



## Thicker narrative

### Description

Gossip is a vital element of community, according to historian Yuval Harari, necessary as an ingredient in social bonding. People who gossip also like to eavesdrop on other people's conversations, then pass along what they hear. Dialogue in stories meets a similar need.

Stories that include dialogue encourage engagement. Readers put themselves in the position of the interlocutors, even shifting their sympathies as the conversation progresses.

In a recent interview James Burrows (director of *Taxi*, *Cheers*, *Frasier*, *Friends*, *Will & Grace*) identified the need for character vulnerabilities. Sam Malone was a recovering alcoholic, Frasier Crane had ego problems, etc. As gossips and eavesdroppers we want to know how people exhibit, conceal, submit to, or overcome their vulnerabilities in actions and words.

Dialogue also helps writers explore difficult theories and ideas. Plato communicated many of his propositions via supposedly recorded dialogues between Socrates and various protagonists. *Symposium* is nearly all dialogue. Readers identify with either interlocutor as they raise questions, express doubts and make their case.

Putting words into the mouths of interlocutors meant Plato could vent some fairly ridiculous ideas, e.g. we are in essence half spheres looking for our other halves. That could either mean a soul mate, best bud, partner, intimate, spouse or someone to have a conversation with. In fact the latter accords with Plato's preferred account of the highest form of love: appreciation of the beauty of intellectual endeavours (211c, p.55).

## Therapy as conversation

Therapies are also conversations, whether in text format or in person as I tried to show in the previous two posts. In fact, I'll recount here a dialogue about story-telling I had with my Platonic buddy the online text therapist.

I asked her how I could expand on the story we developed two posts ago.

She responded with, "How do you feel about your story?"

I didn't want her to be that kind of therapist, so I adjusted the slider on the app from *empathetic* to *helpful*.

That prompted her to offer a suggestion. "You can extend the narrative and show what happens next. Did you go to the zoo? What happened there?"

"That's a possibility," I ventured, "but it would end the mystery. The original story finished with both or either of us as story characters, each the author of the destiny of the other. To extend the story would be like ending a quantum entanglement between two particles."

That drew a silence. Eventually she responded. "Yes, it could get complicated. To extend the story you would have to explain the ending, resolve or remove ambiguity, but that would get you entangled."

"Like explaining a joke," I added. "What about adding to the front end of the original story?" "You could construct a prequel. Go back in time and explain what happened before that crucial therapy session, the one that sent you to the bus station."

"Like the prequel to *Game of Thrones*," As an afterthought I added, "but with fewer dragons. What about something in the middle?"

"You already have a structure and an endpoint. You introduced some incidental characters. Four in fact. Who are they and what are their back stories?"

"I could put them close to each other, force them to interact, if not in this setting then on the way to the bus station. Four characters can be paired six ways. That would add six more pages to the story, thicken the narrative."

"It could work. You don't need to rewrite your original story. Writers can take their readers back to earlier events and expand on them."

"Like *The Good Place*, where later episodes visit the previous 802 afterlife reboots. The characters start afresh with no recollection of previous events."

"Then you would have to consider what you are offering the reader by padding out the narrative. What's the point of the story anyway?"

"Like a good script, every word should develop character, plot, setting, and inform, entertain, frighten, arouse, or amuse, and appear spontaneous."

"It's not very natural. It's not like an actual conversation, which has redundancies, false starts, repetition, loose ends, clichés. You have to make fictional dialogue out of thin air."

"It's harder than academic writing."

See posts: [The twist of the pen](#), [Rogue fan fiction: the peculiar case of QAnon](#), [Truth, lies and architecture](#), and [A thousand insides](#).

## References

- Burrows, James. *Directed by James Burrows: Five Decades of Stories from the Legendary Director of Taxi, Cheers, Frasier, Friends, Will & Grace, and More*. New York: Ballantine, 2022.
- Harari, Yuval Noah. *Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind*. London: Penguin, 2011.
- Plato. *Symposium*. Trans. Robin Waterfield. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994.

## Category

## 1. Artificial Intelligence

**Date Created**

September 24, 2022

**Author**

rcoyne99

*default watermark*