

After These Things

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I the Lord thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children . . .

Exodus 20:5

The fathers shall not be put to death for the children, neither shall the children be put to death for the fathers: every man shall be put to death for his own sin.

Deuteronomy 24:16

So finally, after several botched attempts, humankind beat the Lord at the story game and the Lord sulked mightily, as would any creation, thought up and disturbed into existence and then disputed with by the very creatures whom He thought He had invented. A great long lordly sulk there was after Abraham bound his boy, challenging and defeating God-the-Narrator with the threat of the premature end of His own story. God clammed up. Certainly there were times later when the children of Abraham liked to think that the Lord spoke directly to them too, as children would, but He did not walk and eat and dicker with them for the lives of the Sodomites, as He had with Abraham; He only ever came in dreams to them. And what are dreams if not the stories humans tell themselves, their wishes made phantom-real? Night-children born out of the desire to be heard, to make sense, to get the attention they believe they deserve. If the father deserved it, why not the son? God, it was said, spoke directly only one more time, generations after the

children of Abraham, to another chosen individual in His sadly self-revealing attempt to make Himself palpable to His creation, or creators, what you will.

And more like an affliction than a triumph, humanity's stories, the narration humans had wrenched from the deity, came and came. Counterpointing, contradicting, refining, refuting, relating, distorting, destroying, deceiving, denying, explaining, excusing, blaming, boasting. Depending on who was doing the telling and who the listening. As if anyone ever stops telling for long enough to listen. And, we might wonder, is the telling really intended for another to listen to, so often is it done in silence and alone? Who could have made such consciousnesses up? Creatures like all the others that creep and crawl and pad and thunder over the earth, with all their needs and functions, but who uniquely weld together bits of stuff – memory, fantasy and dream – into *stories*. *Homo fabulans*. What is the wordless, blank-minded baby doing all those crying, sucking, excreting months but waiting for language and building its story reservoir?

So when folks made up the cracking tale of creation and its creator, they proceeded to vie with that creator for control of story, and won, of course, for how could they lose? It's what they do, the only thing they can do with all the time and all the knowing they're stuck with. The past, present and future squat in their heads waiting to be filled in with narrative.

And once the story became theirs, the humans told it over and over, to themselves mostly, as I say, trying to get it straight, or just idling the time away. Version after version; story without end. In the beginning, they began. And so it came to pass, they continued. And in the end, they ended. And then began again. Repeating or altering, it didn't matter, so long as the narrative

trickled on inside their heads, and spilled out of their mouths, and fell upon their ears. The great chaos of telling it as it is, or might be or could never be, but telling, telling, telling. *Tell me a story. A true story. Make a story up. This happened, really happened to me. And then, and then and then. And so that is why. And that is how it came about. And this is my story. And mine. And mine. And have you forgotten his story? And her story? And. And. And . . .*

And nothing, finally. Because after the last gasp, all the stories are lost. The light goes out, the story ends, usually in mid-sentence.

And if someone were to listen in to the stories each of them told of themselves and their relation to others, and were to present them together, a compilation, what might emerge? Another version. Let's go no further than that. Just another story to add to the mountainous heap. Let's not talk about truth, or any other such foolishness. And what would this god-like character be, listening in, cutting and pasting, re-shaping, juxtaposing, adding a little here, taking something away there? With no story of his or her own to tell? Hardly. Such a one has never been. Let's say an editor – a redactor. Someone with a story to tell about stories.

And then again, people get stuck. They want stories but they find themselves in the thrall of a single moment, a point around which they revolve, spun helplessly by an attraction to some, as they perceive it, central event which has, you might say, bewitched them. A pivotal moment. One that takes you by the throat and won't be thought through, only round and round. No resolution comes, no movement forward. The story seems to vanish along with the time the narrative creates. There is just

the identification with the moment, or period, before which everything was different, or after which nothing was the same. The *moment* enchants the teller precisely because it has implications for the rest of the story, yet it retards the narrative, cripples it. The moment is everything. A brief vision stands for everything and nothing. The story stutters to a stop without ever coming to a conclusion. Stuck. So these compulsive storytellers lose their story to an overwhelming moment, as if the material itself takes over from the narrator and demands deference. Or is it merely a lack of courage on the part of the tellers? The fear that the story will turn out nothing more than ordinary, anodyne. Better stay with the dramatic moment than confront the overall blandness of one's single go at existence, the disappointment of retrospection, the ineluctability of the conclusion, which, in any case, the teller will not be present to tell of. A collusion, of course, between enthrallment and paralysis, and an unwillingness to face the structure. And so editors become necessary.

Editors are as obsessed about structure as the individual storyteller is obsessed about his or her *moments*. Editors patch and refit the various stories, each stuck in their various moments, into an order of some kind, so as to come to a conclusion. Where would humanity be without conclusions? Revolving round and round their separate points, dancing some crazed unchoreographed dance, singing single notes, caterwauling an unorchestrated cacophony. Him fixated on his moment, her on hers, but never thinking that both their moments, and all the others, belong together to make an (if you like) accidental structure, something else, something astonishingly different from all the individual moments.

So us editors? We just put things together and see if they

make . . . anything. We take the solitary *I*, and replace it with the third person. Of course, you have to interfere a little. It's true that juxtaposing one version with another has a certain quiet effect, creating a reading between the lines which is the result of the editor's manipulation, but there is more to do than that. In any case what story is not the editor's story? And this story is certainly mine. Mine as much as anyone's.

(1) After these things.--After the war with Chedorlaomer. The word of the Lord came (Heb., was) unto Abram.--This phrase, used so constantly afterwards to signify revelation, occurs here for the first time. The revelation on this occasion is made by night (Genesis 15:5), not however in a dream, but in a trance, in which the senses of Abram were closed to all earthly impressions and he became passive in the hands of the Almighty. After this I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding back the four winds of the earth, so that no wind would blow on the earth or on the sea or on any tree. - New American Standard Version (1995).[^] 7:1 And after these things - What follows is a preparation for the seventh seal, which is the weightiest of all. It is connected with the sixth by the particle and; whereas what is added, verse 9, #Rev 6:9 stands free and unconnected|. I saw four angels - Probably evil ones. Invitation to Marriage Supper. 19:9 Subsequent to the marriage - Angel issues merciful invitation perhaps calling representatives of peoples and nations of the world to the marriage supper. 19:6 Mortal population who respond will indeed be blessed - comprise the "waters"™ who rejoice at this great Hallelujah festival. 19:10 John overcome at seeing this wonderful event - worships the angel - is warned to keep all praise and adoration for Almighty God. After these things. I ask myself do you really believe this, are you buying this. Only a fool asks no questions about what he's following, even Solomon in all his wisdom he still fell[^] pit because still at the end of this tunnel is forgiveness if I can repent this, I'm a train wreck. But sometimes you gotta go threw hell in order to be able to witness that Heaven isn't a fictitious place, sometimes you gotta go threw a little hell to show someone that after these things your sins too can be erased and God's grace hasn't left you stranded.