselves.

The interview with Chief Thomas was a telling story. It sounded chords of family --the old and the young, and of literacy. They were chords that had also been sounded broadly within interpretive work.

The old and the young and interpretive work

Chief Thomas' voicing of the way the Great Law is passed on in the oral storying native culture is kin to some of the rather more academic words written by interpretive writers. David Jardine (1992a) explores the story of a new teacher approaching the classroom door for the first time; and he explores the meaning of initiation. In the work 'initiation' is not a word or a concept that comes to definition. Rather initiation is seen interpretively as an experience that is informed both by how it was experienced in the past, and also by the story of the new teacher's initiation.

Thus, interpretive work doesn't simply read the instance into a pre-given, closed and already understood "past," but with the help of the instance, makes what has been said of initiation in the past readable again by re-opening it to new, generative instances. To the extent that interpretation makes things readable, it is intimately linked up with a sense of literacy. The particular instance, then, can be understood as bearing forward the phenomenon of initiation, reinvigorating it and thus transforming it, making it fruitful, making it a forbearer. Initiation thus needs the instance to become and remain generative. Put the other way around, without living

instances initiation would no longer be a living feature of our lives: it would no longer be something that concerns us, that provokes us, that entices us. Initiation would no longer be an ongoing, vibrant narrative or story of which our lives and our experiences are an intimate part and to which we belong. It would simply be a lifeless concept or name of some object which "stands apart" from the life we live (p. 56).

Interpretive research, akin to the voice of Chief Thomas, involves a respect for the young, involves transformation that comes from the new instance. It involves not only a sense of the toleration of the new and the young but an active courting of the understanding of the new and young. Yet at the same time it involves a respect for the old, for forbearers, for, the "elder." Put simply:

Hermeneutics is this standing between, at the boundary between the old and the new, the young and the old, puer and senex. When we tell tales, these tales must not be simply repeated identically. These tales must be *re-membered* by children, this one and this (Jardine 1992b, p. 121).

David Smith (1988) explores pedagogy in the short powerful article, "Children and the Gods of War." Some similar chords are struck in a discussion that ranges far beyond the pedagogy of the schoolroom.

Homes, classrooms, schools wherein the people in charge cannot lay themselves open to the new life in their midst, always exist in a state of war from which children are driven either inward or outward but never forward. The openness that is required is not a vacuous licentiousness but a risky, deliberate engagement full of the conflict and ambiguity by which new horizons of mutual understanding are achieved. This is the fundamental requisite for giving children a sense of membership in the human community, for one learns to find one's voice only in an

environment where speech itself is well understood as having a listening aspect (p. 175).

The story spoken by the elder and retold by the children, or the word given in the story and re-vitalized by the children, winds itself through both interpretive research and native culture's retelling of the old stories. The story told and re-told is part of the Nativity stories at the beginning of this chapter. Story seems to invite something of itself to be changed by the young. And it seems to also have a shape given to it by the old, by the elder.

The conversation between the two is "a risky, deliberate engagement full of conflict and ambiguity," that is as new as interpretive research and as old as the spirit of the Great Law, older.

Literacy: speech and text

He [the singer] neither composes nor memorizes a fixed text. Each performance is a separate act of creation. Until he actually sings a narrative, that song does not exist, except as a potential song among infinitely many others....Conversely, when the song is over it has ceased to exist. Only to the extent that the singer himself or some member of his audience learns something new about the tradition during the course of a performance can that individual song affect the tradition and thereby take on a slight aspect of permanence in the memories of those who heard it (Scholes & Kellogg, 1966, p. 22).

The spoken story is told or sung for the moment. It does not exist before the telling. It does not exist permanently after it is told. It is a living voice for the young, changed for the audience, for the place of the telling. The spoken story is new with each telling. It is new; it is for the young.

At the same time the spoken story is for the old. Scholes & Kellogg refer to the "tyranny of the traditional in story-telling " (p. 13). The stories of the past are all that the story teller can tell. He is bound by the traditions even as he also is about the task of "rhapsodizing" them.

The spoken story is nested within the "risky, deliberate engagement" of the old and young. But this engagement is drastically altered when the spoken stories are turned into written letters and written down as text.

If you write it down you can never change it (Thomas, 1993). The spoken-stories-in-text have a degree of permanence to them. They are lasting, powerful. And it is this lasting-ness and powerful-ness that is the text's downfall.

The writing-down gives the text a paralyzing rigidity. Whereas, in the oral culture the parts of a traditional tale that over time became irrelevant to the singers and the audience were gradually accommodated to the changing world in the telling of the tale:

In a culture of written letters, however...a fixed text will tend to survive its native milieu and be forced to make its way in alien surroundings. Not only will the language become archaic and obsolete, but the assumptions about man and nature and about the proper way to tell a story, upon which the tale is built, will also recede farther and farther from the assumptions of living men (Scholes & Kellogg, p. 83).

Text allows a story to live "forever." But it does not allow the story to speak wisely forever. The rigid and paralyzed text goes on speaking after it has ceased to have a living connection to the world in which it still lives. It speaks after it has ceased to make sense. And it speaks without the possibility of the invigoration of the new "instance" because the "text" cannot hear, and cannot change. It is doomed to an eternity of senility. It stands as the enemy of the engagement of old and young.

In a different sense even stories-in-text that remain profound may become an enemy.

Four hundred years after the gradual process of establishing a canonical Homeric text had begun, Plato recognized the monolithic structure of the Homeric *paideia* as the chief enemy to the advancement of thought (Scholes & Kellogg, 1966, p. 29). The text that is not obsolete, not archaic but that is profound and authoritative equally prevents the engagement of old and young. The text cannot hear, cannot respond, cannot change. Hidden within the text's power to last and endure, is the text's power to stand in the way of the engagement of the old and young from which "new horizons" could have been born.

In a completely opposite way, written text bars the way to the engagement of old and young. It is hidden inside the text's power to bring freedom.

Literate, a man needs neither priest nor teacher. Books and the ability to read are gateways through which oppressed generations have found their freedom. In an age of literacy such as ours, books become symbols of freedom and truth. To burn or ban a book is to commit a sacrilege against humanity (Scholes & Kellogg 1966, p. 18).

The text-book in bringing freedom tends to make un-needed the teacher and the priest--the old. The text allows the young to receive the power of the text, the knowledge in the text, apart from a dialogue with an elder. Texts enable the puerility of the young.

The development of literacy, of written text, in many ways is the enemy of thought, the enemy of the fruitful engagement of young and old. The strength of the text to endure, and the strength of text to bring "a gateway to freedom," hides within it also the prison of the senile for the old and the prison of the puerile for the young.

It is Socrates who raises the other side of written text, its weakness. The written text, as Plato writes down from Socrates speech, is helpless. In the *Phaedrus* (tr. 1973)

Plato writes of Socrates telling the story of the Egyptian god Thoth, who invented writing. Thoth wanted to share his invention with the people so he appeared before the god Thamus, ruler of Egypt. In the conversation that followed, Thamus said that the inventor of letters was seeing in letters, the "opposite of their true power."

Once a thing is committed to writing it circulates equally among those who understand the subject and those who have no business with it...if it is ill-treated or unfairly abused it always needs its parent [the spoken word] to come to its rescue; it is quite incapable of defending or helping itself (p. 95).

The written text becomes like a writer's child. The text-child of the writer "circulates" separate from its parent, vulnerable to good or ill treatment.

The child is vulnerable. Socrates' spoken word is tied down by Plato's writing it down, pinning it to its place in Plato's work. Socrates' spoken word becomes a captive in its place in Plato's "helpless" print. Plato's print is helpless to its captive placement in this paper. And this paper is helpless in your hands, with Plato and Socrates aboard.

The weakness of written text may bring abuse to the story it bears. In the latter part of the interview with Chief Thomas a discussion ensued about the Code of Hanson Lake, native stories that were in written form, which the interviewer had read, and which, he suggested sounded, "rather Christian." Chief Thomas (1993) replied:

People are so confused today because its been written down. When it got translated it became Christian. There is a lot of words used in there just like the Bible. "Christian" sounding words changed the Code to a Christian code. The old spoken stories were put into new Christian clothes in the written text and the entire Code "became Christian."

But the helpless written text also allows for the young to play with the writing. It allows for the story borne by the text to be played without the old teller hovering about, defending the story. Of this weakness Jardine (1992b) writes:

This weakness can be its strength. It can certainly allow for the possibility of violence and silencing and oppression. It also allows for the freedom and playfulness and self-transcendence of language. It allows for fluidity and the prevention of the oppression of literalism (p. 20).

The helplessness of the text allows for playfulness. It is the "weakness" of the text that has allowed Brebeuf to play with the text of the Nativity stories. To let Canada geese fly into Palestine. To let angels sing in Latin to Hebrew shepherds. It is the weakness of text that has allowed a preacher to play, letting Joseph and the Virgin Mary drive a half ton truck to Bethlehem, and letting magi board Air Canada.

Hidden in the weakness of text may be the redemption of text. Hidden in its weakness is the possibility of playing with the text, re-telling the text, re-singing the text. Without the permission to play, the text has hidden in its powerfulness, the power to destroy.

It is that permission that is not always granted.

Text and Biblical literalism

There also exists a belief that texts should not be played. Within Christianity, the belief may be seen within fundamentalism. William Hordern (1972) tells of the rise of fundamentalism:

In our discussion of orthodoxy we had little to say about the doctrine of the revelation, that is, the doctrine of how God makes himself known to man. That is because there is no such orthodox doctrine in the sense in which there is an orthodox doctrine of the Trinity. There is in all orthodoxy the faith that God has revealed himself, particularly in the events recorded in the Bible...But there has been no final agreement on how God is revealed in the Bible or in what form it is an inspired book. In fact, these are questions which did not become burning issues

until the twentieth century. Luther...called protestants back to the authority of the Bible over and above the authority of the pope and the Church...For Luther the Bible was not literally true from cover to cover nor were all the parts of equal value. ...He did not place much value in James epistle. He recognized that some of the forecasts of the prophets were in error, so that the Bible is by no means infallibly correct in all details. ...As time passed, the Protestants felt more and more need of authority. Rome boasted that it had one voice of unquestionable authority while Protestantism had many conflicting voices...It is not difficult to understand why Protestants met authority with authority, and when Protestants used authority it had to be the authority of the Bible...To protect their authority the Protestants claimed that the Bible was the only infallible authority and, unlike that of pope and king, the literal word of God. Every word in the Bible, was, they claimed, dictated by God to the men who wrote it. One Protestant, A. Polanus, went so far as to insist that even the punctuation of the Bible was inspired and thus free from error. It is this tradition which was inherited by fundamentalism. To the fundamentalist this doctrine became the first defense against error. If one began by doubting any statement of the Bible, he had started down the slippery slope that, the fundamentalist believed, would lead to the denial of God and the divinity of Jesus, the loss of certainty of salvation and finally the loss of ethics (p. 57-59).

Once the story captive in text now also becomes entangled in a theory of infallibility and inerrancy, the story is truly captive. It cannot be retold. It cannot be new to the moment. It cannot be new to the young. It is doomed to senility. The readings are read. But who dares play them. John Spong's (1992) recent book is tellingly titled: *Rescuing the Bible from Fundamentalism*.

Postlude

The stories are played by the tellers. They are played for the church, for the tribe, for the culture, for the family. They are played in the songs of the singers and the tales of the tellers and the sermons of the preachers, and the stories of the parents. They are played well and poorly. They are played between the limits of respect for the old, and the wild, newness of the young.

The stories, whether oral or written, must be played, for the "risky, deliberate, engagement" of the old and the young to happen, and for the "new horizons of mutual understanding" to emerge. The stories need to be told. We need to tell them.

Text needs to be played; text needs to be spoken anew. The fundamentalism of inerrancy attached to the stories of scriptures, attached to the "doctrines" of the church, or attached for that matter to "1492" on the school blackboard must be resisted for the sake of the old, and the new, and for the sake of the stories themselves. They must be resisted in the playing of the stories.

The places of the playing of stories are many: homes, classrooms, coffee shops, hospitals, churches. But the most familiar one for me is magically brought to life in this call to the story-tellers from Frederick Buechner's (1977) *Telling the Truth: The Gospel as Tragedy, Comedy, and Fairy Tale*.

So the sermon hymn comes to a close with a somewhat unsteady amen, and the organist gestures the choir to sit down. Fresh from breakfast with his wife and children and a quick runthrough of the Sunday papers, the preacher climbs the steps to the pulpit with his sermon in his hand. He hikes his black robe up the knee so he will not trip over it on the way up. His mouth is a little dry. He has cut himself shaving...

In the front pews the old ladies turn up their hearing aids, and a young lady slips her six year old a Lifesaver and a Magic Marker. A college sophomore home for

vacation, who is there because he was dragged there, slumps forward with his chin in his hand. The vice president of a bank who twice that week has seriously contemplated suicide places the hymnal in the rack. A pregnant girl feels the stir of life inside her. A high-school math teacher who for twenty years has managed to keep his homosexuality a secret for the most part even to himself, creases his order of service down the center...The preacher pulls the little cord on the lantern light and deals out his note cards like a riverboat gambler. The stakes have never been higher. Two minutes from now he may have lost his listeners completely to their own thoughts, but at this moment he has them in the palm of his hand. The silence in the shabby church is deafening because everybody is listening to it. Everybody is listening including even himself. Everybody knows the kind of things he has told them before and not told them, but who knows what this time, out of the silence, he will tell them? (p. 23)

Chapter 9

Holy Week Pilgrimage: the play of the watchers

Each year in many Christian communities the stories of Holy Week are played in the church. As a pastor I have lead the people of my church through these Holy Week services.

Each day, the people gather. Each day we begin the service with the invitation to, "come back to Jerusalem." Each day we read the story of that day from one of the gospels, and we tell the story of what "we" saw as "we" entered the city with Jesus. We also sing hymns and offer prayers. There is no sermon.

It is on the Thursday of Holy Week that the service begins with story of the Lord's Supper:

While they were eating, Jesus took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying, "Take it; this is my body." Then he took the cup, gave thanks, and offered it to them, and they all drank from it. "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for you and for many," he said to them. "I tell you the truth, I will not drink again of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it anew in the kingdom of God" (Mark: 14:22-26).

After the story, we receive the bread and wine of the sacrament. Afterward, this story is read.

Just as he was speaking, Judas, one of the Twelve, appeared. With him was a crowd armed with swords and clubs, sent from the chief priests...The men seized Jesus and arrested him...Then everyone deserted him and fled (Mark 14:43, 46, 50).

As the reading solemnly ends, we begin the "stripping of the altar," in which we remove from the church the signs of our devotion to Jesus, all the candles and paraments are removed from the altar until the altar stands bare and stark in front of the church.

We walk away in silence.

It is a profound moment. One participant in particular spoke of how awesome that night feels. He said, "It is so hard to watch that. It's like, I am the one who deserts Jesus when he most needs someone. I feel it. And I need Easter morning to come." And each year the Holy Week services surprise me in their profound effect on the watchers. They are simple services. They simply reenact the story of the last week of the life of Jesus of Nazareth. But something extraordinarily complex happens to the "spectators."

Play for the spectator

I told the story above, as I look back, in the first person plural: "we." But truthfully, most of the service is in plain sight done by the pastor--"I." I normally direct the service, and either lead in the prayers and read the lessons or assign several people to read them. But even if three readers are participating that by itself hardly justifies the saying of "we." Yet it seems most natural to say: "we" heard, we received, we left.

The "we"-ness of the Holy Week Pilgrimage is readable from Gadamer's (1985) study of play as the nature of the aesthetic. Within that study, he explores the nature of the play of spectators in such play as sporting events, drama, symphony and also the religious drama.

The religious or profane drama, however much it represents a world that is wholly closed within itself, is as if open toward the side of the spectator, in whom it achieves its whole significance....When a play activity becomes a play in a theatre a

total switch takes place. It puts the spectator in the place of the player. He--and not the player--is the person for and in whom the play takes place (p. 98-99).

The play of the religious drama is open on one side: it is for the spectator. The Holy Week services seemed a story played with one side open. The spectators were a part of the play, even if their actual "part" in the play was limited. So "we" participated in the services.

The story acted out is like the architecture of the stage. Something is happening in the three-sided confines of the stage, and the actor-pastor is largely directing the happening. The stories of Jesus are being read: the supper, the arrest, the desertion. The stories are also acted out in the sacrament and in the stripping of the altar. Something describable is being acted out within the confines of the three-sided stage.

Still there is a fourth side to the stage--and here what is happening is less describable. "Come to Jerusalem." The spectators are invited in to experience the Holy Week of two thousand years ago, to experience the love and the shame and the hope. It is an invitation; being "in" the story is not automatic. The spectator may indeed find themselves within the story that is being told: for instance, in the Garden deserting their Lord. The spectator also may not get "in" because it has been a hard day at work and they are tired and uninterested in the experience. Or they may not get "in" because the actor-pastor has had a hard day at work and is tired and uninterested in the experience. Or as with stories the listener may simply not "get" it. It may not evoke anything for her that day. Or it may evoke a world that the listener is not willing to experience, so that the listener chooses to not enter the story.

The spectator is invited "in." But for one of many reasons, she may not be able to accept the invitation. The spectator is invited "in" not simply to hear some information, or to hear a sermon (there isn't one) but to enter in on the fourth side of the story.

The Holy Week Pilgrimage has resonances also with the teaching in the *Haggadah*. The parent is to teach the children not about the Exodus, the deliverance from Egypt, as an event that happened to ancestors of a certain time, but rather in this way:

In every generation one must look upon himself as if he personally had come out of Egypt.

Put differently, the stories are told that the children may enter the fourth side of the stage.

So it is that the stories like Holy Week are played, are enacted with a purpose, that the spectators may enter the fourth side of the stage, may identify with the life of Jesus, with the disciples of Jesus. Playing the story also entails accepting the possibility that the invitation may be declined--for one reason or another. For the play is *for* the "spectator."

He--and not the player--is the person for and in whom the play takes place
(Gadamer, 1985, p. 98-99).

Play by the spectator

Each year during Holy Week the same story is told in churches around the world. Even as each Christmas the same story is told. Each year the same stories are played as part of the remembrance of the community of the followers of Jesus. But also each year the story changes.

In the last chapter, the telling of Christmas changed for Father Brebeuf when he wrote songs for the native Canadian. Canada geese entered the story. Also the enactment of the Holy Week stories changes given the community or the state of the community. Holy Week is celebrated differently when the community is mourning the passing of their loved ones. Death and resurrection and hope become larger in the enactment of these stories. It would be celebrated differently during the time of the Roman persecution. Faithfulness and commitment would become larger in the enactment. In each place the

same festival would be repeated, the same stories enacted. But the festival would also be different because of the events in the community in which the festival was celebrated.

Following Gadamer (1985), the festival, like a piece of music, or a game, is meant to be *played* differently.

The performance of a play...cannot be simply detached from the play itself...The work of art cannot be simply isolated from the "contingency" of the chance conditions in which it appears, as where there is this kind of isolation, the result is an abstraction which reduces the actual being of the work. It itself belongs to the world to which it presents itself (p. 105).

The religious drama, the religious festival is not here a pure "object" that must be produced identically in order to be true --free of the "dust " (to re-call Jeremias' term), of influence. But the drama, the game, the festival, the story is part of the world to which it presents itself. So the drama changes in the enactment. Again, as spoken by Chief Jake Thomas, the story must change in the telling.

Again, as in the play of the tellers of story, the play that appears within the community in which it is told, also has limits. Gadamer (1985) describes the limits as being "bound" to the text of the music or drama or festival, but also being "free."

Thus we do not allow the interpretation of a piece of music or a drama the freedom to take the fixed "text" as a basis for a lot of ad-lib effects, and yet we would regard the canonisation of a particular interpretation, eg. in a gramophone recording conducted by the composer...as a failure to understand the actual task of interpretation. A "correctness" striven for in this way, would not do justice to the true binding nature of work, which imposes itself on every interpreter in a special an immediate way and does not allow him to make things easy for himself by simply imitating a model (p. 107).

While complete improvisation apart from the text is not "correct," simply imitating the text does not assure correctness either. Gadamer suggests that it is necessary to, "think of the whole of interpretation in a way that is bound and free" (p. 107).

Interpretation is probably, in a certain sense, re-creation, but this re-creation does not follow the process of a creative act, but the lines of the created work which has brought to representation in accord with the meaning the interpreter finds in it (p. 107).

Gadamer appears to be saying that the enactment of the drama, music, or story, is re-creation in that the performance involves the representation of the meaning that the interpreter or the community has found in it. The re-presentation may depart widely from the text of the story, but not from the evocations of the text itself. As such the repetition is not simply a repetition but is also a re-creation of the "text."

Every repetition is equally an original of the work (Gadamer, 1985, p. 110).

Postlude

So the story of Holy Week is played. Its play may be portrayed as a drama played for the spectators, as a three sided stage. The drama is played to invite the spectators "in" the fourth side of the stage, in to Jerusalem, in to the community. In these stories, they are invited in to identify themselves with a particular people called "Christian." They invite the spectator to be other than a spectator. To be, in the Christian community, a disciple. And they allow the spectator to remain a spectator, if they wish or if they must.

The Holy Week Pilgrimage also is played by the spectators: it moves with the condition of the community it addresses. The movement is not a distortion of the story, it is the way of play, of games, of music, of drama. The stories enacted change with the community because the stories are part of the community, part of the world they re-present.

And finally, the traditional enactment of Holy Week speaks of the continued vitality of the story within the church community. Somehow the holy altar, cross, bread, wine, water, angels, ashes, and oil of religious stories continue to play about in the church. It may be that the church has often deserted them, but the stories seem to have a way of--rising, as it were.

Chapter 10

The Ladder: the play of the interpreters

In his novel, The Gates of the Forest, Wiesel tells the story of Gregor. Having survived the holocaust, Gregor finds himself in Paris, seeking a new future after the horrendous trials of his past. There on the advice of a friend and not without reluctance, he visits the rabbi. When the rabbi asks what Gregor expects of him, the answer is, "Make me able to cry."

The Rebbe shook his head. "That is not enough. I shall teach you to sing. ...You must sing."

"And you, Rebbe? What do you expect of me?"

"Everything."

And when Gregor started to protest, the Rebbe added, "Jacob wrestled with the angel all night and overcame him. But the angel implored him: Let me go, dawn is approaching. Jacob let him go; to show his gratitude the angel brought him a ladder. Bring me this ladder."

"Which one of us is Jacob?" asked Gregor. "And which is the angel?"

"I don't know," said the Rebbe with a friendly wink. "Do you?"

Gregor got up and the Rebbe took him to the door. "Promise to come back," he said, holding out his hand.

"I'll come back."

"Will you come to our celebrations."

"Yes." (Nouwen, 1982, p. 57)

The play of Gregor and the Rabbi

Within the story of Gregor and the Rabbi, is to be found the delightful presence of Huizinga's *ludere* --play.

Play often involves "dressing up." The Rabbi, by the nature of his vocation has "dressed up" to play the part of God, or at least, to play the representative of God. They meet at the Rabbi's "playing field" where the stories of the Torah and other religious stories in general are expected to be played. And the play begins.

To play is to playfully move something to and fro, and here what is moved, the "sewn sealskin ball," is the story of Jacob. And it is played with rather freely. Firstly, the "angel" with which Jacob wrestles does not give him a ladder in the story in Genesis (Gen. 32: 28), but rather gives Jacob a new name. In a much earlier incident in his life, a story is written of Jacob seeing a ladder from earth to heaven with angels going up and coming down (Gen. 28:12). But no one is "given" the ladder. The Rabbi speaking of the ladder as the gift of the angel to Jacob for "letting him go" is already moving a story to and fro. Moving it. Playing it. And the play continues.

"Bring me this ladder," says the Rabbi. To play says Huizinga, is to consciously step out of ordinary life. Here it is to step out of life into the ancient story of Jacob. The Rabbi asks Gregor to bring him a ladder. A ladder to get up from being down? A ladder upward to hope? A ladder that came as a gift after struggling with God? And the play continues.

Gregor counters, "which one of us is Jacob, and which one is the angel?" Which parts are we playing? Do I already possess the ladder, and in struggling with you-Jacob, will I find it? Or are you the angel, so that in struggling with you-angel, will you give me the ladder? The play continues.

There is light-heartedness in play. "I don't know," said the Rebbe with a friendly wink. "Do you?" The Rabbi kicks the ball back to Gregor. "We'll see," he says--with a wink. The story is moved back and forth--played--with a "wink."

And yet there is a seriousness in the play. Life is at stake. The ladder may be about climbing out of something--out of Gregor's post-War despair. Wrestling may be about the realness of the difficulty. In his own play with Wiesel's story, Henri Nouwen (1982) concludes:

The God who wrestles with us also gives us a ladder to a new future. Wiesel, who does not want to forget the past, does not want us to lose faith in the future either (p. 58).

The play with the story is in earnest. At stake is a coming to terms with the past. At stake is faith in the future. At stake is living between the past and the future.

The story and the play end with a promise:

"Promise to come back," he said, holding out his hand.

"I'll come back."

"Will you come to our celebrations."

"Yes."

They shake hands. The play is over. And yet it may -- it will--begin again at the same "field" at a later time. Play is over, but is endlessly repeated, each time in a new way.

Play and midrash

Wiesel's story tells of a certain way with Scripture that is markedly different from the play of "The sons," the play of Jeremias and the Christian exegetes.

It is the way of midrashic interpretation. Jacob Neusner (1990) explores the midrash on the Biblical Song of Solomon 1:2---called within Judaism the Song of Songs. Below are excerpts quoted by Neusner from the Songs of Songs Rabbah to Song 1:2.

[1]-A. "O that you would kiss me with the kisses of your mouth! For your love is better than wine": [Song of Songs 1:2]

[1]-B. In what connection was the statement made?

[1]-C. R. Hinena b. R. Pappa said, "It was stated at the sea: "[I compare you, my love] to a mare of Pharaoh's chariots" (Song 1:9).

[1]-D. R. Yuda b. R. Simon said, "It was stated at Sinai: 'The song of songs' (Song 1:1)--the song that was sung by the singers: 'The singers go before, the minstrels follow after'" (Ps. 68:26)....

[2]- A. ...'The Song of Songs is Solomon's' (Song 1:1),

[2]- B. "[meaning] that belongs to the King to whom peace belongs."...

[5]- A. R. Meir says, "It was said in connection with the tent of meeting " (p. 142).

Jacob Neusner notes that Midrash-exegesis turns to the everyday experience of husband and wife as a metaphor of God's love for Israel (p. 142). So, the "sages of blessed memory" search for the ways in which God "kisses" Israel: the crossing of the Sea, the covenant of Sinai, the reign of Solomon, the tent of meeting (tabernacle). The single meaning is not sought in the play. The "connections" the text has with the community appear to be multiple. It is a free playing with text, and also a profound play.

Joseph Dan (1986) describes this way in his discussion of Hebrew ethical writings. The main characteristic of these writings is their basis in the verses of the Hebrew Bible:

One of the constant characteristics of Hebrew ethical works is their insistence on presenting ethical ideas as directly resulting from the correct interpretation of biblical verses and talmudic and midrashic sayings. While in philosophical works a writer may rely on logic and experience, in ethical works everything has to be proven by citing and interpreting an ancient text...This is the main characteristic of the Midrash, which relies on the biblical verse concerning every idea expressed in

it; it is also the most prominent characteristic of Hebrew homiletics and sermons throughout the ages (p. 9).

The way of the use of the Biblical writings is where midrashic interpretation departs from the way of Jeremias and the Christian exegetes. Dan again:

No boundaries were set to the manner in which the connection between the idea and the text could be proven. It need not be logical or literal; midrashic interpretations of verses seldom follow logic or the literal meaning. It even became one of the main aesthetic elements of this literature: to produce a surprising, elegant, and novel connection between the ancient text and the modern idea expressed in the work. As long as the basic norm was preserved--that every notion presented in the work is derived (even in the most far-fetched manner) from the ancient text--everything was permissible and the minimum requirements were regarded as fulfilled (p. 10).

The Midrash allowed the interpreters to play with the stories. Wiesel's fictional rabbi appears to stand within Midrashic tradition as he combines the stories of Jacob and the angel to produce this old-new story for Gregor.

The free-ness of interpretation can hardly be seen as a sort of sloppiness. It may be seen also in the purposeful retelling of stories by Jake Thomas and in the re-enactment of the Holy Week Pilgrimage. As in the telling of the stories, the interpretation of stories is part of the necessary dialogue of the young and the old--senex and puer.

For interpretation to engage, the text and I must be allowed to play (Jardine 1992a, p. 57).

So that along-side re-telling, and re-enacting, there may also be the play of interpreters of story. Midrashic interpretation appears as one form of that play. Beck (1993) speaks of midrash in the context of interpretive research.

Midrash--from the Hebrew root *darash*, which means to inquire, to search, to investigate...It emerges as a dialogue between tradition and its interpreter (p. 38).

"Dialogue between tradition and its interpreter" is engaged in by Gregor and the Rabbi. More generally, dialogue or conversation appears to be one of the ways of the play of the interpreters.

Interpretation and conversation

Gregor and the Rabbi converse with each other. They converse about the story of Jacob. The three, Gregor, Rabbi and the text participate in the story. They dwell together.

One of the Latin roots for the word is *conversari*, meaning, "to dwell with." This suggests that conversation involves an entering into and living with a context and its participants. As such, conversation is not only means of interaction and a way of thinking but also a type of relationship with one's surroundings (Yinger, 1987).

Gregor and the rabbi and the text converse, dwell together. They dwell together in a type of relationship. The rabbi does not deliver the story as a truth to Gregor to be accepted, learned, obeyed. The dwelling of conversation is akin to the kicking game of the people of the sea ice. All are involved with the "ball," not only the experts. All are involved in the "eventfulness of play" (Beck, 1993):

A process akin to that of the eventfulness of play occurs in translation, text interpretation and conversation. It involves the reciprocity between the participants (text and translator, text and interpreter, conversation partners) who are bound by the common subject matter, which is brought by all into language and in which the participants then all share. Like the players' moves, the participant's horizons (in a hermeneutical conversation) are decisive, "yet not as a personal standpoint" that they maintain or enforce, "but more as an opinion and a possibility that one *brings into play and puts at risk*, and that helps one truly to make one's own what the text says." [Gadamer, 1985, p. 388] ...It is a shared, common understanding that

emerges in the to-and-fro, reciprocal movement of the translation/conversation (p. 43).

The game in the ladder story is like this "hermeneutic conversation." The Rabbi and Gregor play. The play is "bound by a common subject matter": the life of Jacob, or more broadly, the Hebrew Bible. They play midrashically, anchored specifically to the Biblical text, but with a long "anchor chain" allowing them to sail far asea. They speak to each other about the text of the life of Jacob.

And as in play, something is at stake. In the conversation both of the participants put at risk their own opinions, their pathways, their very selves. Gregor takes a risk in approaching the rabbi. The rabbi takes a risk in entering into conversation with Gregor. In the conversation either may be changed. They may, like Jacob, find a ladder going from earth to heaven. Or, like the angel, they may lose one. The play of conversation takes the risk of changing ourselves. The play of conversation takes the risk that others may be changed in the "dwelling" together.

Also in the midst of the conversation the text is not simply an inanimate object in the play. The "ball" also plays. The ball bounces of its own.

In order for there to be a game, there always has to be, not necessarily literally another player, but something else with which the player plays and which automatically responds to his move with a countermove. Thus, the cat at play chooses the ball of wool because it responds to play, and ball games will be with us forever because the ball is freely mobile in every direction, appearing to do surprising things of its own accord" (Gadamer, 1985, p. 95).

The story itself plays in the conversation. Gregor is invited to consider himself in the light of Jacob--and in the light of Jacob as ancestor. Gregor is invited with the mention of Jacob to also consider Jacob as Israel, which means "striver." Gregor is invited with the mention of Jacob to also consider the ladder; he is invited to consider the eventual blessing of Jacob.

He may also by the mention of Jacob's struggle with the angel consider the possibility of voicing his own struggle as that of a wrestling match with God. Which would the story do? Which way would the ball bounce? The story may "do surprising things of its own accord."

And in the play of the conversation, also the story is at risk. The story may change. It may find itself speaking of something else. Within Jacob's story the wrestling angel may find itself giving the Jacob-wrestler a ladder. Canada geese and hunters may appear in the Christmas story.

But the story may also be said to be at risk if it is not played, if it does not become part of the conversation.(Beck 1993)

When it is interpreted, Gadamer [1985, p. 386] claims, "written tradition is brought back out of the alienation in which it finds itself and into the living present of conversation " (p. 86).

The tradition, the story, lives on, not as it is protected but as it is put to risk, as it is told and interpretively played. The tradition lives on even as it is told by those who would only confront it and reject it.

The call of tradition is not obedience but being confronted, wounded, outraged, appealing, contesting through dialogue; it is hermeneutic, a midrash (Beck, 1983, 21).

The story is put to risk in the conversation. It may change. It may be confronted. It may outrage. But the conversation also gives the dead text life.

Gregor and the Rabbi "dwell" together, playing the story of Jacob. The play of the interpreter may be to converse with the story itself, to play the story interpretively, midrashically. The conversation may involve other players, Gregor and the rabbi, or a whole community playing on the field, including the mothers with children in the "hood."

Conversation and play is radically different from the play of Pilee, Portagee, and of course, Jeremias.

Hence, the pedagogue's/midrashist's task is to lift dogma (tradition, theory, text) out of its flatness, which constitutes the state of affairs when we concede to the expert, for example, and speculate on it, make sense of it (Beck 1993, p. 31).

Limits of interpretive conversation

At what point is the encounter of conversation destructive? What sets the limits on the play of conversation with the text, on the play of conversation about the text?

The play of the tellers involved the re-telling of the story in new ways, but it would be limited by respect for the old, said Jake Thomas. The play of the Holy Week services meant that the services would be different because they were part of the changing world which they were representing but limited by the evocations of the text itself. The play of the interpreters may move and play with the stories, like Midrash. The play may put the story at risk.

The limits to interpretation may well also be "respect" for the old as well as limits of the "evocations" of the text itself. Limits are spoken in a different way in the language used by James Hillman (1983) in speaking of the interpretation of images in psychotherapy. He quotes St. John Damascene (tr. 1898) who distinguishes (ca. 675-749) between "*latria*" as the kind of worship due the supreme invisible power as object of religion", and, "*dulia*" as an attitude of service." Hillman says that *dulia* is the attentiveness "appropriate to the icon or saint or angel, holy place, object or book." "*Latia*" in relation with a statue is idolatry -- as the word itself says. The act of painting the image or speaking with it in a poem is *dulia*, a service to the image (p. 72-73).

Hillman's words on the "icon or saint or angel, holy place, object or book" seem fitting also to speak of the limits to interpretation. *Dulia* sets a limit on the one end of

interpretation as "idolatry." The story is not served by making it into an inaccessible, safe, protected fact or doctrine--an idol. Idolatry is spoken of by Dwayne Huebner (1984) in the context of education.

Idolatry exists when teachers present knowledge, forms, symbols, as if interpretation and conversations are frills rather than duties informed by love and responsibility (p. 122).

The interpretation of stories is limited in this sense by *dulia*, service. They are served in "love" and "responsibility" when they are not idol-ized as facts or doctrine or even as inerrant text, but when they are played and conversed. The play and the conversation may also take the form of lovingly and responsibly confronting the story out of a sense of being "wounded, outraged." This too is *dulia*.

Dulia also presents another limit to interpretation on the far side of idolatry. It appears in the story Robert Coles (1989) tells of Elaine, a teacher.

Elaine, taught, "I Stand Here Ironing" with special conviction and passion. She emphasized the story's moral introspection: the mother's taking stock of life as it has been lived by herself and her daughter. Elaine shared some of her own family history with the class...Her personal memories sparked memories in her students--though she kept returning to the text as a mainstay. "There must be a balance," Elaine once reminded me, and then spelled out its nature: the stories are emotionally powerful and have a strong effect on the students. They tell me so. When they come to class I want to encourage them to talk directly and without fear and shame about the response to what they read. But I want us to make sure the responses are to the text...The students are usually grateful. They want to digress, but they want to be brought back home, also. Otherwise they feel lost--too much on their own (p. 89).

Dulia limits the idolatry of the story--idolatry which would refuse to play. But *dulia* also would set a limit at the other end --at the abandonment of the story. Staying with the stories provides a conversation, a dwelling place, in which "they can be brought back home." In this way the service of the story can also be seen as a service to the people who interpret it. The story may be a place to dwell with each other.

Finally, the limits of the conversation must also touch on the relationship of the people who converse with the story. Huebner (1984) again speaks of education:

We need the assurance the we will not be destroyed, that life will indeed be enhanced rather than destroyed. Love is that assurance. We can face the threat of the unknown and of the stranger if we are not alone; if we are in the presence of love which affirms life (p. 117).

Postlude

In the context of *dulia* for the story, and love for "players," let the conversations play. And surely, a ladder will be seen.

Jacob left Beersheba and set out for Haran. When he reached a certain place, he stopped for the night because the sun had set. Taking one of the stones there, he put it under his head and lay down to sleep. He had a dream, in which he saw a ladder resting on the earth, with its top reaching to heaven, and the angels of God were ascending and descending on it...When Jacob awoke from sleep, he thought, "Surely the Lord is in this place, and I was not aware of it. He was afraid and said, "How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God; this is the gate of heaven " (Gen. 28:11-17).

Chapter 11

Interlude

Pilate was in a difficult spot. In front of him was a rabbi, a wandering teacher from Galilee named Jesus. The man had been brought by his own people to Pilate for judgment. But Pilate could not find a legal charge to lay against him. Outside the doors were a crowd of people calling for the execution of the man as a criminal. The man would not confess. The people would not relent. And a judgment was expected.

"What is truth?" (John 18: 38), Pilate asked.

Much of this paper has found and told stories that have questioned certainty. 1492 questioned the certainty of the plain (Cartesian) scientific fact. Confessions questioned the certainty of doctrinal formulations. Nativity questioned the certainty of 'inerrant' text. If these works have validity, what is left? In Pilate's words, "what is truth?"

In the midst of the ambiguity of story, in the midst of the temporality of story, in the midst of the interpretable-ness of story, in the tangle of the beautiful weaves of story, what can be said for certain when something needs to be said for certain? What can be said when the people outside are calling for one thing and a man in front of you stands for another?

The question is exceedingly difficult.

There seems to be on the one hand, validity in the search for actual events--the "event." In Pilate's words, "What did he do?" Polkinghorne (1988) speaking about the interpretable meaning-making of narrative still affirms the validity of the event:

While the acknowledged task of a narrative is to organize and make actual past events meaningful, it is required to attend to the accepted reality of these events. ...

For example, the death of one's mother in a personal narrative cannot be represented as if it did not happen; however the interpretation and significance of one's mother's death may vary, depending on its placement within the narrative scheme (p. 160).

Hayden White (1973) similarly speaks of the work of the historian. The historian, says White, is also a story-teller "emplotting" the story as either Romance, Tragedy, Comedy, or Satire. (p. 7) Historical emplotment, as in story-telling, involves including some events and excluding others, emphasizing one and silencing another. But the historian also must deal with "events already constituted" (p. 6). An event happens: the king dies. However, "the death of the king could be a beginning, an ending or a transitional event in three different stories." (p. 7) But the king does die.

Attending to the "events already constituted" must be part of "truth." Columbus may not have discovered America, but attending to the sailing of a certain sailor to a certain land has some part of the "truth." The man is standing in front of Pilate. The man has said something, done something.

Still Pilate's lot is not much improved. The bare event has little meaning of itself. The man was in front of him. He taught. People knew him. What is the significance of the events? What did it mean? What did it matter? What was happening in the events around the man Jesus? What was threatened that the crowd was up in arms? To know this truth with regard to meaning, Pilate is back to his difficult question. What is truth?

Clifford (1986a) in speaking of ethnographic truth, speaks of ethnographic writing as being the writing of fictions, "in the sense of 'something made or fashioned,' the principal burden of the word's Latin root, *fingere*. But it is important to preserve the meaning not merely of making, but also of making up, of inventing things not actually real" (p. 6). The writing of ethnographic story--as with other stories--includes the selecting of

certain voices, and the silencing of others. As such the "ethnographic truths" are inherently partial (p. 7). Clifford describes ethnographers in this telling story.

Ethnographers are more and more like the Cree hunter who (the story goes) came to Montreal to testify in court concerning the fate of his hunting lands in the new James Bay hydroelectric scheme. He would describe his way of life. But when administered the oath he hesitated: "I'm not sure I can tell the truth....I can only tell what I know " (p. 8).

The question of truth—at least when any meaning or ordering or understanding is involved—moves in language that is not kin to the measured, certain language of the modern scientific world. It is more kin to the language of the courtroom, of 'witness', of 'testimony', of conviction.

Willis (1989) sees the need to shift the language of knowledge in education from factual certainties, into the language of conviction—which is akin to religious language.

To live religiously is, therefore to abandon the lesser hope of treating fundamental questions as problems of matters of knowledge for the greater hope of treating them as matters of belief. To live fully is to live religiously, to be perpetually perplexed about the mysteries that lie beyond the apparent manifestations of the universe, but to be perpetually open to dialogue about these mysteries and to new forms of living (p. 71).

The ambiguity of a storied world is expressed well within the language of conviction. Different stories are told. Witnesses called have different stories. They speak of the "whole truth" or at least they speak of what they have seen, and experienced.

And of course, the story may be untrue--accidentally. It may even be untrue--intentionally. A lie.

Wiggins (1975) speaks of the difficulty of weighing the truth of stories, of determining which stories are worth attention.

Stories which evince no response in the present will be abandoned as dead. By contrast, responses which are evoked in the present give testimony to the abiding power of living stories. But one dare not prematurely foreclose the kind, the intensity, or the response to a particular story. The stories which survive and the new ones which are born will take care of themselves. There seems to be no alternative but to open oneself to and to trust the process (p. 19).

The stories that survive are alive; they deserve a hearing. The stories that evoke nothing in the present will die. In their living or in their dying, they will take care of themselves.

Ironically, this is similar advice given by Gamaliel at the trial of the followers of Jesus as told in the Christian Bible:

Therefore, in this present case I advise you: Leave these men alone! Let them go!

For if their purpose or activity is of human origin, it will fail. But, if it is from God, you will not be able to stop these men; you will only find yourselves fighting against God. (Acts 5:38-39)

What is truth? Pilate's question is unanswered in the story. Pilate simply goes out and succumbs to the crowd. What is truth? The question hangs in the air--eerily, hauntingly. Like a Man himself would in the hours that followed.

Chapter 12

Shutting the Poplar Gate: the play of the yarners

Say, did I ever tell you about the poplar gate? Well, back in those days we were looking for a place to start a Bible Camp. We had heard that there was some land near Christopher Lake that we might be able to get. Now we didn't have any money, so we weren't just sure what we were doing. But nine of us boys decided to go with Pastor Larseth to look anyway. We piled into two cars and headed for the lake. Well, we got there and walked all around. There was nothing but brush and trees in those days -- mostly poplar. Anyway we were running all over the place, we weren't too sure what to look for, you know. Pastor Larseth finally said, "Let's stop for a moment of prayer, boys." So we did. But we didn't find anything that day. But this is the story. Four of us were in the first car, heading back to Prince Albert. You know, poplar trees they grow real shallow roots, so one day, when they get too tall for their roots, they fall over. Now a real big poplar had fallen across the road. But we were young and strong. The three of us in the back seat jumped out of the car and spun it off the road, and the car pulled up. We three looked at each other and didn't say a word-- we just quickly put the tree back across the road. The Pastor's car wasn't in sight behind us. We drove off. When we got to the church we were standing by the car when the Pastor's car got there. He came over to us looking very serious. "You fellows had a close one." he says. "What's that?", we said-- and we each covered our smiles with a hand. But he seemed to know we were laughing. "This is serious," he said. "You fellows were nearly killed." "What?", we said-- hands over our mouths. "We weren't many minutes behind you and a huge poplar tree had fallen across the road. You could have been under it". Then he looked at us all and the lights went on. "Did you

shut the poplar gate, Larseth?", I said. (And his hand covered his mouth in the telling, covering--but not quite covering--a broad grin.)

My father told me this story not many years ago. It happened during one of the many times we pored over his photo albums of the "old days" in northern Saskatchewan. On this occasion we were looking at a photo of ten men in double-breasted suits outside a rustic chapel.

My father was a man of deep faith and impish humor. He told me the story of the poplar gate about a year before he passed away. It is a story I remember well, even though I only heard it told once in my father's life. It was a story about the respected pious men who visioned and founded Camp Kinasao, a Lutheran Bible Camp in northern Saskatchewan. Something about the story matters to me. Something about it matters more since my father's death last summer.

Crites (1971), cited before, on story:

We find stories composed as works of art as well as the much more modest narrative communications that pass between people in explaining where they have been, why things are as they are, and so on. Set within a world of consciousness, the mundane stories are also among the most important means by which people articulate and clarify their sense of that world. In order to initiate their children in the "ways of the world," parents tell them stories (p. 296).

The preceding chapters have encountered ancient stories: tribal stories from Zambia, aboriginal stories from Canada, Biblical stories from Palestine. This chapter begins to explore every-day stories as they are spoken and occasionally written by people, in "modest narrative communications"-- like the poplar gate. It will explore the homespun play of the spinners, yarners and weavers.

Story and Yarn

"Story" is a simple word." It has been used throughout this paper without examining its etymological roots. It does not seem to have particularly "telling" roots. Story is plainly a short form of "history." History is from the Greek *historia*, a learning by inquiry, and from the German *histor*, knowing (O.E.D.). But history and story have a different texture. My father wanted to tell a story; he would not have said he was producing an historical study. History is a critical discipline. Story seems broader, earthier. Story can refer to anything from the Biblical story of the exodus to the student's story of "my summer vacation." It is as sombre as the story of Dachau, as frivolous as the story that carries the latest joke. It is as lasting as the story of Abraham, as passing as the stories in today's newspaper. My father told me a "story" which he made up, fashioned, spun.

Spinning, yarning, and weaving are some of the expressions that have gathered around the everyday, home-spun "telling" of stories. To tell or spin a yarn is one of those expressions. Yarn has to do with turning or twisting fibres into thread. Originally though, yarn is from the Old Norse *garn*, "thread made from gut" (O.E.D.). So yarn at least in its etymology has connections to thread that is also biological-- living thread.

My father "yarned." He took the threads of his life, what he had known and experienced, and spun them into the story of the poplar gate. In the midst of the poplar gate story the "threads" crossing and winding around each other are palpable. In the midst of the story are ties with faith. There is mission: to find land for a camp. There is wilderness and lostness. There is prayer in the midst of the lostness--and continued lostness. There is a spiritual leader, one who is both helpful and fallible--"fool-able" even. And the threads have ties to the past. The Torah's Exodus story of wilderness also had mission and wilderness and lostness, and prayer, and more lostness. That story had fallible spiritual leaders. The same threads run through many of the stories of the Hebrew

Bible and the Christian New Testament. The same threads wind their way through other stories and eventually through the story of the poplar gate.

Threads are spun together by the yarner. Crites (1971), cited before, on the spinning of stories:

The most direct and obvious way of recollecting it [memory] is by telling a story, though the story is never simply the tedious and unilluminating recital of the chronicle of memory itself....I can abstract general features and formal elements of it [memory] for purposes of theory, or suspend it in order to draw a picture, or splice episodes from it in a way that gives them new significance (p. 300).

The poplar gate story had a form to it that was not accidental. The "poplar gate" was his introduction to the story, and also re-entered with a wink as the story concluded. The yarner did spin the yarn. My father did arrange the story. My father did some sort of selecting of the events of that day. And he did include with the threads his own particular humor.

Threads that are spun together also are entangled with other threads. It is the "boys" who went to find land. The "girls" had no part in this story. Moses and Aaron led the people through the wilderness. Peter and James and John and the "boys" led the early Christian church in its wilderness. Threads entangle. In the midst of the story are threads that are rough and coarse to the touch. There are threads that wind their way through other stories of the exclusion of the women. So the story becomes entangled in threads one would rather not acknowledge--kin one would rather not claim.

The language of spinning or yarning stories while throwing light on story making, also casts a shadow. Yarning sounds like an activity done by a yarner on threads. But the threads also seem to have their say in telling stories--they are "gut," living thread. My father did not set out to tell his son a story about gender issues. But the threads were entangled within the story. Quite likely he made no conscious connection between Moses

and the wilderness in a story of faith either. We were sitting over a photo album. He was telling me the story of the poplar gate. Of himself. Of who my father was. Maybe of who his son was. But I did surely feel the threads as I listened and thought about the story.

The yarner does tell a yarn. The yarn is spun by the teller. A certain twist is given the story. But the yarn still has unavoidable connections and windings to other threads of which the yarner may not be aware. Telling stories is not as simple as spinning threads into a cord. And indeed, the yarn grows; it has connections that are yet to come.

The last story my father told was the hymn he spoke from memory when he had little memory left--when he could no longer spin his own stories.

Guide me ever, great Redeemer,
 Pilgrim through this barren land.
 I am weak, but you are mighty;
 Hold me with your pow'r-ful hand.
 Bread of heaven, bread of heaven,
 Feed me now and evermore,
 Feed me now and evermore....

When I tread the verge of Jordan,
 Bid my anxious fears subside;
 Death of death and hell's destruction,
 Land me safe on Canaan's side.
 Songs and praises, songs and praises,
 I will raise forevermore,
 I will raise forevermore
 (Williams, 1978/eighteenth century, p 343).

I played the hymn on trumpet at his funeral a few days later. The yarn somehow does not end. Something lives in the living gut -threads of yarn. It stretches back at least to the wilderness of Sinai. It stretches forward to somewhere, through unknown wilderness of its own. In the church that day the yarn spun its way into the living web of the group that gathered. For me, it would wind its way into every act of worship, particularly this prayer from the Lutheran Book of Worship (1978), from Vespers, a service of evening prayer:

Lord God, you called your servants to ventures of which we cannot see the ending, by paths as yet untrodden, through perils unknown. Give us the faith to go out with good courage, not knowing where we go but only that your hand is leading us and your love supporting us; through Jesus Christ our Lord (p. 153).

Yarn and Threads

He was waiting to see. He was watching for signs. He was coming to no conclusions, leaving a few doors wide open. He called me shortly before he died to tell me he'd not be keeping our next "appointment." He had kept using that word, in spite of my efforts to rid both of us of it. I hastened to offer an alternate date. "No need for that," he told me. Stupidly, fearfully unaware (not only patients "deny"), I pressed the matter, so that he had to end it, finally, by saying a firm good-bye: "I hope I'll see you anon." That last word succeeded--by its slight awkwardness, its antiquity, its rendering of the present and the future, its capacity to break through conventional, temporal statements--in conveying what he had long known better than I: that death had no intention of waiting very long for him. That word, "anon" was the next to last one I heard from Ed. I promised, too wordily, an imminent visit, and he said, "Good-bye," and meant it. Not long afterward I was sitting in a church, listening to his friends sing of him, and sitting in a class,

talking with future doctors about the singing he did during his stay on earth (Coles, 1989, p. 96).

Anon. A small and simple word. The Oxford English Dictionary simply defines anon as from the Anglo Saxon,

"on one," that is, without break, at another time.

The etymology does not seem to lead toward the meaning that broke through its use to Robert Coles. The word anon, appears in such archaic English as in the (1611) King James Bible.

But he that received the seed into stony places, the same is he that heareth the word, and anon with joy, receiveth it (Matthew 13: 20).

Something of the "antiquity" of that single word "anon" connected Ed's story with another story, with other threads. It was not the etymology of the word that broke through for Coles but something else. Feeling down the thread of the single word anon, led the conversation out of the world of schedules and appointments into another world--into a world in which anon played, into the stories that told of life and death. Something happened to Robert Coles with the speaking of that one small quaint word.

Every word causes the whole of language to which it belongs to resonate and the whole world view that underlies it to appear (Gadamer, 1985, p. 458).

The single word connects the hearer to a story in which the word often plays.

Stephen Crites (1971) notes that stories are not a collection of "independently defined symbols " (p. 305). The words have a life before use in the story. Phrases such as "the cross" or "the holy mountain" cannot be employed as though they have been nowhere before this usage. These words bring with them into their new contexts the significance that the phrase gathered to itself in previous contexts.

So the word may sound resonances that the hearer does not sense. Ed also spoke the word, "Good-bye," etymologically a contraction of "God be with ye " (O.E.D.). But

if Ed meant "Good-bye" to connect with the archaic etymology of good-bye (which he may not have) --with which "anon" would often play--Robert Coles did not hear it.

He said, "Good-bye," and meant it.

Good-bye, Coles took to mean simply "The End" of the story. The word and the stories that underlie may resonate but they do not force their way to the surface. Still, something did happen with "anon." It seems that rather than connecting rather mechanically word to underlying story as a sort of Wohlstrom's wonder, the single word rather seems to summon, to suggest, to dance.

The single word can also voice a story that the teller does not intend. David Jardine (1993) explores this commonplace, simple, brief story given by a high school principal:

I enjoy having student-teachers in the school. It keeps things lively, keeps us on our toes. And anyway, it's our responsibility. The profession needs new blood (Jardine, p. 1).

The article follows the threads of the language within this seemingly simple commonplace statement. "Needing new blood" could mean simply, "requires new prospects." But these were not the words, the threads, the principal spun. By voicing the phrase, "the profession needs new blood" something else happens. "Needing new blood" suggests other tales.

The graphic notion of "needing new blood" suggests archaic images of fleshy vitality, regeneration, transfusion, fertility/fecundity, reproduction, blood sacrifice, menstruation, child bearing, renewal, healing/wounding, transformation and the whole cascade of bloody events surrounding the Christian worship of the consuming of flesh and blood and its intimate coupling with crucifixion and resurrection (Jardine, 1993, p. 2).

Did the school principal intend to tell of these tales? Probably not. More likely, he simply used a fairly common phrase from the culture around him. But the words themselves still are full of these tales, even as the culture is full of them.

These words are the new, unanticipated, (and most likely unintended) revoicing of a world, a world of multiple tales that are folds of the same cloth (the same weave). This principal is, however unwittingly, folded in to a world--implicated in it...Differently put, this principal has "kin" even though he may not know it or experience it (p. 3).

The yarner spins what seem to be mere words. The yarner may know the "kin" of the word of which he intends to remind the hearer. But there may also be other "kin" which the yarner also brings into the world of his story because he is who he is, and lives where he lives. The yarner tells the tale of his people as well as of himself. Because he uses their language. Because he is part of the yarns he spins. Because she is part of the yarns she spins.

The performance of a play...cannot be simply detached from the play itself... It itself belongs to the world to which it presents itself (Gadamer, 1985, p. 105).

Woven text

While yarn is about spinning thread, fascinatingly, text is from *textus*, "to weave" (O.E.D.). While the yarn of oral stories evokes images of spinning strings into thread, the weave of text evokes images of weaving the threads into cloth. Interestingly, the earliest use of text is in reference to "Scripture text" (O.E.D.). The image of weaving seems to suggest something of shape, something of breadth, and texture. It would seem unusual to call the text of the exodus or the story of the crucifixion a "yarn." It would also seem unusual to call the text of Hamlet a yarn. Text seems to have to do with stories that have achieved something of permanence in a culture.

Stephen Crites (1971) explores two sorts of stories that relate to a distinction between yarning and texting above. The first he calls the mundane story. By mundane he simply means stories that are set within a world, the phenomenological *mundus* (p. 297).

All stories that are spoken or written are mundane stories, they are set in a world, real or imagined. The second type of story is what Crites (1971) calls, "sacred story."

Within the traditional cultures there have been some stories that were told, especially on festal occasions, that had special resonance. Not only told but ritually re-enacted, these stories seem to be allusive expressions of stories that cannot be fully and directly told, because they live, so to speak, in the arms and legs and bellies of the celebrants...We sometimes apply the ambiguous term myth to this "story within a story" (p. 295).

The mundane and the sacred story are distinct but not separated, says Crites. All of a people's mundane stories are implied in that people's sacred story. Also, each mundane story "takes soundings" in the sacred story (Crites, 1971, p. 295). For Crites, certain texts take deep soundings in the sacred story, while some "merry tales" are content to play on the surface. The Scriptural text for example, while not to be equated with the sacred story could be said to have deep ties with sacred story. The mundane story of the "poplar gate" had connections with the sacred story that my father found in the Scriptural text.

There are also other texts, other stories that have a certain permanence. Robert Coles speaks of his patient's use of texts in telling their own stories. Coles writes of Phil, a fifteen year old polio patient. One "text" that gave Phil words to tell his own story came first from a reading of *Catcher in the Rye*.

He began a lively monologue about that novel, on Holden, on Pencey Prep, on "phonies," on what it means to be honest and decent in a world full of "phoniness." Holden's voice had become Phil's; and uncannily, Holden's dreams of escape, of rescue (to save not only himself but others), became Phil's. The novel had, as he put it, "got" to him: lent itself to his purposes as one who was "flat out"; and as one who was wondering what in life he might "try to catch" (Coles, 1989, p. 38).

"Holden's voice had become Phil's." The patient telling his own story yarned the woven text into his own story.

Texts are a source of ways to speak our own stories. They are in a sense ready-made cloth which we can use to weave in our own experience. A medical colleague confided to Robert Coles:

We try to say what we're experiencing, and sometimes we can't find the words, and other times we're lucky we run into a poet who gives us the words (Coles, 1989, p. 100).

Perhaps more importantly, the text provides more than simply words to express our own stories. Coles' patient Phil speaks of the novel *Huckleberry Finn*.

I read, and when I was done with the story, I felt different. It's hard to say what I mean. ..I know that my mind changed after I read *Huckleberry Finn*. I couldn't get my mind off the book. I forgot about myself--no, I didn't actually. I joined up with Huck and Jim; we became a trio. They were very nice to me. I explored the Mississippi with them on the boats and on the land. I had some good talks with them. I dreamed about them. I'd wake up, and I'd know I'd just been out west, on the Mississippi. I talked with those guys and they straightened me out! (Coles, 1989, p. 35)

This text for Phil was not simply words to use to tell his own story. In *Huckleberry Finn* a sort of invitation came to Phil, to join, to come along, to be somewhere, to see something. It was an invitation which both drew Phil in and which brought a change in his way of thinking.

Coles (1989) told also of Phil's response to a second book, William Golding's *Lord of the Flies*.

Phil resisted that invitation; the book, brought to him by the friend, remained unread. He had glanced at it, seen its charged symbolism, its mix of hard realism

and surrealism... He decided to give me a terse explication, one I would never forget. "I'd like to leave this hospital, and find a friend or two, and a place where we could be happy, but I don't want to leave the whole world I know" (p. 38).

"I don't want to leave the world I know." The finding of a text, a cloth, a myth, in which to speak about one's world, is also about finding a text, a cloth, a myth in which to dwell.

Such stories [myths], and the symbolic world they project, are not like monuments that men behold, but like dwelling-places. People live in them (Crites, 1971, p. 295).

Something of the interwovenness of a birds-nest begins to picture the wild and prolific intertwinings of text and humans. Coles' Phil found *Huckleberry Finn* a place to dwell, to nest. And my father found the story of the Christian Scriptures a place to dwell.

Finding a nest matters. James Hillman's (1983) fascinating work speaks of the importance of story in the field of psychotherapy. He characterizes the work of Freud as being a writer of "pure fiction". Freud could hear the words of the patient and place them into a single plot, the plot named after Oedipus (p. 11). While Hillman is critical of this "shaping of all shoes on one last" (p. 10), he affirms the very nature of psychotherapy is working in story.

Ever since,[Freud] we are all, in this field of psychoanalysis, not medical empiricists, but workers in story (p. 9).

The psychotherapist, says Hillman, is a worker in story, involved in the genre of therapeutic fictions.

The force of the diagnostic stories cannot be exaggerated. Once one has been written into a particular clinical fantasy with its expectations, its typicalities, its character traits, and the rich vocabulary it offers for recognizing oneself, one then begins to recapitulate one's life into the shape of the story. One's past too is retold

and finds a new internal coherence, even inevitability, through this abnormal story (p. 15).

The work in part is a call to psychotherapists to "turn directly to the literature rather than use it unawares"; it is a call to expand the limited types of plots, that psychotherapy traditionally employs (p. 19). But here the words shine as a beacon to the play of people nesting in stories.

I need to remember my stories not because I need to find out about myself but because I need to found myself in a story I can hold to be mine (Hillman, 1983, p. 42).

"I need to found myself in a story": In the adventures of Huckleberry Finn, in the wilderness wandering of the Exodus, in Oedipus, in Descartes, in the Great Law, in the hyena at the crossroads, in the story of Jesus.

We found ourselves, and find ourselves in many stories at once. Polkinghorne (1988) pictures the nest of stories:

Our lives are ceaselessly intertwined with narrative, with the stories that we tell and hear told, with the stories that we dream or imagine or would like to tell. All these stories are reworked in that story of our own lives which we narrate to ourselves in an episodic, sometimes semiconscious, virtually uninterrupted monologue. We live immersed in narrative, recounting and reassessing the meanings of our past actions, anticipating the outcomes of our future projects, situating ourselves at the intersection of several stories not yet completed. We explain our actions in terms of plots, and often no other form of explanation can produce sensible statements (p. 160).

Closing

This exploration of the play, of the gut-threads, the spinning of yarns, the weaving of texts, and the dwelling in texts has many loose ends--maybe innumerable loose ends that could be explored.

Something of the yarn spins back to Plato's argument that stories should not be written down because they are helpless--cut off from their tellers. They belong in a certain nest--a certain place.

Something of the yarn spins back into Jeremias' attempt to sweep away all the dust, all the webs of tradition that grew around the "original" story--as though the webs were accidental or meaningless.

Something of the yarn spins out toward considering the nestedness of any specific text within another text. The wilderness of the exodus story is nested in the story of the exodus, which is nested in the Torah, which is nested in the Hebrew Bible, which was later nested by Christians in its own Bible--in the part called the "Old" testament. How does that nestedness in the Christian Bible affect the story of the wilderness? And how does the wilderness story affect the story of the Christian Bible?

Something of the yarn about speaking words that have kin of which one is not aware, spins back into the prelude of this paper:

I am convinced that public schooling in Canada is deeply involved in the Christian narrative--or at least in the narrative that existed when the schools still knew that they were speaking it. For instance, the valuing of the mind/spirit over the body appears on every report card and in every time table; it is a valuing that has roots in the old Christian narrative of the "denial of the flesh." But such connections are not voiced, nor challenged. Even more significantly, while the Christian narrative has been changing, education, in refusing to hear the story it has been telling, remains entangled in the once unquestioned narrative of the denial of the flesh.

Yarn and threads are growing everywhere. Even where it is un-spoken.

The thread of the simple word, "story," runs on in every direction: backward, forward, upward, downward, inward, outward, "ever-ward"-- infinitely. Where to stop.

It seems irresistible to close with these words about spinning and weaving and words in Welty's (1955) review of *Charlotte's Web*.

What the book "proves" in the words the minister in the story hands down to the congregation on the Sunday after Charlotte writes "Some Pig" in her web--is that "human beings must always be on the watch for the coming of wonders." Dr. Dorian has this to say: "Oh, no, I don't understand it. But for that matter I don't understand how a spider learned how to spin a web in the first place. When the words appeared everyone said they were a miracle. But nobody pointed out that the web itself is a miracle" (p. 206).

"The web itself is a miracle." Something quite wondrous is at play in the yarning and weaving and nesting of stories. Something alive. Something ancient but also newly growing. Something magical. Something past even the wonder of words. A wondrous web.

After a time, all that is left to do is cover our smiles, wink and shut the poplar gate.

Chapter 13

Postlude

The organ sounds the postlude as the service closes. The bell in the tower tolls.

And the pastor raises his hands and speaks: "Peace be with you."

The "luding" is nearly over. The pre-lude introduced the play of stories. And the stories played: the son set out from his father's house; the hyena stood at the crossroads; Columbus sailed to America; Luther studied in the tower; the people of the sea-ice played the kicking game; the church gathered for Holy Week; the rabbi and Gregor played with a ladder; Pilate arrived in the inter-lude; and the poplar gate was played, then shut with a wink.

Now as the post-lude sounds, the play concludes. It seems usual to summarize the conclusions--what has been settled, nailed down, proven. But in the play of stories much may be said to have "opened" but little can be said to have "closed."

What may have been closed has been the refusal of closure. The nature of stories is to open rather than to close. The closure of interpretation is relegated as a "second-order" language, as one way of playing with a story, but not as the closing summary of a story. The stories themselves must not be close. They are to be re-told, re-shaped for the young and the old.

The pre-lude of the paper spoke of the attempt to speak the "suffocated narrative" of Christianity, and to speak the narrative in the midst of other voices. Telling stories seems to make this conversation possible. Telling stories allows us to speak our stories without resorting to the closure of doctrine or fact or inerrancy. Telling stories allows us to speak our stories as an invitation for consideration, for participation, for understanding.

The next to last words of the playing come from William Carlos Williams. His words rang in the work of Robert Coles (1989). They toll again here:

Their story, yours, mine--it's what we all carry with us on this trip we take, and we owe it to each other to respect our stories and learn from them (p. 30).

But the last words come from the preacher--yes, with hands raised from the keyboard:

"Peace be with you."

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