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# The Cauldron of Story: A Theory of Narrative

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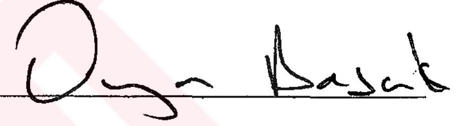
Professor Oya Başak 

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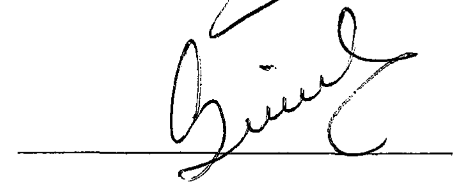
Associate Professor Sibel Irzık 

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# ABSTRACT

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Stories are as old as the ability of human beings to communicate, and every culture both historically and geographically, appears to have its own body of narratives. Since the early Greeks, different theories of the nature of narrative have been advanced, but the general tenor of the arguments presented has usually been to view narrative as an inferior form of knowledge. This thesis aims to examine one theory of narrative that sets itself at odds with this position: Walter Fisher's "narrative paradigm". This theory seeks to re-unite mythos and logos through its notions of coherence and fidelity and the logic of good reasons, and, following an explication of the theory, it will be assessed through its application to a genre of literature, children's literature, in the form of J.K. Rowling's Harry Potter novels.

# KISA ÖZET

Öykü Kazanı: Bir Anlatı Kuramı

by

Anthony John Pavlik

Öyküler insanların iletişim kurma yetenekleri kadar eskidir ve her kültür tarihsel ve coğrafi olarak kendi anlatılarına sahiptir. Eski Yunanlılardan bu yana anlatının yapısı hakkında farklı kuramlar geliştirilmiştir fakat ileri sürülen tezlerin genel tutumu anlatıları bilginin daha az değerli bir biçimi olarak görmek olmuştur. Bu tez bu görüşe karşı olan bir anlatı kuramını incelemeyi amaçlar: Walter Fischer'in "anlatı paradigması". Bu kuram, kuramın tutarlılık ve güvenirlik kavramları ve iyi nedenler mantığı yoluyla mitos ve logosu yeniden bir araya getirmeyi amaçlar, ve kuram, açıklaması yapıldıktan sonra J.K. Rowling'in Harry Potter romanları kullanılarak edebiyatın bir türü olan çocuk edebiyatına uygulanması yoluyla değerlendirilecektir.

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# CHAPTER I

# INTRODUCTION

Speaking generally, there would seem to be some intuitive understanding that narrative or story[1] is a fictitious or factual (or something between the two) account, usually given in writing or verbally (but which may be expressed in other symbolic systems, such as art, gesture or sign language) which involves a teller or narrator, an audience, and a subject. Moreover, storytelling would appear to be a human universal, a necessary component of human communicative activity, as noted, for example, by Tom Crick, the narrator in Graham Swift's novel Waterland, in his belief that Man

> is the story-telling animal. Wherever he goes he wants to leave behind not a chaotic wake, not an empty space, but the comforting marker–buoys and trail-signs of stories. He has to go on telling stories, he has to keep making them up. As long as there's a story, it's all right. Even in his last moments, it's said, in the split second of a fatal fall – or when he's about to drown – he sees, passing rapidly before him, the story of his life. (62 – 63)

Crick's comment expresses very clearly the importance of stories and the central role they have, and have had, in human society.

Indeed, the ubiquity of stories has long been noted. As Roland Barthes points out, "the narratives of the world are numberless. Narrative is first and foremost a prodigious variety of genres, themselves distributed amongst different substances - as though any material were fit to receive man's stories," and he continues, noting that "narrative is present in myth, legend, fable, tale, novella, epic, history, tragedy,

drama, comedy, mime, painting [. . .] stained glass windows, cinema, comics, news item, conversation ("Structural Analysis" 79). Ultimately, for Barthes, "narrative is international, transhistorical, transcultural: it is simply there, like life itself" ("Structural Analysis" 79). In similar vein, Michael Hanne notes that

> whether in the form of dreams, myths of origins, memoirs, reports of scientific experiments, evidence given in court, tribal genealogies, novels, histories, printed or electronic news, economic predictions, biographies, folk-tales, soap operas, annual reports of corporations, feature films, diaries, erotic fantasies, medical case histories, or strip cartoons, there is no getting away from storytelling. (7)

For Hanne, "if we cannot narrate the world in this everyday manner, we are unable to exercise even the slightest degree of control, or power, in relation to the world," and he continues, explaining that "it is our internal narrative faculty that makes it possible for each of us perpetually to construct and reconstruct our sense of ourselves as individuals, located socially and in time and space" (Hanne 8). Hanne comments further that

> collective human action is, in very large part, shaped by the interaction of, even slippage between, such diverse narrative forms as religious and national metanarratives, written history, collective memory, shared fantasies about the future, and so on, all of which have fictional elements in them. Conscious decision-making about the future is inevitably done in relation not just to anticipatory narratives about what is necessary, desirable, or possible for the future, but to the way many forms of retrospective story serve to tell us where we have come from and who we are. (36)

Through stories, then, people are enabled. They can explain, or attempt to explain, their purpose and role, how things are, and why they are so. By utilising narrative conventions such as temporal markers, characters, and plots, people are able to make sense of their world by structuring what might otherwise be incomprehensible. Stories provide the foundations of at least a form of knowledge, of memory and learning, and they connect people with their humanness, linking past, present, and future. "It is human interest that determines whether events and causes fit together in a plot with beginning and end" such that "the shapes of narrative are then instances of general cultural assumptions and values – what we consider important, trivial fortunate, tragic, good, evil, and what impels movement from one to the other" (Martin 87). In this sense, "narratives might well be considered a solution to a problem of general human concern, namely the problem of how to translate *knowing* into *telling*, the problem of fashioning human experience into a form assimilable to structures of meaning that are generally human rather than culture specific" (White 1).

If, however, stories are so central to human existence, one would expect societies to place a high value on stories and those who configure and construct them. Yet, a feature of European civilisation is that stories have been denigrated or dismissed as unimportant relative to those discourses concerned to discover eternal truths, notably mathematics, philosophy, theology and science. Indeed, since Plato (who, despite his use of stories to represent philosophical debates, denigrated poets) wisdom and truth have been identified with knowledge of the permanent and fixed, the laws of nature, rationality and logical truths, and, within this approach to knowledge, wisdom and truth, narrative has largely been consigned a secondary role.

This is not to claim, however, that narratives or narrative elements have not been the object of attention. Different types of narratives, legends, stories, myths, together with their more structural or formal components such as plot, point of view, setting, character, and voice, have been analysed since the time of Plato and Aristotle and through to the institutionalisation of academic inquiry in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. However, this analsysis did not generally seek to move against the view that deemed story as subordinate to reason, to mathematics and philosophy, to objects and forms, to the 'real' and the eternal, to instrumental rationality and to science, relegating it to the role of describing being rather than to creating, expressing and unfolding the possibilities of becoming. Even though such opinions of stories has been contested at various times, stories have largely been regarded as simply entertainment or dismissed as a realm of mere fiction, as a representation or imitation of reality, and as something generated from an otherwise idle human consciousness rather than constitutive of consciousness itself.

As Walter Benjamin, laments, "familiar though his name may be to us, the storyteller in his living immediacy is by no means a present force. He has already become something remote from us and something that is getting even more distant" and, in Benjamin's view, "the art of storytelling is coming to an end. Less and less frequently do we encounter people with the ability to tell a tale properly" (83). Benjamin, of course, is talking of a specific kind of storyteller since, for Benjamin, storytelling, is "an artisan form of communication" requiring "craftsmanship" (91, 92). More importantly, however, Benjamin acknowledges that story is "the ability to exchange experience" (83), and this experience is the kind which is "passed from mouth to mouth and is the source from which all storytellers have drawn. And among those who have written down the tales, it is the great ones whose written versions

differ least from the speech of the many nameless storytellers" (Benjamin 84). However, although Benjamin sees the rise of the novel as symptomatic of the decline of storytelling in that "what differentiates the novel from all other forms of prose literature – the fairy tale, the legend, even the novella – is that it neither comes from oral tradition nor goes into it" (87), his main point is that "the art of storytelling is reaching its end because the epic side of truth, wisdom, is dying out" (Benjamin 87).

Moreover, and also in line with Benjamin's concern as to the decline of storytelling, the historical tendency of modern narrative has been away from mimesis or fictional realism, a path which has, until recently, led to an increasing absorption in the questioning and problematising of writing and textuality. The result of this, as the novelist Phillip Pullman notes, is that the only recourse for the modern novelist "is to fill the tale with references to its own textuality, in order to make it clear that we're too fly to be taken in by our own invention. Unable to bear the story's nakedness, we play all kinds of literary tricks until we've sewn together enough fig-leaves of wordplay to conceal it (par. 4). As a result of this state of affairs, continues Pullman,

> if you want to be regarded as a writer of literary novels for grown-ups, how can you do something so crass as begin at the beginning of a story and carry on till the end? Why, bad writers do that. How can you be so naive as to tell it in the voice of an omniscient narrator, now that we know all narrators are unreliable? And as for "Don't trust the teller trust the tale", the deconstructionists have shown that, although there may be many things you can do with a tale, trusting certainly isn't one of them. (par. 2)

Consequently, suggests Pullman, the prevailing position is one which brings about "a flush of self-consciousness when you find yourself doing something so primitive as telling a story," noting of the novelist Umberto Eco in terms of this dilemma that

> in his "Reflections on The Name of the Rose", he describes the pitiful postmodernist, unable to tell his beloved that he loves her because the words "I love you" have already been used by Barbara Cartland. Eco's solution is for his lover to say: "As Barbara Cartland would say, `I love you,'" and thus hand her the sugar of his affection with the tongs of irony. (par 3)

Moreover, the study of narrative, and the theories which direct that study, does not, it seems, put forward a unified approach to understanding how humans create and maintain social knowledge; rather, it represents assorted theories that have been variously articulated by different thinkers and writers. For F. R. Leavis, for example, one way to ensure the survival of the culture was to educate a minority through the universities in the sensitivities necessary to respond to culture, to create a mind "trained in a kind of thinking [. . .] that will apply itself to the problems of civilisation" (Education 59). For Leavis, in fact, "society's only conceivable organ for such an effort is the university" (Sword 104), specifically the English (literature) department. Leavis saw the institution of the university as the bastion of distinction, a guardian of cultural values which, albeit minority, are better.

However, this point of view seeks to move culture and its narration away from the universal and sequester it within the institution, and, as Preston comments,

> the privileging of one group's forms of cultural production over those of other groups is, in part, related to academia's inherited tendency to

> construct and thereby think in terms of binary and hierarchical categories, and such representational practices have hardly been confined to those in the humanities who have constructed reified literary canons" (x).

Moreover, as K. M. Newton observes, textual interpretation is delimited by the dominant culture it springs from in that "the interpreter co-exists with the literary institution and is dependent on it, for it is the institutionalisation of literary criticism that guarantees [. . .] its role in society as a legitimate activity which should be supported and funded" (qtd. in Hunt, Criticism 1 - 2). Other less elitist and more scientific and structurally based approaches to the study of narrative and its vital function have also come to be seen as problematic, for "it seems that with the growth of the study of narrative, interest in what makes narrative 'be' or 'come across' as narrative has only declined. Partly, narratology is to blame for this discrepancy, with its positivistic claims, formalist limitations, and inaccessible, idosyncratic jargon" (Bal xiv).

All is not lost, however, for, as Wallace Martin remarks,

> the interest in theories of narrative that is evident in recent literary criticism is part of a broader movement [. . .] in the humanities and social sciences. Since the nineteenth century, the methods of the natural sciences have served as a model for the rationalizations of other disciplines. But during the past two decades that model has proved inadequate for an understanding of society and culture. (7)

Thus, for Martin, although more recent narrative theory comprises an assortment of epistemologies and ontologies, each of these ultimately promotes the claim that the

physical sciences and nature do not provide the boundaries necessary for humans to distinguish time and causality and that "nature is indifferent to what culture calls the rise and fall of empire"(73). Indeed, says Martin, "mimesis and narration have returned from their marginal status as aspects of 'fiction' to inhabit the very center of other disciplines as modes of explanation necessary for an understanding of life" (7).

It is apparent, then, that, in more recent times, thinking about stories has signicantly changed. Now, the consideration of stories and their nature has come from quarters other than just the literary field, and lines of enquiry have concerned themselves with other, more wide-ranging matters; today, there are examinations of narrative's ontology, politics, epistemology, ideology, cognitive status, and disciplinarity, and this is being done from different institutional and intellectual positions, and frequently with different goals. There is then, as Anne Rigney notes, an "increasing recognition of the ubiquity of narrative *within* any culture, in discursive practices as diverse as theology, historiography, economics, legal practice, political speech-making, everyday conversation, and philosophy" (264) and, for Rigney, it is noticeable that

> many scholars have suddenly realized that we've been talking all along in narrative form. But to judge by the tenor of recent discussions, the perceived implications of this realization have been by no means trivial, involving philosophical, epistemological, and political issues which go far beyond the merely literary matter of genre. (264)

Thus, narrative should not simply be seen as discrete events or phenomena like myths, novels, or fairy tales; rather it is a more general and inclusive mode of human communication, for it is not just something we engage in occasionally, but rather it is

a continuous process by which people are able to tell stories which translate their experiences into meaning. Literature may not be the sole preserve of narrative and story, but the importance of narrative to humanity has become not only a given, but also the means to assess the nature of the effect of narrative within human communicative practices.

For Rigney, however, this process of recognition of narrative's presence is not without its problems, for

> the proliferation of the term 'narrative' in such a variety of contexts, often with an enormous symbolic weight in tow, has meant that its precise meaning has tended to become blurred. As it becomes more popular and all-embracing, the concept of narrative now also risks becoming vacuous to the point of losing all effectiveness as an analytic tool. (264)

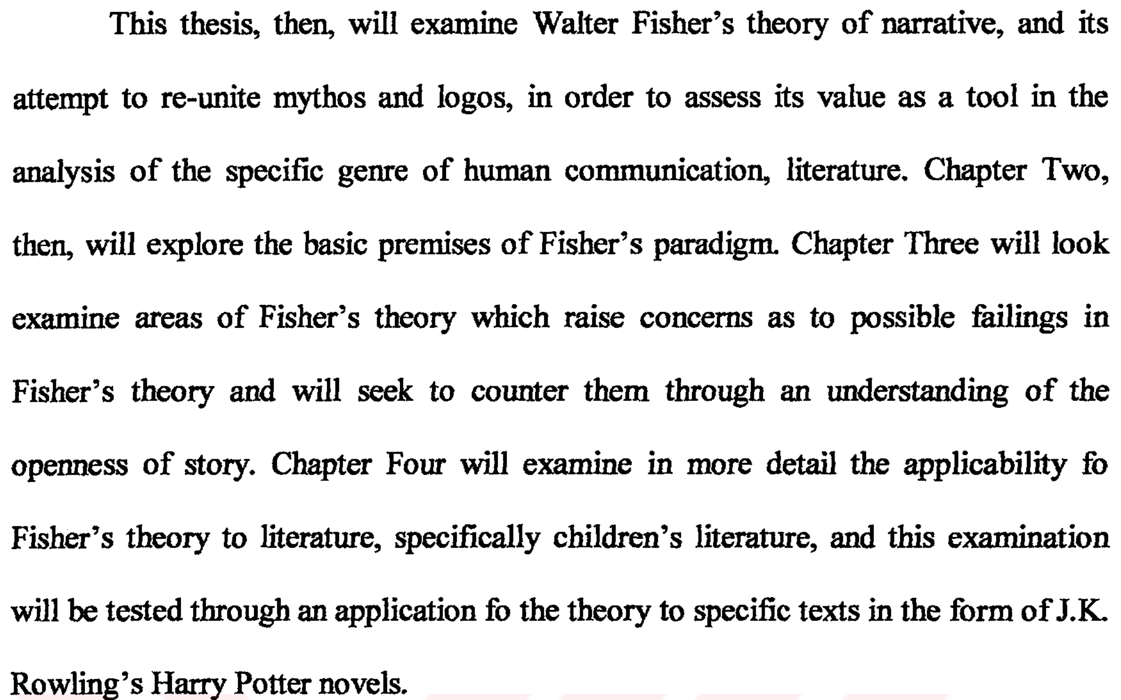
Moreover, it is not enough simply to indicate that narrativity is a basic communicative vehicle fror humanity. What is required further to this is a means of assessing how narrative operates within this communicative, cultural setting, an analytic tool which, furthermore, recognises that the scientific and the rational do not necessarily provide the only paradigm for evaluating communication, a tool which recognises the possibility that there are more paths to the truth than that of rationally patterned judgments.

Rigney's notes in her comments to approaching the question of narrative "references to *homo narrans*, 'narrative rationality', and to the 'narrative paradigm' as the basis for a critique of scientific reason" (264), and these terms are specific to the narrative theory of Walter Fisher. For Fisher, the central role of the process of narrative to other human processes of thought, knowledge and reality, consciousness

and identity is particularly important. Significantly, Fisher's theory seeks to address the impasse concerning *mythos* and *logos,* the imaginal and the rational. Fisher's aim, therefore, is to move beyond rationalism and formalism and to take up the notion that narrative functions centrally in human existence. More than this, however, he intends to offer a view of narrative which, in opposition to prevailing notions of rationality and logic as primary modes of expressing reality, truth and knowledge, values it as the primary paradigm or model on which rhetoric and most other forms of human communication are built. To do this, Fisher proposes "to offer a way of interpreting and assessing human communication that leads to critique, to a determination of whether or not a given instance of discourse provides a reliable, trustworthy and desirable guide to thought and action *in the world*" (Human 90).

Fisher's theory emerged in the early nineteen-eighties, at a time when consideration of narrative, especially in terms of historical narrative was becoming a more prominent activity. However, whilst the writings of Paul Ricouer and Hayden White have become established as seminal texts in the development of theories of narrative in general, Fisher's theory has primarily only been considered in the field of Communication Studies, and it is, perhaps, a useful exercise to re-visit Fisher's theory in order to see whether or not it could provide insights into literary analysis, even though Fisher's sets out and proposes his paradigm as a tooll for assessing communication in general. Clearly, it is important, as with any general theory, to understand its application to the particular, and narrative and story, as the basis in particular of literary texts would appear to be a prime point of departure, especially given the element of the imaginary that infuses literay texts (in contrast to other forms of discourse).

This thesis, then, will examine Walter Fisher's theory of narrative, and its attempt to re-unite mythos and logos, in order to assess its value as a tool in the analysis of the specific genre of human communication, literature. Chapter Two, then, will explore the basic premises of Fisher's paradigm. Chapter Three will look examine areas of Fisher's theory which raise concerns as to possible failings in Fisher's theory and will seek to counter them through an understanding of the openness of story. Chapter Four will examine in more detail the applicability fo Fisher's theory to literature, specifically children's literature, and this examination will be tested through an application fo the theory to specific texts in the form of J.K. Rowling's Harry Potter novels.



# CHAPTER II

## "HOMO NARRANS" – FISHER'S 'NARRATIVE PARADIGM'

For most people, the first encounter that they have with communication is through story, for children hear stories long before they are able to read (and write) for themselves. Later, as children grow to adulthood, even though they may have moved away from the overt use of storytelling in their own discourses, every adult is able to recall from their childhood the characteristics of a 'good story' to some degree. As Alisdair MacIntyre asserts,

> Man is in his actions and practice, as well as in his fictions, essentially a story-telling animal. He is not essentially, but becomes through his history, a teller of stories that aspire to truth. But the key question for men is not about their own authorship; I can only answer the question "What am I to do?" if I can answer the prior question "Of what story or stories do I find myself a part?" We enter into human society, that is, with one or more imputed characters—roles into which we have been drafted—and we have to learn what they are in order to be able to understand how others respond to us and how our responses to them are apt to be construed. (216)

Thus, story places people, and people put forward their own social claims and assess the claims and arguments of others based on narrative components, characters, and critical events combined in ways that, for them, make sense and "ring true." This is a sentiment which accords very closely with the theory of narrative advanced by Walter Fisher.

The basis of Walter Fisher's theory is to make a case on behalf of story and, in particular, for the value of the particular kind of rationality found in story or narrative[2]. His proposition, the 'Narrative Paradigm' (presented primarily in Human Communication as Narration: Toward a Philosophy of Reason, Value, and Action[3]) is a reaction to what he sees as the prevailing paradigm which privileges logic over narrative discursive forms. However, his approach is not simply one of identifying story or narrative as the key mode of human interaction, for his effort is directed towards re-instating the pre-Socratic state of viewing *mythos* and *logos* as equal constituents of knowing reality since the two "inform one another and both are necessary to a full realization of the relationship between communication and what humans are and become (Fisher, Human 6)).

With Plato and Aristotle, argues Fisher, comes the culmination of a movement whereby *logos* and *mythos*, previously considered as one entity, become separated. With this separation, *logos* becomes specific and narrowed in its application, applying only to philosophical or technical discourse which itself was privileged over other forms of discourse. Such a position, in turn, privileges an abstract language of descriptive science over the concrete language of oral memory, a movement which poses rational argumentation as the primary form of rhetoric, with all other rhetorical phenomena being only secondary.

It should be noted, here, that Fisher's opposition to the tradition which identifies rhetoric specifically with rational argument, does not entail a belief on Fisher's part that Aristotle is in error; rather, Fisher believes that Aristotle's emphasis on rational public communication has both marginalised other forms of rhetoric (for example, story-telling), and denied the possibility that other forms of rhetoric outside of rational argument could be based in the rational too. Effectively, argues Fisher,

Aristotle's move has thus both narrowed the scope of what we value as rhetoric, and also reduced the richness of reason to a very specific form of rationality, one which is identified with public argument and specific, formal logics, or what Fisher calls, the "rational-world paradigm" (Human, 59). This position places Fisher in line with thinkers who have called into question the history of philosophy and specifically metaphysics as the prevailing process of human thought.

Within the operation of this 'rational-world paradigm', humans are identified essentially as rational arguers, and, for Fisher, the presuppositions of the 'rational-world paradigm' and this movement since the early Greeks can be summarised as follows:

> (1) humans are essentially rational human beings; (2) the paradigmatic mode of human decision making and communication is argument – discourse that features clear-cut inferential or implicative structures; (3) the conduct of argument is ruled by the dictates of situations – legal, scientific, legislative, public, and so on; (4) rationality is determined by subject-matter knowledge, argumentative ability, and skill in employing the rules of advocacy in given fields; and (5) the world is a set of logical puzzles that can be solved through appropriate analysis and application of reason conceived of as an argumentative construct. (Human, 59)

Resting on the simple assumption that some people are more rational than others, this traditional notion of rationality entails a hierarchical system, a system which does not only privilege certain forms of discourse over others (the philosophical over the poetic for example, as exemplified in texts such as Plato's Republic or Ion), but one in which some are also considered best qualified to judge, whilst others are meant

only to follow. Moreover, in order to provide those best qualified to lead rationally, argues Fisher, the historical mission of Western education has been "to generate a consciousness of national and institutional community and to instruct citizens in at least the rudiments of logic and rhetoric" (Human, 60), a course of action which, for Fisher, inevitably creates a cadre of experts in truth, knowledge and reality whilst at the same time negating or dismissing the authorship of ordinary people. (Human 5–7)[4]. Fisher does not seem to be suggesting, here, that that such 'cadres of experts' should not exist; rather he questions the benefit of such experts having come to be esteemed, especially in the modern period, for their expertise in itself, and thus as guardians of knowledge, rather than as gatekeepers providing access to knowledge.

Fisher's counter-argument to the rational-world paradigm is that other forms of rationality exist than just those identified with formal logic, and his specific reference is to "narrative rationality." For Fisher, this narrative rationality recognises that, rather than *logos* alone providing the basis for discourse, "all instances of human communication are imbued with logos and mythos, are constitutive of truth and knowledge, and are rational" (Human 20). In order to substantiate his position, Fisher sets out his presuppositions in the following way:

> (1) Humans are essentially storytellers. (2) The paradigmatic mode of human decision making and communication is "good reasons," which vary in form among situations, genres, and media of communication. (3) The production and practice of good reasons are ruled by matters of history, biography, culture, and character [. . .]. (4) Rationality is determined by the nature of persons as narrative beings [. . .] their inherent awareness of *narrative probability*, what constitutes a coherent story, and their constant habit of testing *narrative fidelity*,

> whether or not the stories they experience ring true with the stories they know to be true in their lives [. . .]. (5) The world as we know it is a set of stories that must be chosen among in order for us to live life in a process of continual re-creation. (Human 64)

Here, story is at the basis of the world making of "homo narrans" (Fisher, Human 62), and, quoting, appropriately, Heidegger, Fisher notes that "we are a conversation . . . conversation and its unity support our existence" (Human 63), for Fisher believes that "the philosophical ground of the narrative paradigm is ontological" (Human 65), that it relates specifically to human beingness.

These suppositions underpin Fisher's belief that, rather than viewing narrative as a secondary element of culture or of rhetoric, narrative needs to be moved to a central position, and viewed, therefore, as the primary form of rhetoric. Indeed, for Fisher, any instance of discourse

> is always more than the individuated forms that may compose it. The central point here is that there is no genre, including technical communication, that is not an episode in the story of life (a part of the "conversation"), and is not itself constituted by *logos* and *mythos*. Put another way: Technical discourse is imbued with myth and metaphor, and æsthetic discourse has cognitive capacity and import. The narrative paradigm is designed, in part, to draw attention to these facts and provide a way of thinking that fully takes them into account. (Fisher, "Elaboration" 347)

Clearly, what is being laid claim to here is that the separation of logos and mythos is an arbitrary move, the substance of which is not evidenced by the nature of discourse across the spectrum of areas of knowledge.

What Fisher intends, therefore, is to find a way to overcome the disparate nature of approaches to discourse and communication, a division of approaches of which, in terms of discourse and efforts to obtain a more complete understanding of it, Fisher notes that

> structuralists have offered *form* as the seminal phenomenon from which comprehension flows. Logical positivists proposed *verifiable content* as the heart of meaning. In literary theory and criticism and some of the social sciences, the concept of text, variously defined, is offered as the comprehensive concept by means of which the depths of human meaning (or nonmeaning) can be plumbed. In modern philosophy multiple logics, including logics of informal reasoning, have been proposed. And, of course, there have been those who have proposed that since no overarching concept will be comprehensively revealing and since meaning is in the eye of the beholder, the search for unifying notions about communicative meaning is a useless enterprise and there is no escape from utter relativism or even from communicative anarchy. (Human, 192-193)

In order to reconcile this situation Fisher, however, proposes that "narrative is the context for interpreting and assessing all communication – not a mode of discourse laid on by a creator's deliberate choice but the shape of knowledge as we first apprehend it" and he continues by affirming that "we interpret our lives and our literature as stories that emerge within other stories of history, culture, and character – within all of which struggles and conflicts inhere" (Human 193).

For Fisher, "all good stories function in two ways: to justify (or mystify) decisions or actions already made or performed and to determine future decisions or

actions" (Human 187), and Fisher's concern, then, would appear to be process, rather than product (something which is specifically the case with works of literature as will be seen in Chapter IV). The narrative paradigm, however, is not limited only to examples of literary narrative discourse, for, by "narrative" Fisher does not mean merely make-believe or fiction; rather, it addresses the fact that people constantly represent their experiences of the world - real or fictive - in the form of story, and this can be seen in instances from a simple recounting of the events of the day to the more complex narrativising of barristers in an English court of law. In this sense, for Fisher, narrative can be defined as "symbolic actions - words and/or deeds - that have sequence and meaning for those who live, create, or interpret them" (Human 58).

In contrast to the logic of the 'rational-world paradigm, then, the 'logic' of the narrative paradigm is narrative rationality. In this, Fisher does not deny the value of argument or true logic, but, for Fisher, "the values of technical precision are not as important as the values of coherence, truthfulness, wisdom and humane action, which are necessary for transforming technical logic and empirical knowledge into a force for civilized existence" (Human 48). Indeed, for Fisher, "*humans as rhetorical beings are as much valuing as they are reasoning animals*" (Human 105). Here, Fisher is specifically attesting to that element of humanity which operates subjectively in the way in which it responds to human existence.

Furthermore, Fisher's concept of narrative rationality

> asserts that it is not the individual form of argument that is ultimately persuasive in discourse. That is important, but values are more persuasive, and they may be expressed in a variety of modes, of which argument is only one. Hence narrative rationally focuses on "good reasons" – elements that provide warrants for

> accepting or adhering to the advice fostered by any form of communication that can be considered rhetorical. (Human 48)

Fisher's concept of narrative rationality, therefore, is concerned with the manner in which humans are motivated to strengthen (or even adapt) their beliefs or their will to action towards society. Here, subjectivity of response does not, as might be thought, represent what might be considered a flaw in Fisher's theory because the consideration of values undergoes "a systematic and self-conscious process" (Human 110). Thus, subjectivity is, in some basic way, presented as a motivation for belief and action, yet, at the same time (and within the operation of narrative rationality) constrained through the activation of a second level of activity, an analytical mode not necessarily or only premised upon the formally logical.

Within this process of analysis, Fisher allows that "some stories are better than others, more coherent, more 'true' to the way people and the world are – in perceived fact and value" since "some stories better satisfy the criteria of the logic of good reason, which is attentive to reason *and* values" (Human 68). This does not rest, however, upon the necessity to learn the techniques of doing 'good' narrative analysis. What it requires is the application to narrative of the logic of good reasons, an approach which Fisher feels is "more universal and probably more efficacious than argument for nontechnical forms of communication" for three reasons: "first, narration comes closer to capturing the experience of the world, simultaneously appealing to the various senses, to reason and emotion, to intellect and imagination, and to fact and value. It does not presume intellectual contact only" (Human 75). It is in this more general appeal that Fisher finds the more inclusive nature and value of narrative. Fisher's second reasons is more basic to human history and nature since "one does not have to be taught narrative probability and narrative fidelity; one

culturally acquires them through a universal faculty and experience" (Human 75), that is to say, that narrative rationality is an inherent human ability that arises out of the nature of community itself. "Third, narration works by suggestion and identification; argument operates by inferential moves and deliberation (Human 75) and is thus a process more readily open to all people, not just those trained in matters of rational and logical discourse. Furthermore, what application of the narrative paradigm allows, claims Fisher, is for people to make "important discriminations" (in this sense, checks and balances on the purely subjective process), and these are of three kinds:

> (1) one will focus on the sequences of symbolic actions and their meaning, (2) one will recognize that no text is devoid of historical, situational, and biographical context, and (3) one will recognize that the meaning and value of any account are always influenced by how the account or story stands with or against other stories known to an audience or other observer (Human 144).

Here, then, is affirmation on Fisher's part of narrative rationality as a process which situates narrative culturally as intertextual, and as both synchronically and diachronically referential, aware of both the moment and history.

In a world where different stories compete for acceptance, it is this discriminatory awareness that provides the process for determining how some stories can generally be accepted, whilst others can be marginalised or rejected. For Fisher, any narrative comprises two aspects which are in dialectical tension with each other: the argumentative and persuasive, and the literary and aesthetic. The narrative paradigm, it should be recalled, presents a "philosophy of reason, value and action" (Human, 47), providing a 'logic' for assessing stories, and also exploring, too, "how

we endorse or accept stories as the basis for decisions and actions" (Human, 87). Here Fisher is implying a method for analysis since communication can be interpreted and critiqued for coherence and fidelity, and can be linked to human actions.

In this respect, Fisher views people as full participants rather than as actors with scripts, and asserts that "people's symbolic actions take the form of stories and that they assess them by the principles of coherence and fidelity" (Fisher, Human 19). Fisher argues that all individuals and all cultures view communication as a narrative; in essence, the world exists as a set of stories that must be chosen among, and these narratives are stories or discourses that potentially contain "good reasons" to believe or to act. Good reasons are the essence of stories, and the means through which humans realise their nature as reasoning *and* valuing animals (Human 64).

According to Fisher, the two central principles through which people test the stories they encounter in their daily life are probability and fidelity, the extent to which particular events or circumstances "ring true" or reflect past experiences or circumstances and substantiate the event's narrative fidelity. Since, in Fisher's theory, all communication is inherently rhetorical (that is, it seeks to influence others at some level), communication which maintains high degrees of both narrative probability and narrative fidelity is most persuasive. Fisher argues that these two criteria of narrative assessment, narrative probability (coherence) and narrative fidelity (truthfulness and reliability), are utilised by any given audience when coming to a decision as to whether or not any message contains reasons for belief or action (Human, 47). "Narrative beings" (and the manner in which narratives are judged) are identified by "their inherent awareness of narrative probability, what constitutes a coherent story, and their constant habit of testing narrative fidelity, whether or not

the stories they experience ring true with the stories they know to be true in their lives" (Human 64).

Narrative probability or coherence (Fisher does not noticeably separate these two terms) is a formal element in narrative, and it relates to the coherence of the story, whether or not it is free of contradictions[5]. Assessing narrative probability is a three part process, the first element of which is an assessment of a story's "argumentative or structural coherence" (Human 47). In this, the internal consistency of a narrative would seem to follow the lines of accepted structuralist approaches to narrative[6], and, additionally, to relate to lines of argument in a rational-world paradigm. Consequently, the narrative paradigm does not dismiss traditional argument or logic; rather, Fisher views the traditional test of reason as but one of the factors which affect narrative coherence, for the second element of appraisal requires an analysis of the "material coherence."

This analysis is achieved through an intertextual comparison of the story with stories told in other discourses in order to discover whether or not important facts have been overlooked, ignored, or even omitted, or whether other plausible interpretations have been ignored. Finally, the "charactereological" coherence is assessed since character "as an organised set of actional tendencies is considered central to all believable stories. If these tendencies contradict one another, change significantly, or alter in 'strange' ways, the result is a questioning of character" (Human 47). For Fisher, the ultimate test of narrative coherence, then, becomes whether or not the audience can depend upon the characters to act in a reliable manner since a character's motives are "prerequisite to trust, and trust is the foundation of belief" (Human 47). If the character becomes questioned, the story loses its fidelity. This assignment of belief through narrative probability is not simply

based, however, only on the specific event itself, but on the likelihood that this event or circumstance is consistent with other events or circumstances; that is, there is narrative fidelity, the second element of assessment.

Narrative fidelity is a substantive element of narrative, and it relates to the truthfulness of story, the quality of a story that causes it to strike a resonant chord in the audience. Fidelity, for Fisher, is defined as concerning "the `truth qualities' of a story, the degree to which it accords with the logic of good reasons: the soundness of its reasoning and the value of its values" (Human 88). Thus, a story has fidelity when it "rings true" to the audience's experience and to the stories they might tell about themselves and others, and whether or not a story has fidelity is assessed by applying "the logic of good reason," a logic that makes it possible to locate and critically weigh values. "The principle of fidelity pertains to the individuated components of stories-whether they represent accurate assertions about the social reality and thereby constitute good reasons for belief or action" (Human 105). In terms of the kinds of discourse which relate to the everyday, of course, such as a witness' statement to the police, the relationship between the audience's assertions and social reality are more obviously recognised. In terms of the literary, the imaginal text, however, especially in respect of texts which use fantasy as their from, such a relationship may not be so apparent (and this will be explored in later chapters). "Good reasons", for their part, are "elements that provide warrants for accepting or adhering to the advice fostered by any form of communication that can be considered rhetorical" (Human 48). The essential point, here, is that a good reason is one that provides meaning for those who live, create or interpret the stories narrated. Fidelity, as such, presents a set of values. The failure in fidelity tells about the breakdown of social order based on those very values.

Thus, it is values which differentiate the narrative paradigm's logic of good reasons – "those elements that provide warrants for accepting or adhering to the advice fostered by any form of communication that can be considered rhetorical" (Human 107) – from the rational-world paradigm's traditionally emphasised logic of reasons. This does not mean that any 'good reason' is as good as any other; it simply emphasises that "whatever is taken as a basis for adopting a rhetorical message is inextricably bound to a value – to a conception of the good. [. . .] good reasons are not necessarily effective, persuasive reasons" (Human 107). Clearly, what are taken to be "good reasons" can bring about action which is not considered (either retrospectively or by other social groups or cultures) beneficial: extremism, such as Nazism provides a relevant example. It is however, "good reasons", whatever their tenor, that Fisher identifies as being intrinsic to the value which an audience places upon any given narrative.

This logic of "good reasons" lies at the heart of Fisher's theory and is premised upon five value-related issues which Fisher outlines in the following way:

> First, is the question of *fact*: What are the implicit and explicit values embedded in a message? Second is the question of *relevance*: Are the values appropriate to the nature of the decision that the message bears upon? Included in this question must be concern for omitted, distorted, and misrepresented values. Third is the question of *consequence*: What would be the effects of adhering to the values – for one's concept of oneself, for one's behavior, for one's relationship with others and society, and to the process of rhetorical transaction? [. . .] Fourth is the question of *consistency*: Are the values confirmed or validated in one's personal experience, in the lives or statements of

> others whom one admires or respects, and in a conception of the best audience one can conceive? [. . .] Fifth is the question of the transcendent issue: Even if a prima facie-case exists or a burden of proof has been established, are the values the message offers those that, in the estimation of the critic, constitute the basis for human conduct? (Human 109)

In short, the logic of good reasons, reasons which "may be expressed through a variety of individuated forms of discourse and performance" (Human 143), relies upon the values embedded in the narrative, the relevance of those values to any decisions which are subsequently made, the consequences of adhering to those values, the level of conjunction of the values with the audience's world view, and, finally, the conformity with what the audience believes is an ideal basis for conduct (for Fisher, the paramount issue), with each element interdependent upon the others.

Good reasons, for Fisher,

> express practical wisdom; they are, in their highest expression, an encompassment of what is relative and objective in situations. They function to resolve exigencies by locating and activating values that go beyond the moment, making it possible that principles of decisions or action can be generalized. (Human 94)

In this sense, "good reasons" are ultimately referential and intertextual, and, although this may be redolent of deconstructionist notions of the interminable play of signifier and signified, where meaning can never be fixed, what Fisher appears to be suggesting is that such notions, however they might play in terms of philosophical concerns, are lacking in importance when considered within the context of the exigencies of human existence; it may be possible to aver the total meaninglessness

of human existence in theory, but the practicality of everyday existence demands that people, from the highest to the lowest, come to a set of beliefs and values that can guide them through the day-to-day experience of life in some form of praxis.

There is one further element which Fisher adds to his position, and this is the question of narrative motives. The narrative paradigm is largely akin to Reader Response theories, but, contrary to notions of the 'death of the author' as espoused most notably by Barthes and Foucault, Fisher, not surprisingly given the humanistic nature of his theory, also gives credence to identifiable motives of narratives. Although he does not explicitly raise the issue of authorial intent, Fisher does declare that, texts, "whatever their subjects, times, places, or cultural contexts can be characterized as expressing one or more of four, perhaps five, motives" (Human 144). Confirming his understanding of the term 'motive' as "a name that characterizes the nature of a symbolic action in a given situation" (Human 144), that is, quite simply, it would seem, a matter of purpose, Fisher proposes that, in terms of authorial purpose, texts

> "function (1) to give birth to – to gain acceptance of – ideas/images, *affirmation*; (2) to revitalize or to reinforce ideas/images, *reaffirmation*; (3) to heal or to cleanse ideas/images, *purification*; and (4) to undermine or discredit ideas/images, *subversion*" (Human 144).

Finally, Fisher's fifth motive is nihilism, "a *rhetoric of evisceration*" which "implies or asserts the impossibility of or absurdity of life" (Human 145).

However, although Fisher does not delve deeply into the question of authorial intent through his brief delineation of motive, he affirms that "whatever the motive of a message may be, its ultimate effect is to constitute or reconstitute listeners or readers as selves, to constitute or evoke the experience of community, and to shape

the meaning of one's world" (Human 145). This suggestion of motives almost negates his argument about audience valuation through the narrative paradigm, but it is important here to note that Fisher includes amongst the motives the subversive intent in the "rhetoric of evisceration". This, coupled to the notions of the narrative paradigm, denies the absolute assurance that a narrative might simply be open only to passivity or inaction on the part of the audience. Moreover, although one motive might dominate perception, "which motive dominates depends on the perception of the kind of symbolic action that is performed, how the discourse moves the mind to assent, reassurance, corrected vision, or rejection" (Human 145).

Fisher's theory of narrative communication, then, argues that all human beings are storytellers, and his narrative paradigm views narrative as a fundamental form in and through which *any* person can express values and reasons, and can subsequently make decisions or act. The narrative paradigm, as Fisher states,

> sees people as storytellers, as authors and co-authors who creatively read and evaluate the texts of life and literature. A narrative perspective focuses on existing institutions as providing "plots" that are always in the process of re-creation rather than existing as settled scripts. Viewing human communication narratively stresses that people are full participants in the making of messages, whether they are agents (authors) or audience members (co-authors). (Human 18)

The narrative paradigm focuses on the message of a story and evaluates the reliability, trustworthiness, and desirability of that message, and, when applied, the narrative paradigm allows for texts, regardless of their genre (although different criteria might be used when viewing different genres) to be recognised as "verbal phenomena composed of good reasons (some reasons, of course, being better than

others) as elements that function as warrants for believing or acting in accord with the message of the text" (Human 143). Whatever motive may exist behind the recounting of the narrative, the focus is "not on authorial techniques or specific individuated forms but on audience response, the mental moves that will be made by auditors or readers in interpreting a work" (Human 161); in this way it is open to acceptance or rejection as a subject of the analysis of the narrative paradigm in terms of its coherence and fidelity and the nature of belief or action that the motive attempts to engender.

For Fisher, then, narrative communication is not a question of absolute truth; rather, it is a process which focuses on the principles of storytelling to engender both narrative probability and narrative fidelity, that human communication takes the form of a narrative or story that can be examined and criticised accordingly. The narrative paradigm is set out as a counter to "the concept of knowledge that denies a role for values, the separation of logic from everyday discourse, and the privileging of 'experts' and their discourse" (Human 9).

One obvious implication of Fisher's narrative paradigm, then, is that, whereas the rational-world paradigm suggests that 'experts' can only discuss with other 'experts', whilst laymen and the uninitiated have no right to judge or comment upon the expert discussion, the narrative paradigm accepts the lay audience as equally capable of testing the stories for coherence and fidelity. Within the rational-world paradigm, the reader's act of interpretation raises the question of competence, but, as Terry Eagleton asks,

> what is meant by the 'competent' reader? Is there only one kind of competence, and by whose criteria is competence to be measured? One could imagine a dazzlingly suggestive interpretation of a poem

> being produced by someone who entirely lacked 'literary competence' as conventionally defined – someone who produced such a reading not by following the received hermeneutical procedures but by flouting them. (108)

Eagleton's comment underscores the narrative practices of people who have no cultural power and who work not within the language spoken by knowledgeable elites but by using critical idioms based within their own local concerns.

Here, what is being referenced is what Michel Foucault has called "subjugated knowledges," which more specifically refers to "an autonomous, non-centralized kind of theoretical production, one, that is to say, whose validity is not dependent on the approval of the established regimes of thought" (81). These are, then, knowledges which have found themselves "disqualified as inadequate to their task or insufficiently elaborated: naive knowledges, located low down on the hierarchy, beneath the required level of cognition or scientificity" (81-2). As Fisher, has pointed out, however, such knowledges should not be dismissed merely because they do not operate within the auspices of a system of logic offered by the rational-world paradigm.

For Fisher, "one no longer has to appeal to a privileged audience as the measure of rationality. Rationality is grounded in the narrative structure of life and the natural capacity people have to recognise coherence and fidelity in the stories they experience and tell one another" (Human 183). In terms of the narrative paradigm, "all are seen as possessing equally the logic of narration – a sense of coherence and fidelity" (Human 68), and, in this respect, 'experts' are no better placed than any other in respect of having access to, or disseminating, the 'truth. The expert's contribution, for Fisher, emerges as a result of the fact that "they are in a

position to reveal the discursive and performative mechanisms through which 'the truth' is served, but this leaves their proper roles as that of counsellors who "impart knowledge, like a teacher, or wisdom, like a sage" not as superiors who, from on high seek "to pronounce a story that ends all storytelling" (Fisher, Human 73). Moreover, experts who assume the role of counsellors inevitably also "become subject to the demands of narrative rationality" (Human 73), and their own narratives are also open to assessment based on the principles of coherence and fidelity as set out in the narrative paradigm.

It should be noted, at this point, that Fisher's narrative theory is essentially developed as a general theory of communication, and, although Fisher's claim is that all genres of discourse fall within the scope of the narrative paradigm, it is also true to say that little substantial work has been done in terms of the application of Fisher's theories to works of literature. This is the case even though Fisher himself makes the claim for the narrative paradigm's applicability to this form of communication when he specifically states that, "if the narrative paradigm works anywhere for the purposes of rhetorical analysis, it should work on plays and novels" (Human 177)[7].

Chapter IV, then, will seek to address this absence by applying Fisher's theory to a specific type of literary work, children's literature, for reasons which will be made clearer in that chapter. Before moving on, however, it should be pointed out, that Fisher's theory is not without possible criticisms as to the ubiquity of narrative, and, in general terms, the apparently conservative nature of the actions and beliefs prompted through such a narrative analysis, and these will be addressed in the following chapter.

# CHAPTER III

## THE NARRATIVE PARADIGM UNDER SCRUTINY

The first obvious point of contention that arises with Fisher's narrative paradigm and its reliance upon the notion of human beings as storytellers is whether or not all human communication can really be viewed as narrative. There is some intuitive sense in which including all types of communication as narrative is too broad an appeal, and, as a result, and subject to Fisher's own criteria within the narrative paradigm, this would tend to discredit Fisher's approach. However, a story or narrative cannot be considered as merely a personal construction, for "man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun" (Geertz 5) and individuals inherently exist and are bound up within a network of symbolic or mythic representations which both produce and maintain meaning. Moreover, as Barbara Herrnstein Smith remarks,

> it is important to recognise that narrative discourse is not necessarily – or even usually – marked off or segregated from other discourse. Almost any verbal utterance will be laced with more or less minimal narratives, ranging from fragmentary reports and abortive anecdotes to those more distinctly framed and conventionally marked tellings that we are inclined to call 'tales' or 'stories'. (228)

Bal, perhaps, further clarifies the issue in her assertion that "not that everything 'is' narrative; but practically everything in culture has a narrative aspect to it, or at the very least, can be perceived, interpreted as narrative" (220). The notion of all communication as narrative does not then present a significant obstacle, especially

given the fact that Fisher's real focus is on communication (including internal dialogues) rather than simply utterance.

The second area of concern relates to the cultural specificity of stories and Fisher's claim to a universal logic of narrative rationality. Indeed, Fisher might be criticised for privileging contemporary Western values when, in fact, such values as truth, good and evil, or beauty may not really be universal. In addition, as culturally based phenomena, the standards by which narratives are judged might also differ. Fisher, for example, claims that The Epic of Gilgamesh "exhibits narrative probability and fidelity across time and culture" (Human 78), but it is not possible to escape from the fact that Fisher's interpretation is inevitably affected by his own cultural background. Whether or not Fisher's theory does have universal application can only be judged by having Fisher's theories applied within alternative cultural settings and this remains untested. However, in principle, the application of the narrative paradigm, based as it is in the notions of coherence and fidelity does not preclude the effectiveness of a culturally bound analysis.

Moreover, there is also some sense that human narratives do have a universality of concern. As Walter Burkert notes of myths (themselves narratives), the identification of common patterns within mythic narrative is a tautology, for we would expect human beings, wherever they are, to experience similar patterns of existence: birth, puberty, finding food and shelter, love, social and sexual inter-relationships, the struggle for a better life, power and freedom and finally death. For Burkert, the similarity between myths from different cultures arises because "the sequences of actions in myths appear to be based upon basic biological and cultural programs of action" (18). These "programs of action" are, in effect, the biological functions which humans are genetically, and also culturally, programmed for, and,

thus, such formalist schemes as the plot functions proposed by Vladimir Propp for fairy tale actually correspond, says Burkert, to real-life needs in a primitive setting (20).

This biological perspective, whereby certain types of events in a narrative appeal so strongly because they are deeply rooted in natural human evolutionary patterns, means that narratives may indeed have an intrinsic sense in which they appear to "ring true" since they are emplotments of basic human functions and eternal themes of human life which are adaptable to a limitless variety of individual life stories, the eternal tensions which dominate human life, regardless of historical time and regardless of where in the world the individuals live their lives.

The primary area of concern, however, is that Fisher's theory would appear to be conservatively biased since the emphasis on values and the audience's consensus favours a conservative view of society where dominant values define and delimit the narratives which are told. As Fisher himself indicates, narratives which challenge any individual's self-conception are unlikely to be accepted, for "if a story denies a person's self-conception, it does not matter what it says about the world" (Human 75). This suggests that the narrative paradigm is flawed inasmuch as the theory is limited (and limiting) in neglecting to explain how stories can create new possibilities; storytelling may readily impact upon others, but whether or not people's narratives impact upon themselves and they then learn from such experiences is an entirely different concept.

Specifically, if the audience accepts or rejects any given narrative on the basis of whether or not the narrative "rings true" with their past experiences, values, and beliefs, based upon "what they perceive as the true and the just" (Human 67), there

would not appear to be any allowance for novelty or alternative possibilities for the audience in the form of narratives which posit variant values and beliefs even though some of the most powerful narratives may not directly relate to an audience yet may still be 'good stories'. This, in turn, implies that `good stories' are unlikely to question people's values and beliefs even if these values and beliefs are inaccurate or even extreme in nature. The application of fidelity, then, would appear to present an obstacle to the introduction of novelty through narrative.

This sense that the narrative paradigm fails to allow for audiences to accept new stories that challenge their values, allowing only the choice of accepting narratives that resonate with their existent values and beliefs, would certainly seem to preclude new narratives from achieving the attention of the audience. Indeed, as Fisher himself says,

> we *identify* with an account (and its author) or we treat it as mistaken. We identify with stories or accounts when we find that they offer "good reasons" for being accepted. [. . .] Reasons are good when they are perceived as (1) true to and consistent with what we think we know and what we value, (2) appropriate to whatever decision is pending, (3) promising in effects for ourselves and others, and (4) consistent with what we believe is an ideal basis for conduct. (Human 194)

The clear implication, here, is that values are self-referential inasmuch as a narrative is evaluated as being 'good' or 'bad' on the basis of what individuals believe personally to be coherent and valid. However, if individuals examine their own existence, beliefs and standards in order to judge whether or not the narrative is acceptable, new possibilities and values may be filtered out *a priori* as unacceptable.

However much objectivity individuals might attempt to achieve, there will inevitably remain some degree of the personal which has been conditioned by the specific group, social milieu, or culture in which individuals find themselves, and different social structures and groupings would be unlikely to support aspects of a narrative that have importance only in other social groupings, which in turn leads to the rejection of novel ideas. A clear example of this can be seen in contemporary rejections of Muslim narratives by non-Muslims and vice-versa.

If Fisher's position is accepted, narratives which proffer extremely unfamiliar ideas and values to the audience would be largely rejected, yet Fisher does explicitly state that the narrative paradigm does not preclude possibility. He denies his theory's exclusion of novel narratives by stating that "nor does the theory behind the narrative paradigm deny [. . .] the capacity of 'people' to formulate and adopt new stories that better account for their lives or the mystery of life itself" (Human 67). Unfortunately, however, Fisher fails to provide any substantial evidence as to how the narrative paradigm might be open to novelty and possibility. Clearly, therefore, it is necessary to qualify Fisher's theory in terms of how the narrative paradigm might allow for such movement, to explore how stories can also be seen to open up the opportunity for such possibility and resolution of contradiction.

Fisher's notion that that life is, in effect, a set of stories which people choose to believe or reject also suggests the possibility of self re-creating through each new narrative encountered. This can be seen in the nature of the changing value of myths which can readily be seen as narratives which invoke strong beliefs and truth claims. Commenting that "a myth is a much-retold narrative that is transparent to a variety of constructions of meaning, a neutral structure that allows paradoxical meanings to be held in a charged tension" (80), Doniger points out that myths can be multi-vocal and

multivalent in respect of the acts of retelling and receiving, and that that each telling of a myth "may have within itself, simultaneously, several points of view, several voices" (84). In this way, a myth can be told and retold from a variety of points of view, and this, in turn, "allows a myth, more than other forms of narrative, to be shared by a group (who, as individuals, have various points of view) and to survive through time (through different generations with different points of view)" (80). [8]

Importantly, here, is the way in which narratives seem readable in several ways at once since the narrative reproduces recognisable patterns, but not any particular original. In addition to these basic plots, there are layers of additional details, events, characterisations, themes, and locations which embellish the narrative as an integral function of the processes of literary and cultural transmission. Indeed, "in the innumerable retellings of a traditional story, accidental or intentional dislocations are inevitable. To account for elements that have become for one reason or another, meaningless, secondary interpretations are invented, often with considerable skill." (Campbell 246 - 247). In other words, a society's historical change can recreate its narratives within, and as a result of, its own social context as a relationship between the teller and the audience. Moreover, within any narration of social permanence, there surely exists a subtext of potential social change embedded in the narrative which remains unheeded as long as a group or society's knowledge and truth claims concerning its world are, individually and collectively, unquestioned. However, when such assuredness becomes subject to any doubt, the need for new narratives arises. By viewing narratives as implicitly competing with the alternatives the possibility of embedding the social or other change into the narrative is surely possible.

The relationship, then, between the teller of the tale and the audience is important in terms of the transmission of narratives. Those receiving the narratives are also the co-authors of the narrative, and reception is an open process (albeit constricted to some degree by the nature of the receiving community) where various factors come into play. As Herrnstein Smith comments, if asked to summarise a fairy-tale or other narrative, for example, people's summaries, "will be different if the motives and purposes of their summarizing are different" (213), (not to mention their individual powers of memory and recall and narrativising skills), and, furthermore, "each of these summaries would simplify the narrative at a different level of abstraction, and each of them would preserve, omit, link, isolate, and foreground different features or sets of features in accord with the particular occasion and purposes of the summarizing" (Herrnstein Smith 213). Furthermore, what are referred to as "the basic stories or deep-plot structures of narratives are often not abstract, disembodied, or subsumed entities but quite manifest, material and particular retellings – and thus versions – of those narratives, constructed, as *all* versions are, by someone in particular, on some occasion, for some purpose, and in accord with some relevant set of principles" (Herrnstein Smith 214). Thus, "the form and features of any 'version' of a narrative will be a function of, among other things, the particular motives that elicited it and the particular interests and functions it was designed to serve"(Herrnstein Smith 217).

Viewing a narrative as a "social transaction," as Herrnstein Smith suggests, implies that that not only is every telling "produced and experienced under certain social conditions and constraints and that it always involves two parties, an audience as well as a narrator, but also that, as in any social transaction, each party must be individually motivated to participate in it: in other words, that each party must have

some interest in telling or listening to that narrative" (Herrnstein Smith 229). As social transaction, it is possible to "describe the necessarily contingent value of a narrative in terms of how successfully it accommodates the interests of the parties involved in any of the particular transactions in which, at any time, it figures" (Herrnstein Smith 230).

Narratives, then, can assume the attributes of objective truth for an audience through the process of generating a body of common consent. This does not mean that storytellers cannot make their own additions to a particular narrative in their retelling, but it does mean that the additions they make need to obtain popular consent if they are to remain acceptable. Consider, for example, the story of Robin Hood, whose early incarnation as a renegade was superseded by one who robbed the rich and gave to the poor (an element of the story which did not transfer out of its British context). If something in the tale becomes inappropriate, elements of the narrative may be altered to better accord with the revised context, or elements previously considered essential might be removed from the narrative altogether. A further example of this is the number of times the Brothers Grimm changed 'mother' to 'stepmother' in their folk-tale collections because of the inappropriateness, in their social context, of presenting a negative image of the figure of a mother. Moreover, in European story-telling traditions (and those which have been influenced by them), a major influencing factor in terms of change due to inappropriateness came with the advent of Christianity, when, after a culture had converted to Christianity, storytellers would have needed to change many details in the narratives they recounted in order to make them acceptable to a newly Christian audience whilst still retaining elements of the earlier non-Christian tale.

It is true, of course, that if a narrative is too alien to an audience's previous experiences and beliefs, the audience might simply find it impossible to understand, or might reject it on the basis of its strangeness. Therefore, the narrative must somehow be connected with the audience's prior experiences and the other narratives being told and retold. The narrative must, in some way, have a connection to the everyday, must include a certain degree of similarity for the audience. If, however, a narrative simply repeats or affirms all that the reader already believes, it may not necessarily hold any interest for the reader, nor would it provoke any kind of questioning or learning experience.

Indeed, following Fisher, even the process of validating a narrative through coherence and fidelity and the logic of good reasons require at some level a testing of the narrative. Whilst it is true that people can and do seek validation through narratives, such a process does not allow for those individuals who seek or need to move forward. The assessment of the audience as validating conservative precepts also suggests that the audience has no 'wisdom'. Yet Fisher specifically notes the narrative rationality which is acquired (as much as learned), and the notion of a passive commonality would also imply no social or personal change. Clearly, however, both individuals and society do change, and, if we accept that communication is narrative, then the inference must be that narratives can and do effect change, even if such change is slow. It is the nature of good narrative, therefore, that it situates itself within this gap between the familiar and the strange. The version of Christianity proposed by Lutheran and Calvinist thought, for example, works in this way; the changes proposed in the narrative were radical in their challenges to only certain specific areas of conventional wisdom whilst maintaining many familiar narrative themes and discourses from the Catholicism they contested.

In this respect, as well as allowing for rejection of narrative for reasons of lack of coherence and fidelity, narrative can also enable a new value set to replace or to be superimposed on an older one, and the collectivity sustains itself by creating an identity homogenous enough to let it live with social change. Moreover, even that which is, for various reasons, accepted can be questioned even if that questioning is undertaken by a minority, either in public or in private, according to how that particular social group perceives the chances of its efforts being successful. Stephens and McCallum note that first,

> retellings do not, and cannot, also reproduce the discoursal mode of the source, they cannot *replicate* its significances, and always impose their own cultural presuppositions in the process of retelling, and second even the most revered cultural icon can be subjected to mocking or antagonistic retellings. The resulting version is not so much a retelling as a *re-version*, a narrative which has taken apart its pre-texts and reassembled them as a version which is a new textual and ideological configuration. (qtd. in Zipes107 - 108)

The narrative, then, can be seen as the result of common conscious and unconscious content having been shaped by the conscious mind, not just of one particular person, but the consensus of many in regard to what they view as universal human problems, and what they accept as desirable solutions. Narrative in this sense is about perceptions rather than historically validated truths (in so far as these exist at all), about the ways in which communities regard certain propositions as normal and natural rather than others.

Only if the narrative meets both the conscious and unconscious requirements of the individual or group will it gain acceptance (and be valued on a consistent basis both within the group and from generation to generation). From this it would seem that the interaction between historical moment, storyteller and audience requires a cohesive element, and that element can be defined as a form of resonance. Such resonance could be momentary, or long-standing (for example, certain groups in modern society still retain a strong element of Christian mythology in their understanding of life as witnessed by the resonance which the Biblical creation myth still holds sway in some groups in spite of considerable scientific knowledge to disprove the validity of biblical creation myths as any kind of empirical truth) depending upon social and personal circumstance.

It might, of course, simply be the case that the notion of pervasive archetypes being present is sufficient to bring about such responses (although, as noted earlier, the reiteration of archetypes and themes provide the audience with multiple interpretations that are relatively in accord with the original text yet which open up new possibilities related to contemporary social situations). "Narrative conventions provide the structure within which our understanding of the world is made. Paradoxically, however, formula narrative can provide the most opportunity for fantasy because the conventional setting sets the coordinates for imaginative possibilities beyond the text."(McCracken 185)

Dismissing accounts of narrative that follow archetypal theories, Tolkien, discussing fairy stories, discourages interpretation which merely reproduces variations of certain common themes since this negates the individual integrity of each story as "a thing told in its entirety" (18). True literary differences are found, says Tolkien, not in a general plot, but in "the colouring, the atmosphere, the

unclassifiable individual details of a story, and above all the general purport that informs with life the undisclosed bones of the plot, that really count" (18 – 19). The key notion, then, is the use that society makes of a given narrative, the decisions made or actions taken. In this respect, it is the changing use-value, not the structure, of narrative which is important. Form and content can and do change, but this is, if anything, an inherent part of the process of functional or purposeful designation of narrative within a given context. It may be the case that people who accept a narrative do so because they believe it is true, but what matters is not simply the power of narrative to inspire belief and to enable believers to make sense of their experiences.

What ultimately is of importance is not the variable content, but the application, the uses to which the narrative is put in terms of validating decisions and actions. The nature of every "real story" is that "it contains, openly or covertly, something useful. The usefulness may, in one case, consist in a moral; in another some practical advice; in a third, in a proverb or maxim. In every case the storyteller is a man who has counsel for his readers" (Benjamin 86). Within a social group, narratives can affirm the common values, customs and beliefs of the group, and produce or reinforce bonds between group members. Such narratives have an unquestioned truth for the group. As Karl Kroeber comments, in keeping with Fisher's position,

> all significant narratives are retold and are meant to be retold – even though every retelling is a making anew. Story can thus preserve ideas, beliefs, and convictions without permitting them to harden into abstract dogma. Narrative allows us to test our ethical principles in our

> imagination where we can engage them in the uncertainties and confusion of contingent circumstances. (qtd. in Zipes134)

It might be thought that the imagination is not a suitable testing ground for ethical principles and that if the narrative is too far removed from the 'reality' of the audience, that audience will find it difficult to envision the possibility of new action or values.

However, the opposite is surely also true. Narratives which exceed the possible within the world in which they are encountered can open up possibilities by allowing the audience to transcend the everyday. "Fantasy, the making or glimpsing of Other-worlds" (Tolkien 41) is, for Tolkien, "a natural human activity. It certainly does not destroy or even insult Reason; and it does not either blunt the appetite for, nor obscure the perceptions of, scientific verity" (54). The realm of the fantastic, the imagination, is always grounded in a reality, but it allows for a movement beyond and around that reality and in so doing offers up the possibility for an encounter with values and notions which may differ from or contradict those of the audience. Thus, the ability of such narratives to reveal novelty and possibilities is not wholly dependent upon their fidelity as set out by Fisher.

Moreover, to return to Doniger's point about multivalent narratives offering seemingly contradictory value structures which the audience or reader must not only understand, but also construct how these values can coexist with those already held. The active participation of the audience or reader is required since a multivalent narrative resists the simple retrieval of those values which accord with or appeal to the audience's current value-set, and the audience must consider how these relate to past and future actions and decisions. Multivalent narratives, then, through their

incorporation of existing and also conflicting value structures, present the audience with new values and ideas whilst not alienating the audience with presentations of the extremely novel. In a narrative such as Lewis Carroll's Alice stories, for example, the reader is presented with the fantastic and the novel. The reader can either dismiss the contradictions and inversions as mere nonsense, or try to understand and give meaning to them. A surface reading would be most likely to lead to dismissal as nonsense, which to some degree compels the reader to assess what is being said in order to detect any if any message can be detected. Some readers may choose to dismiss the narrative and its multiplicity as nonsense, but those who choose to engage with the narrative's apparent contradictions should be able to derive some level of meaning and related values which they can the either accept or reject.

Thus, novel ideas and values can find a place within an audience's value set, and can 'ring true' as a result of the audience's efforts to understand the multiple levels of the text. This is especially the case when the novelty is introduced alongside the familiar, a process which opens up the possibility for the combination of new values with old, or even the replacement of existing values.

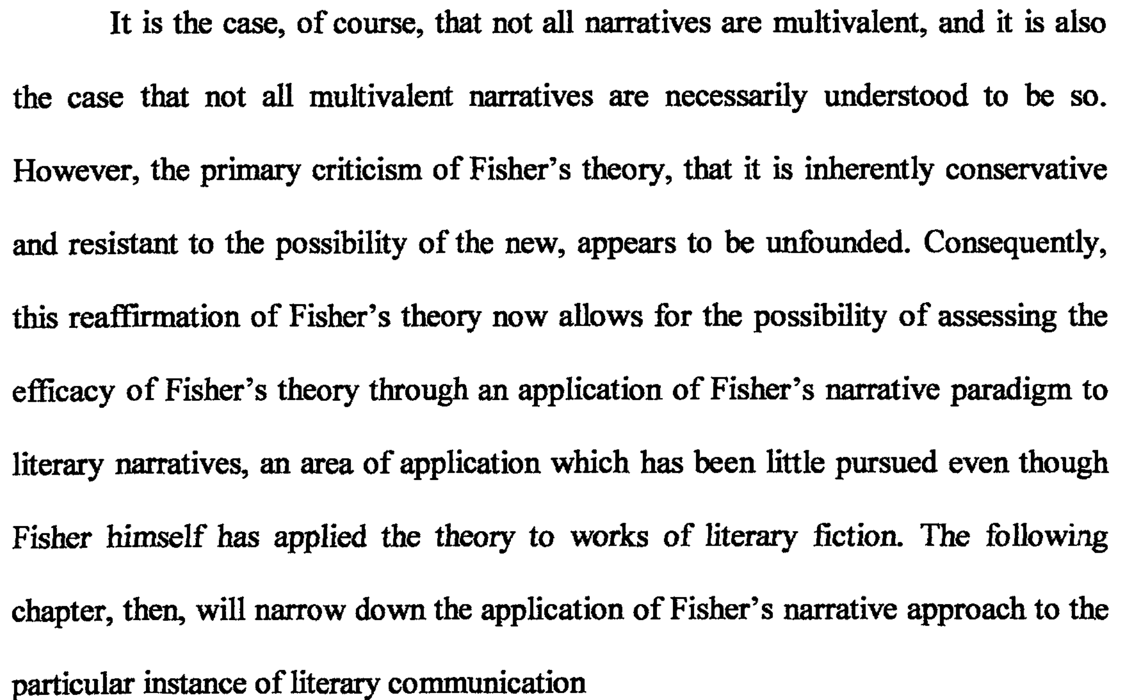
This also leads to yet another possibility which has already been briefly touched upon, for, although the logic of good reasons and fidelity focus primarily upon what is already held to be true or right, it is not simply the case that coherence and fidelity of the narrative allow it to 'ring true' for the audience. What, conversely, can be posited is that, on occasion, it is also possible for the audience to 'ring true' with the new ideas and values presented within the narrative. Thus, narrative fidelity should also be taken to include whether or not a story 'rings true' with not only the values that an audience currently holds, but also whether or not it 'rings true' with

the values that the audience could *potentially* hold. This position, of course, also implies a reciprocity of response which itself provides more opportunity for the possible and the novel to be opened up to the audience.

In fact, then, what would appear to be problematic issues for Fisher (the notions of narrative contradiction and incoherence) can actually provide points of entry for novel ideas and values. Within the concept of multivalent narratives, contradiction does not necessarily equate to incoherence, nor does it necessarily lead to a story failing to 'ring true', for the question now becomes one of whether or not anything can develop from these contradictions; after all, if the audience can reconstruct a coherent meaning of some kind, then the narrative is opened up and made available for evaluation. Indeed, this is an inherent possibility in narrative, for, as Karl Kroeber remarks,

> stories are always retold, reread, that the narrative is a repeating form for discourse – in which repetition is unique. This paradox gives storytelling a strong claim to be the most important of all modes of cultural discourse. No one can dispute that narrative has been the primary means by which most societies have defined themselves. On the other hand, narrative is also the primary means by which sociocultural boundaries could be crossed, not transgressively, but unobtrusively over surprising obstacles, including vast spans of time and space, quietly adapting to foreign environments, and then changing those environments. Narrative is the discourse most amenable to translative adaptations that permit simultaneous retention and revision of its peculiarities. (qtd. in Zipes, Slovenly 108)

It is the case, of course, that not all narratives are multivalent, and it is also the case that not all multivalent narratives are necessarily understood to be so. However, the primary criticism of Fisher's theory, that it is inherently conservative and resistant to the possibility of the new, appears to be unfounded. Consequently, this reaffirmation of Fisher's theory now allows for the possibility of assessing the efficacy of Fisher's theory through an application of Fisher's narrative paradigm to literary narratives, an area of application which has been little pursued even though Fisher himself has applied the theory to works of literary fiction. The following chapter, then, will narrow down the application of Fisher's narrative approach to the particular instance of literary communication



# CHAPTER IV

# LITERARY APPLICATION OF THE NARRATIVE PARADIGM

Noting the "appearance of the rhetorical in the poetic and the poetic in the rhetorical" (Human 159), Fisher is clear that common experience confirms that "we do arrive at conclusions based on 'dwelling in' dramatic and literary works" (Human 158). In terms of the application of the narrative paradigm to literary texts, the 'arguments' of fiction are specifically appropriate to two of Fisher's claims: first, that "arguments operate on principles of the logic of good reasons," and, second, that "people are as much valuing as reasoning animals" (Human 158). Following Kenneth Burke's assertion that there can be no absolute distinction between poetic and rhetoric, Fisher posits that "Rhetoric is a symbolic function, the function of inducement. Rhetoric arises whenever we attribute meaning to symbols, and where there is meaning there is persuasion" (Human 160). As a by-product, Fisher also believes that "'aesthetic proof' can be more effectively and systematically assessed using the specifications of the narrative paradigm than is possible when one uses the rational-world paradigm" (Human 158).

For Fisher, literary works 'argue' through "the process of suggestion" (Human 161), but, rather than focusing upon authorial techniques, Fisher's move is to concentrate on reader's responses, "the mental moves that will be made by auditors or readers in interpreting a work" (Human 161). These mental moves are at first an aesthetic "felt-belief," one "based on an immediate, emotional, intuitive response to a representation of a closed fictive world. It is a response not based on deliberate thought or reasoned analysis" (Human 161). For Fisher, fictive works that fail to engender this kind of response also fail as aesthetic works. The second level of

response involves a review of the elements of the work which gave rise to the initial response, and these elements then become the bases for the reader's reasoned justification of the initial response.

The proofs which are established in this way are, for Fisher, "aesthetic proofs" since they originate in the initial aesthetic response, and these aesthetic proofs – based on structural elements such as characters, actions, words and effects – are "representations of reality that fall somewhere between analogies and examples. What is represented is not exactly our own world but something that bears a more essential relationship to it than analogy" (Human 162), and readers can identify (or not) with these representations; the work seems "'true' in principle, though we cannot testify to all details portrayed" (Human 176). Aesthetic proofs are, says Fisher,

> constituted in verbal and nonverbal ways: by words and actions consistent with other words and actions (matters of the work's dramatic-literary probability); by consideration of whose words or actions dominate and survive or transcend the conflicts between or among characters and circumstances; and by consistency and validity when tested against one's own perceptions of "real" people and "real" events. (Human 162)

The suggestive nature of these proofs also allows for a range of different interpretations and validations, although, for Fisher, the range of possible interpretations is not infinite, and aesthetic proofs must "permit an account of the work in a way that leaves it recognizable to others" (Human 163).

The process through which readers test their literary interpretations is, according to Fisher, premised upon four considerations:

> First is determining the message, the overall conclusions fostered by the work. Second is deciding whether one's determination of the message is justified by (a) the reliability of the narrator(s); (b) the words or actions of other characters; and (c) the descriptions of characters, scenes, and events [. . .]. Third is noting the outcomes of the various conflicts that make up the story, observing whose values seem most powerful and/or worthy, whether events are controlled by characters or by forces outside them. [. . .]. Fourth is weighing this "truth," the set of conclusions advanced by the story, against one's own perceptions of the world to determine their fidelity. The questions are: (a) Does the message accurately portray the world we live in? and (b) Does it provide a reliable guide to our beliefs, attitudes, values, actions? (Human 175)

Here, the first three considerations replicate the need within the logic of good reasons to assess fact and relevance since these considerations equate to the concern as to whether or not the narrative rings true and what 'truth' it makes available, or, more precisely, fact and relevance. The fourth consideration corresponds to "*consequence, consistency and transcendent issue*" (Fisher, Human 176). In addition, this process is able to show weaknesses in the text, such as "the presence of irrelevant and digressive incidents and discourse; incidents and discourse that cohere or cluster to support conflicting themes; representations of seldom-experienced or fantastic situations; inconsistencies in character portrayal" (Human 177). Indeed, one consideration of what constitutes a good literary text is that there is no superfluity, that all the parts have a relevance to the development of the narrative.

The method for applying the narrative paradigm, then, involves identifying story themes, together with narratorial reliability, and assessing the connection between values, reason and action made available. In terms of literary analysis, Fisher applies his own theory to two pieces of literary narrative: F. Scott Fitzgerald's The Great Gatsby, and Arthur Miller's Death of a Salesman. However, a type of text that has been given little space in the application of the narrative paradigm (one which can potentially expand the narrative to include possibility and novelty) is children's literature[9], especially given that the assumption that adults are in some way superior to children through having developed a rational approach to their worlds is not necessarily the case as is shown in Fisher's paradigm. The choice of children's literature with which to assess Fisher's theory might seem a strange one, but there are valid reasons for such a decision.

There is no doubt, of course, that children thrive on stories. Children need stories "because they 'think' in terms of stories and are able to discover the fundamental truths revealed by stories long before they are capable of thinking in abstract terms" (Ewers 176). For Alasdair MacIntyre,

> it is through hearing stories about wicked stepmothers, lost children, good but misguided kings, wolves that suckle twin boys, youngest sons who receive no inheritance but who must make their own way in the world and eldest sons who waste their inheritance on riotous living and go into exile to live with the swine, that children learn or mislearn both what a child is and what a parent is, what the cast of characters may be in the drama into which they have been born and what the ways of the world are. Deprive children of stories and you leave them unscripted, anxious stutterers in their actions as in their words. (216)

More importantly perhaps, as John Savage notes, "children's literature traces its beginnings to preliterate times when ancient bards and storytellers passed tales and legends from generation to generation [. . .]. These ancient tales were not just for children; they were a means of information, inspiration, and entertainment for everybody in society" (4). As Walter Benjamin points out,

> the fairy tale, which to this day is the first tutor of children because it was once the first tutor of mankind, secretly lives on in the story. The first true storyteller is, and will continue to be, the teller of fairy tales. Whenever good counsel was at a premium, the fairy tale had it, and where the need was greatest, its aid was nearest. (102)

There is a sense that this tradition has not ended, and, echoing Walter Benjamin's view of storytelling, Hans-Heino Ewers comments that,

> modern epic literature, the central genre of which is the novel, has increasingly distanced itself from the structural principles of the old art of storytelling. However, storytelling is still flourishing, now as ever: children's literature still constitutes a type of literary culture in which stories are told [. . .]. Yet, at the same time, the art of storytelling in most other cultural contexts has been slowly disappearing, if it has not already vanished altogether. (169)

Thus, children's literature would appear to be the vehicle through which story has been maintained, whilst concepts of knowledge and arriving at truth have taken a different path of revelation through the logical process.

Such storytelling as resides in children's literature "imposes restrictions on literature while enriching it at the same time, forcing such literature to refrain from using numerous literary techniques peculiar to modern prose. On the other hand, it is

able to incorporate much of what is considered outdated and, therefore, taboo in literature for adults." (Ewers 177). This view is supported by writer Phillip Pullman[10], who claims that "there are some subjects too large for adult fiction; they can only be treated satisfactorily in children's books" (par. 1). Pullman believes that the reason for this is that "for most of this century serious readers have treated story with a certain disdain. [. . .] One consequence is that novelists who are also storytellers find themselves pigeonholed in a genre or dismissed as second-rate." (par. 1). "Stories" comments Pullman, "encompass larger worlds than literary fashion does. We need stories as we need air and food and love. And to tell your story as clearly as you can, free of the torment of self-consciousness, with all the resources of your craft, there's only one place these days to do it: in a children's book." (par. 8). Tabbert and Wardetzky concur with this view, and they further suggest that,

> if there are two major functions of literature, fulfillment of wishes and interpretation of reality, then successful children's books, similar to fairy tales, tend to favor the first of the two. What is presented as desirable originates in the author's consciousness, which is fed either by strong memories of childhood [. . .] or by a considerable knowledge of what children want [. . .]. In addition, the success of children's books seems to depend on a certain degree of prefiguration of the subject matter by the bond-creating patterns of myths, if not by their more modern equivalent of social stereotypes, both of which may be recognizable either to an international public or to a specific ethnic community only." (2)

Here we find a reaffirmation of the notion that, in presenting values to an audience for validation, first must come the recognition of the familiar.

Another reason for selecting children's literature, here is the assertion that children's literature's "relationship to the rest of literature [is] problematic" (Hunt, Literature 1), and it thus seems appropriate to employ children's literature to assess the value of Fisher's theory. In Fisher's paradigm, of course, all types of literature fall within the province of the narrative paradigm; sadly, literary theory and its theorists have often neglected literature for children, and a brief review of most major theories and the work of theorists reveals that children's literature is significantly absent in terms of direct reference or as exemplification. Other than an interest in the pedagogical role of children's literature, or its utility in teaching reading skills, the study of children's literature, the literary study of children's literature, has been restricted to a few exceptional texts (most notably, Lewis Carroll's Alice in Wonderland, and Alice Through the Looking Glass[11]Indeed, as Shavit noted in 1985, "only a short time ago, children's literature was not even considered a legitimate field of research in the academic world. Scholars hardly regarded it as a proper subject for their work, and if they did, they were most often concerned solely with its pedagogic and educational value and not with its existence as a literary phenomenon" (ix). Beckett also notes that, "in the early part of the twentieth century, children's literature was undervalued, marginalized, excluded from mainstream literature" (ix).

Concomitantly, "the exclusion of children's literature from the class of serious literature has of course resulted in its being classed a as branch of popular literature" (Hughes 550). Even if such a classification is valid, popular literature has its own value. As McCracken notes,

> popular fiction, from folk tales and fairy tales to popular ballads to modern bestsellers, has always provided a structure within which our

> lives can be understood. Who we are is never fixed, and in modern societies an embedded sense of self is less available than ever before. [. . .] popular fiction has the capacity to provide us with a workable, if temporary, sense of self."(2)

Moreover, in terms of multivalency and the possibility of the 'new' already discussed, "popular narratives play a vital role in mediating social change, informing their audience of new currents and allowing the reader to insert him or herself into new scenarios in a way that can be related to her or his own experience" (McCracken 185). In this sense, "the reader's act of interpretation plays the crucial role in mediating between the popular text and the culture industry's marketing of that text within an economy of signs" (McCracken 34).

Much of this negativity expressed towards popular fiction may arise from the New Criticism which dominated twentieth century literary studies. As Jill May points out, "most New Critics felt that the ideal readings of literary texts could only come from a body of knowledgeable scholars who resided inside academia. Thus, the novice's interpretations were not to be trusted" (19). Indeed, says May, the New Critics

> did not contend that everyday readers could appreciate the text's true meaning on their own. However, they believed that while ordinary citizens were not capable of notable interpretation, they could be taught to appreciate the true meaning of a piece of literature. Thus, true knowledge of literature was not in the hands of simple readers. It could not be obtained easily, and it stemmed from a more sophisticated practice than learning to read. (19)

This is a restatement of Fisher's notion of cadres of experts, and in keeping with

Fisher, May also notes that

> literary critics assume reading stances and create interpretations of the stories they read that fit with certain ways of reading. Actually, all adults have certain perceptions about how to read and enjoy a good story. Those perceptions are based on past reading experiences and learned knowledge of literary patterns. Most adults are "critical" about what they read, but don't have formal reasons for their decisions. They are "childlike" in their preferences. (14)

Not that all theorists have ignored children's literature. A singular case in point is Frederick Crews' Postmodern Pooh[12], but, here, the "Winnie the Pooh" books are used in order to parody literary critical discourse, rather than to specifically explore the primary text itself. Despite its parodic intent, however, what Crew's work does specifically suggest is that the best way to show the limitations or flaws of a critical approach is to apply it to a children's text. In this respect, Aidan Chambers has "often wondered why literary theorists haven't yet realized that the best demonstration of all they say when they talk about phenomenology or structuralism or deconstruction or any other critical approach can be most clearly and easily demonstrated in children's literature" (qtd in Hunt, Criticism 5)[13] For Nicholas Tucker, children's literature "abounds in contradictions, ambiguities and arguments, making it a fascinating but necessarily complex field for study" (17), and, as such, is a vital body of literature with much to offer. Deborah Thacker even goes as far as to suggest that

> the transformation of critical theory over the last few decades has meant that theory *needs* children's literature. As theorists move from a textual emphasis toward the interplay between reader and text and the

> social and political forces that mediate those interactions, so the part played by texts written primarily for children and the ways of reading available to children, within a web of discourses that both encourage and control interactions with fictional texts, need to be included and examined. (1)

It may well be, as Perry Nodelman suggests, that "children's fiction thwarts would-be interpreters simply because so *few* children's novels move much beyond the formulaic or stereotypical" (5), and, thus, interpretation of children's fiction will only reveal a seeming lack of uniqueness. In similar vein, Roderick McGillis sees the primary mode of expression in children's literature as romance, reaching his conclusion not only because its plot turns on adventures that tend to end happily [...], but also because in romance the structural patterns of myth are less displaced than in other forms of literary expression" (52). Here, McGillis appears to be utilising Northrop Frye's basic pattern of romance of the hero's quest, *agon*, *pathos*, and, finally, *anagnorisis* (Frye 192) on the basis that these three stages represent the required stages in the proving of a point. McGillis therefore sees didacticism as a primary purpose of all narratives for children, "reassuring them that the world is, ultimately, human in shape and meaning" (52). However, Nodelman, in concluding his comments upon the apparent sameness of children's fiction, how it seems to be suffused with traditional archetypal plots and characters, notes that the fact that

> traditional interpretation could not explain how these books are different from each other does not so much deny their value as literature as it challenges our usual assumptions about interpretation. If interpretation of these books does not give us any insight into what makes them unique, then perhaps the information that interpretation of

> more "complex" novels provides is equally misleading. Perhaps the apparently unique themes and patterns we find in those more complex novels do not adequately explain their uniqueness either; perhaps we must search for other means of interpretation. (20)

Of course, there would be few who would not concur that most 'children's literature' is evidently different from 'adult literature' in essential ways:

> Good children's literature may differ from good adult literature in certain interesting but limited ways. In good children's literature there will be (1) some restriction of the range of experience described by the author to types of experience comprehensible to the young, (2) a less complex combination of language, character, plot and theme, (3) a lesser range of language, though not less ingenuity and flexibility within that range, (4) a greater reliance on action to do what the author wants, (5) a fuller integration of visual patterns with the verbal patterns. (Steel Smith 6)

Steel Smith continues, however, noting that

> We will find the similarities of good children's literature and adult literature to be as significant as the differences. We will find that good children's writing, like good adult writing, tends to have a high degree of (1) unity, (2) concreteness, particularity, specificity, (3) appropriateness of the form – organization and language – to the content, (4) a formal pattern that is in itself appealing in some ways, (5) an absence of waste motion or indirectness.(6)

Steel Smith's assertion as to the similarities between good children's literature and adult literature are particularly relevant, for his isolation of a high degree of unity, of concreteness, and specificity, of formal appropriateness to content, of a formal pattern that is in some way appealing, and, finally, of the absence of waste motion or indirectness (6) are also redolent of Fisher's premises.

There is, of course, a view that children's literature is really no more than adult nostalgia for a lost childhood. J.R.R. Tolkien, however, presents the view that children's literature (here, specifically fairy stories) "have in the modern lettered world been relegated to the 'nursery', as shabby or old-fashioned furniture is relegated to the play-room, primarily because the adults do not want it, and do not mind if it is misused" (34). Stories confined only to the nursery and schoolroom, and to be read only by children, would be spoiled forever; "fairy-stories banished in this way, cut off from a full adult art, would in the end be ruined; indeed in so far as they have been so banished, they have been ruined. The value of fairy-stories is thus not, in my opinion, to be found by considering children in particular" (35)[14]. Tolkien feels that if children's literature were only used to 'educate' children or to fit other needs of the 'class of children,' then it would cease to be literature.

Indeed, Tolkien avers that fairy-stories are not essentially children's stories at all, and that the connection of fairy stories with childhood is often made by those possessed of an idealised notion of childhood when, in fact, it is merely an accident of western society's history (34). For Tolkien, in fact, "only some children and some adults have any special taste for them" (34), it is an innate taste and one that "does not decrease but increases with age" (35). Such stories, then are not just for children, for "if fairy-story as a kind is worth reading at all it is worthy to be written for and read by adults," and Tolkien is convinced that such tales should be read as "a natural

branch of literature," and thus capable of carrying values and functions as other forms of literature can (45), the most important of which being fantasy, the working of imagination.

The creator of such stories draws from the "Cauldron of Story", a resource which "has always been boiling, and to it have continually been added new bits, dainty and undainty" (Tolkien 26 – 27), and

> makes a Secondary World which your mind can enter. Inside it, what he relates is 'true': it accords with the laws of that world. You therefore believe it while you are, as it were, inside. The moment disbelief arises, the spell is broken; the magic, or rather, the art has failed. You are then out in the Primary World again, looking at the little abortive Secondary World from the outside (36).

Indeed, the process of drawing from the cauldron continues, refusing to consign such stories to the nursery. As Christina Bacchilega remarks of postmodern fairy tales, they

> reactivate the wonder tale's "magic" or mythopoeic qualities by providing new readings of it, thereby generating unexploited or forgotten possibilities from its repetition. As "borderline enquiries," postmodern re-visions of traditional narratives do more than alter our readings of those narratives. Like meta-folklore, they constitute an ideological test for previous interpretations, and in doing so, postmodern fairy tales exhibit an awareness of how the folktale, which modern humans relegate to the nursery, almost vindictively patterns our unconscious and "secretly lives in the story." (qtd. in Zipes 123)

C. S. Lewis, another academic and writer who found an imaginative outlet in his Narnia books is in agreement with Tolkien. As Lewis notes, "Professor J.R.R. Tolkien in The Lord of the Rings has shown that the connection between fairy tales and children is not nearly as close as publishers and educators think. Many children don't like them and many adults do" (37). Indeed, Lewis notes that he himself is "almost inclined to set it up as a canon that a children's story which is enjoyed only by children is a bad children's story. The good ones last" (24). He also notes that it certainly is my opinion that a book worth reading only in childhood is not worth reading even then," for,

> the peculiarity of child readers is that they are not peculiar. It is [adults] who are peculiar. Fashions in literary taste come and go among the adults, and every period has its own shibboleths. These, when good, do not improve the taste of children, and, when bad, do not corrupt it; for children read only to enjoy. (38)

Despite the passage of time, C.S. Lewis' comment remains pertinent:

> a man who admits that dwarfs and giants and talking beasts and witches are still dear to him in his fifty-third year is now less likely to be praised for his perennial youth than scorned and pitied for arrested development. If I spend some little time defending myself against these charges, this is not so much because it matters greatly whether I am scorned and pitied as because the defence is germane to my whole view of the fairy tale and even of literature in general. (25)

Both Tolkien's insistence that fairy-stories are not necessarily for children and Lewis's that "a children's story which is enjoyed only by children is a bad children's story" provide a basis for the argument that adults should grow with and

not out of stories and fairy-tales. In both Tolkien and Lewis' terms, adults read books written for children because a good story is *always* a good story, and there is no truly good 'children's book' that cannot also be enjoyed by adults as well. Bess Porter Adams enlarges this idea so as to include all literature: "Good literature, whether for old or young readers, bears the mark of truth and integrity; it carries the reader along into genuine, if vicarious, experience; it stirs his emotions, arouses his curiosity, stimulates his mind, and gives him a measuring stick for living" (vii). John Rowe Townsend also believes that children's books must be judged "as part of literature in general, and therefore by much the same standards as 'adult' books. A good children's book must not only be pleasing to children. It must be a good book in its own right" (11).

Another reason to use children's literature here is that stories for children, being written by adults, inevitably express something about a society's aspirations and the values it wishes to pass on to the younger generation. Such stories can be seen as functioning as a means of introducing children to a cultural heritage, as well as transmitting a society's values, assumptions and experiences. This line of thought would suggest that children's literature is intended to maintain socially conservative value-sets (especially given the apparent ethnocentric, androcentric and class-based assumptions of many stories for children). However, as has already been seen, the multivalency of narratives can allow for variant readings (especially as, inherently, children's literature has two implied readers: the child and the adult who acts as narrator/reader of the narrative or as gatekeeper of suitability of content). It is possible, then, that children's literature can embody multivalence through the dual (or even multiple) implied readerships and, in so doing, introduce the possibility of novel ideas to the audience.

There is, linked to this notion of multivalency, one final reason for the appropriateness of children's literature which arises from the notion of children's literature as inherently conservative and this is the notion of subversion. As Karl Kroeber remarks,

> genuine storytelling is inherently antiauthoritarian. Even a true believer in an official dogma cannot help articulating a received truth in his own fashion – for stories are told by individuals, not groups. Inherent to all such individuation is the potentiality for subversion, especially because a story is "received" by individuals, no matter how large and homogenous the audience of a telling, each of whom simply by interpreting for himself or herself may introduce "unauthorized understanding – all the more dangerous if unintended. (qtd. in Zipes 133)

If this notion is equally applicable to children's literature as a bastion of storytelling, there is in children's literature another element which responds to the criticism of Fisher's theory that it does not provide for the novel and for possibility: the notion of subversion.

In a sense, whether intended or not, all literature has the potential to teach. Didactic children's literature in particular specifically attempts to uphold contemporary adult social values, or to teach morals and manners, and, thus, is usually written in an adult narrative voice, one which assumes that children need to be shown how to fit in to an adult world. Many such texts show how and why to follow adult rules, usually stated explicitly, viewing children as simple in their thought processes, and such texts also tend to repress taboo subjects such as

sexuality, bodily functions, or death primarily through absenting them from the narrative.

Alison Lurie, however, argues that the children's literature which continues to retain its popularity is that which subverts contemporary adult values, poking fun at adults and adult institutions:

> Most of the great works of juvenile literature are subversive in one way or another: they express ideas and emotions not generally approved of or recognised at the time; they make fun of honored figures and piously held beliefs; and they view social pretenses with clear-eyed directness, remarking – as in Andersen's famous tale – that "the emperor has no clothes" (Don't Tell 4)

They also indulge those traits which adults would wish to remove from children's characters such as "daydreaming, disobedience, answering back, running away from home, and concealing one's private thoughts and feelings from unsympathetic grown-ups" (Don't Tell x). The subversive narrative allows children to assert their power over themselves and their world by breaking adult rules especially when those rules appear either pointless or when they provides an obstacle preventing children from achieving their potential. In addition, subversive narratives can show a distrust of the adult world by subverting natural laws which adults seem to value. Thus, by valuing a world in which children create their own rules, these texts give children power over themselves, over their surroundings, and over adults. In so doing, they de-value the adult world, and "make fun of adults and expose adults to their pretensions and failings; they suggest, subtly or otherwise, that children are braver, smarter, and more interesting than grown-ups, and that grown-up rules are made to be broken" (Lurie, Boys and Girls xi)

In contrast to didactic narratives, subversive narratives acknowledge that children understand more than adults believe of them, and are premised on the belief that children are complex beings who understand that the adult world is not a perfect one, and who can also understand the possible double meanings of text or images. The narrative voice in such texts does not talk down to children, thus giving children more agency over their world. Heroes and heroines in such narratives often create or enter their own worlds in order to be able to live in the way that seems best to them, and in these worlds the people who prove most trustworthy are not adults but peers.

It is here that Bakhtin's notion of carnival is of relevance, for, as Nikolajeva comments, “carnival theory is highly relevant for children’s literature” (129). Bakhtin believes that carnival arose in part in the Middle Ages in order to combat the everyday as well as fears of death against which the carnivalesque view of life as cyclical, not linear, as communal, not individual, offered reassurance. In carnival, Bakhtin argues,

> all distance between people is suspended, and a special carnival category goes into effect: free and familiar contact among people. This is a very important aspect of a carnival sense of the world. People who in life are separated by impenetrable hierarchical barriers enter into free familiar contact on the carnival square. (Problems 123)

Carnival extols the ritual debasement of the exalted by those without power, celebrating the “joyful relativity of all structure and order” (Problems 124), reducing all to the same level. Thus, hierarchies are inverted, fools become wise, the rich become poor, and opposites such as fact and fantasy, good and evil become less clearly defined. In addition, much of carnival’s subversive power derives from

laughter, for it is directed at exalted objects, forcing renewal. Bakhtin argues that "laughter degrades and materializes" and that "degradation here means coming down to earth, the contact with the earth as an element that swallows up and gives birth at the same time" (Rabelais 20, 21).

John Stephens takes up this notion, and sets out three types of carnivalesque children's books: those which "offer the characters 'time out' from the habitual constraints of society but incorporate a safe return to social normality," those which attempt "through gentle mockery to dismantle socially received ideas and replace them with their opposite, privileging weakness over strength," and those which are "endemically subversive of such things as social authority, received paradigms of behaviour and morality, and major literary genres associated with children's literature" (121). Stephens also makes the following significant claims:

> Carnival in children's literature is grounded in a playfulness which situates itself in positions of nonconformity. It expresses opposition to authoritarianism and seriousness, and is often manifested as parody of prevailing literary forms and genres, or as literature in non-canonical forms. [. . .] Children's literature does not make extensive use of the abusive language or the insulting words or expressions generally characteristic of the carnivalesque in its breaking of the norms of official speech, but it does have linguistic and narrative resources through which to mock and challenge authoritative figures and structures of the adult world--parents, teachers, political and religious institutions--and some of the (often traditionally male) values of society such as independence, individuality, and the activities of striving, aggression and conquest. (121-22)

A ready example of this can be seen in Lewis Carroll's Alice's Adventures in Wonderland, which can be seen to satirise English culture through its parodying of the manners of tea parties, croquet games, royal meetings and the like through its depiction of the events which befall Alice during the course of her adventures. Many of Alice's conversations with herself, her constant concern about good manners, her poor geographical knowledge, her study of Latin, and the moral poems which she was required to memorise, also reflect aspects of Victorian attitudes towards childhood and contemporary educational beliefs. As George Orwell understood,

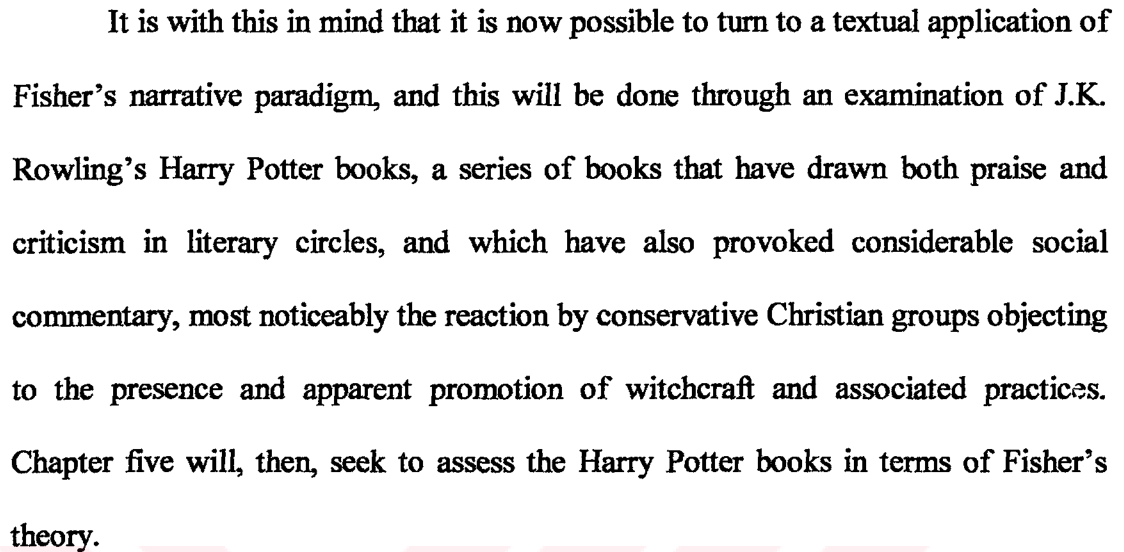
> there are subtler methods of debunking than throwing custard pies. There is also the humour of pure fantasy, which assaults man's notion of himself as not only a dignified but a rational being. Lewis Carroll's humour consists essentially in making fun of logic, and Edward Lear's in a sort of poltergeist interference with common sense. When the Red Queen remarks, "I've seen hills compared with which you'd call that one a valley", she is in her way attacking the bases of society as violently as Swift or Voltaire." (par. 13)

In this sense, the Alice books also posit childhood wonder and questioning as both an appropriate system of thought and a viable method of storytelling.

Thus, children' books are able to offer ambivalent or multivalent positions which require multiple constructions of meaning, so empowering readers through the creation of their own interpretations of texts and offering the opportunity for readers to validate narratives according to flexible, creative subjectivities rather than simply accepting predetermined positions. As a consequence, children's literature would appear to be able to provide not only a body of narrative with which to show whether

or not Fisher's theory is workable, it also offers a clear means by which criticisms of the theory can be countered.

It is with this in mind that it is now possible to turn to a textual application of Fisher's narrative paradigm, and this will be done through an examination of J.K. Rowling's Harry Potter books, a series of books that have drawn both praise and criticism in literary circles, and which have also provoked considerable social commentary, most noticeably the reaction by conservative Christian groups objecting to the presence and apparent promotion of witchcraft and associated practices. Chapter five will, then, seek to assess the Harry Potter books in terms of Fisher's theory.



# CHAPTER V

# HARRY POTTER AND THE NARRATIVE PARADIGM

The choice of J. K. Rowling's Harry potter series of books is predicated upon the fact that the series has proved enormously popular, has sold in the millions, and yet, at the same time, the books are not, nor do they claim to be, 'high literature.' The enormous success of the projected series of seven books clearly demonstrates an appeal that is wider than any junior audience they may nominally have been intended for. An adult audience is reading the books not simply as narrators for children or as gate-keepers of content; they are being read by adults for themselves[15].

To add to the context, the Harry Potter "phenomenon" (to use the term often applied to what has happened in this instance) has not, however, been immune from critically negative responses. Prominent scholar Harold Bloom, whilst aware that the books sell in large numbers, often being purchased by adults who intend to read them for themselves, posits his 2000 Wall Street Journal article, "Can 35 Million Book Buyers Be Wrong? Yes," as a tirade against Harry Potter readers, who "will continue to be [wrong] for as long as they persevere with Potter,"(par. 13) remarking further that "a host are reading it who simply will not read superior fare, such as Kenneth Grahame's 'The Wind in the Willows' or the 'Alice' books of Lewis Carroll" (par. 5). Similarly, in "Besotted with Potter" published in The New York Times in 2000), William Safire asserts emphatically that the Harry Potter books "are not [. . .] books for adults" (par. 5). Safire believes that the fact that adults are reading the Harry Potter books in large numbers evidences "the infantilization of adult culture, the loss of a sense of what a classic really is" (par. 7). Safire, like Bloom, admits to having

read only the first of the Harry Potter books since, for him, "more than a little is a waste of adult time" (par. 10). Novelist A.S. Byatt's critical analysis came in a New York Times article in 2003, "Harry Potter and the Childish Adult." Byatt claims that the Harry Potter books are "written for people whose imaginative lives are confined to TV cartoons, and the exaggerated (more exciting, not threatening) mirror-worlds of soaps, reality TV and celebrity gossip" (par. 7). Adult readers of such fare, she continues, "are simply reverting to the child they were" (par. 14).

Jack Zipes, a Marxist scholar in the field of fairy tales, dismisses the Harry Potter books as ordinary and puts their success down to marketing hype[16]. For Zipes, what is noticeable about the plots of the Harry Potter novels is "their conventionality, predictability and happy ends despite the clever turns of phrases and surprising twists in the intricate plots. They are easy and a delight to read, carefully manicured and packaged, and they sell extraordinarily well precisely because they are so cute and ordinary" (175). It would seem too simple, however, to assert that the Harry Potter books are successful simply because of the marketing campaigns, merchandising and media hysteria. As Blake notes, "it does *not* explain how a book for children that was first published in a print run of 500 by a smallish UK 'quality' publisher without any hype at all comes to the world's attention in the first place, nor why that book, and the subsequent series is so appealing to adults" (3). Success, therefore, need not necessarily be equated with shoddiness (and it should be recalled that, when Carroll's Alice books were first published, they sold in what were, for their day, incredibly large numbers, much as the Harry Potter books sell today)[17]. Unfortunately, however, as Hanne points out,

> if, in a liberal democracy, a piece of imaginative writing seeks or achieves social or political influence that goes beyond such a limited

> conception of its proper power, it must either be non-literature masquerading as literature or a literary work being manipulated and misused for non-literary, propagandist purposes. (19)

For Maria Nikolajeva, therefore, "whatever we think of the [Harry Potter] novels in terms of their social or literary value, we can hardly dismiss them; instead, we should explore their allure in critical ways" (129). Here, this will be done applying the narrative paradigm by identifying story themes, together with narratorial reliability, and assessing the connection between values, reason and action made available. First, however, a brief introduction to the novels is necessary.

The five Harry Potter novels that have appeared to date offer a frame narrative of the growth, maturation, and coming of age of Harry Potter, an orphan, and a young wizard. The story begins one night when the infant Harry is left on the doorstep of his aunt and uncle, the Dursleys (although the origins of this event go back much further). Harry spends ten years with the Dursleys, during which time they treat him unkindly, more as a servant than as a member of the family, forcing him to sleep in a cupboard under the stairs, to dress in hand-me-down clothes, and survive on little food, which lends him a skinny, bespectacled appearance, whilst the Dursley's own son, Dudley, is spoiled and grows fat. Harry has been told that his parents had died in a car accident.

With the approach of Harry's eleventh birthday, mysterious letters begin to arrive, all of which are destroyed by Mr Dursley until, finally, Harry learns the truth that his parents had not died in a car crash, that, in fact, they had been powerful and respected members of the wizarding community and had been murdered by the evil wizard Voldemort ten years previously. Voldemort had also tried to kill the infant Harry but, for some still unknown reason, had failed to do so, consigning himself to a

nether-world existence with diminished powers, and leaving Harry alive but with a lightening bolt shaped scar on his forehead. Harry thus learns that he is famous in the wizard world as the "boy who lived," the one who defeated Voldemort.

Harry is removed from the Dursleys by his parents' wizard friends and sent to Hogwarts, a school for young wizards, although he has to return to the Dursley's house during the summer holidays, something which causes Harry much anguish. At Hogwarts, Harry finds he has a natural aptitude for the wizard game Quidditch (played in the air on broomsticks), and he meets his best friends, Ron, the son of a poor wizard family, and the studious Hermione, whose parents are both non-wizards (or "muggles" as such humans are called by the wizarding community). Hogwarts largely provides the setting for the strange new lessons Harry and his friends study under the tutelage of an assortment of strange, kindly and mean teachers, and also for the adventures that befall them, with Harry a year older in each book.

Rowling's novels are an admixture of different genres of narrative, from English boarding school stories to detective and mystery fiction, and they offer a bricolage of literary devices from myth, fairy tales, saga, Arthurian romance, and science fiction. Whilst Rowling's reference to other standard and well-known genres would seem, in Fisher's terms, to add to the level of intertextual reference, and thereby open up for the reader the opportunity to assess the books referentially in terms of other narratives which are available within the reader's purview, one of the main areas of criticism surrounding the books arises from her use of barely altered standard tropes which has led to a charge that the devices, motifs and character types are cliché or stereotypical. Jack Zipes, for example, believes the Harry Potter books are no more than ordinary, formulaic conventional works of fantasy employing "hackneyed tricks of the trade" (178), and Zipes adds of the books that "if you've

read one, you've read them all" (176). However, Zipes' criticism becomes less forceful in the light of the need to present the familiar to the audience, especially if new ideas and values are also to be presented. Furthermore, there is only a thin line to be drawn between the clichéd or stereotypical and the archetypal which, when employed by someone with imagination within a new narrative setting can be utilised again and again, whilst still retaining a degree of resonance. As Benjamin comments, "storytelling is always the art of repeating stories, and this art is lost when the stories are no longer maintained" (Benjamin 91), for a story "preserves and concentrates its strength and is capable of releasing it even after a long time" (Benjamin 90).

One clear archetype is the home-away-return pattern that is common in a multitude of narrative forms. The standard presentation of this pattern presents home as a place of safety, but Rowling adds a different level to this pattern since, for Harry, home with the Dursleys is miserable, and what is more, it is not a place in which he is allowed to utilise the knowledge or gift that he has brought back with him from his journey. For Harry, away is where he is happiest, with his friends in the wizarding world, where he is not considered abnormal, and the return to the family home brings only unhappiness. However, at same time, home is safe because of the power of blood which, as professor Dumbledore, the Hogwarts headmaster, explains to Harry: "while you can still call home the place where your mother's blood dwells, there you cannot be touched or harmed by Voldemort. [. . .] you need return there only once a year, but as long as you can still call it home, there he cannot hurt you" (Phoenix 836). In addition, amongst others, there is the archetype of the wise old man (in the figure of Albus Dumbledore, the Hogwart's headmaster), the figure of the dark other (in the guise of Voldemort), an initiation rite (in the process of sorting of students into school house by means of the Sorting Hat). Archetypes abound in the

Harry Potter stories, but it is their imaginative re-utilisation which is important, not simply that they can be found in the texts.

Notwithstanding the criticism of the use of archetypes, the initial aesthetic response is of a good story well told, and the narratives, in their structure, are well unified, but this is not enough. Following Fisher, it is necessary to move beyond the coherence (or otherwise) of the structural level in order to determine the message, and this is achieved by moving beyond the framework of the school year with which Rowling structures each book and the twisting turns of the plot, to look at the many different themes and sub-themes which are developed through reiterated motifs, words and images, and which are interwoven both within each book in the series and between books.

One of the early themes of the books is that of desire and temptation, and the consideration of this issue plays on numerous levels, not least at the level of materiality. The temptations are everywhere, from simple sweets such as "Bertie Bott's Every Flavor Beans" and "Chocolate Frogs" to the latest racing broomsticks, permeating the narrative and enticing both the characters and the reader into a world where conspicuous consumption appears to be the norm. Even Harry, on his first visit to the wizarding world is awed by the array of goods on offer. This notion of materialism is typified most clearly in the character of the middle class Dursleys and in particular their son, Dudley, whose materialist desire to possess objects for the sake of ownership leads him unhesitatingly to complain on his birthday that he has only received thirty seven presents, one less than the previous year (Sorceror's 21)

Rowling addresses this issue in a number of ways. First, she juxtaposes the materialism of the Dursleys with the lifestyle of the Weasleys, a poor wizarding family who effectively adopt Harry as an extra son. The Weasley children are also

accustomed to wearing hand-me-down clothes and buying second hand school books, yet, despite financial concerns, they are a happy family. Second, Rowling shows that the acquisition of objects as ends in themselves, as symbols of status, is hollow by contrasting the attitude of Dudley Dursley (who acquires objects and then leaves them forgotten or broken in his bedroom while awaiting the next gift) with the objects that Harry receives (items such as an Invisibility Cloak, the Marauder's Map (which shows who is where in Hogwarts, and where secret passages can be found), the new Racing broomsticks, and even his wand and his owl) as objects which, whilst they can be treasured, are only means to greater ends. These objects are used by Harry to effect actions and results which have a moral purpose.

More than this, however, Rowling offers a more overarching discourse about desire, through the "Mirror of Erised" the inscription on which reads, "*Erised stra ehru oyt ube cafru oyt on wohsi*", or, read in the opposite direction, "I show not your face but your heart's desire" (Sorceror's 207). When Harry first finds the Mirror of Erised, he is able to see, for the first time, the image of his dead parents smiling and waving to him. His desire is to return again and again to visit the mirror for it shows him what he most wants in the world. Finally, however, Professor Dumbledore advises Harry against this course of action by warning him that the mirror

> shows us nothing more or less than the deepest, most desperate desire of our hearts. [. . .] However, this mirror will give us neither knowledge nor truth. Men have wasted away before it, entranced by what they have seen, or been driven mad, not knowing if what it shows is real or even possible. (Sorceror's 213)

More than this, Dumbledore further warns Harry that, "it does not do to dwell on dreams and forget to live, remember that" (Sorceror's 214).

This lesson about the dangers of desire and temptation is reinforced by the relationship with other objects which are sought. Voldemort seeks unicorn's blood to keep himself alive, but it is such a magically precious thing that drinking it "will keep you alive even if you are an inch from death, but at a terrible price. [. . .] you will have but a half life, a cursed life, from the moment the blood touches your lips" (Sorceror's 258). Voldemort's real object of desire in the first book in the series, however, is the Sorceror's Stone, from which can be made the "Elixir of Life". Harry prevents Voldemort from obtaining the stone and is told by Dumbledore that "the stone was really not such a wonderful thing. As much money and life as you could want! The two things most human beings would choose above all – the trouble is, humans do have a knack of choosing precisely those things that are worst for them" (Sorceror's 297). This comment provides a narrative admonition that unbridled desire and temptation provide for poor rewards.

A further theme is the notion of identity. Indeed, all of the books narrate Harry's ongoing quest, starting with his first discovery that he is a wizard, to discover his origins, and to understand where he comes from. Harry may be famous in the wizarding world and known by every wizard, but he does not know himself and who he really is. This contrast is particularly exemplified both in Harry's ambivalence towards the obsessive attention of Ginny Weasley and Colin Creevy in Chamber of Secrets, as well as his growing doubt about his own ability to live up to the fame attached to him. Harry's doubt is contrasted with the confident figure of the narcissistic, shamelessly self-promoting, and ultimately incompetent wizard Professor Gilderoy Lockhart, author of autobiographical works such as "Magical Me" among others, and "five-time winner of *Witch Weekly*'s Most-Charming-Smile Award" (Chamber 99). Lockhart's books have served to create his public image, but

they are, it emerges, fabrications for he has misrepresented others' adventures as his own. His catch-phrases such as "celebrity is as celebrity does," and "fame is a fickle friend" help to satirise him as a celebrity-fraud when, ultimately, he is found out, showing that fame should be seen as a result of character and achievement rather than presentation. Indeed, throughout the books seemingly good people are revealed as villains, like Lockhart, and apparently evil people are shown to be innocent, like Harry's Godfather, Sirius Black who had been imprisoned for murder, but whose innocence Harry proves in Prisoner of Azkaban. As Dumbledore states, "it is our choices, Harry, that show what we truly are, far more than our abilities" (Chamber 333).

Another theme in the books is the problematic nature of the written word and its ability to represent the truth. On a simple level, criticism is levelled at the power, and sometimes unscrupulous nature of the press. This is particularly evident in the fourth book in the series, Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire, in the figure of Rita Skeeter ('skeeter' being a shortened form of the word 'mosquito'), a tabloid reporter who lurks waiting for any snippet of information she can find out about Harry, only to misrepresents his thoughts, deeds and words in her articles for the main wizard newspaper, "The Daily Prophet" (again, the play on words between 'prophet' and 'profit' is surely no coincidence, nor is the irony of bringing together 'daily' with both 'profit' and 'prophet'). In Order of the Phoenix, "The Daily Prophet", an ostensibly serious newspaper, is manipulated by the Ministry of Magic such that Harry is portrayed as a fantasist and liar because his revelation of the return to bodily form of Voldemort runs counter to the Ministry's agenda. In the same book, by way of contrast, it is another publication, "The Quibbler" (which is usually given over to

fantastic stories such as dragon sightings and the unravelling of the mysteries of runes) which provides the forum for Harry to counter the accusations being made against him. More important than the power of the press, however, is the power of books and their relationship to knowledge.

Whilst it is true that Hermione is bookish, and spends much of her time in the library seeking information which is usually of benefit in aiding Harry in solving a mystery or escaping from a dangerous situation, the written word is also shown to be unreliable and even dangerous. When Lockhart is unmasked, he is quick to tell Harry that "books can be misleading" (Chamber 297). Quite apart from the falsification evident in Lockhart's books, or the strange nature of other books such as those in the Restricted Section of the library, or others such as the one described by Ron which "you could never stop reading! You just had to wander around with your nose in it, trying to do everything one-handed" (Chamber 231), the Chamber of Secrets presents a more sinister nature for books in the form of Tom Riddle's diary. Tom Riddle, who will, in later life, change his name to Voldemort, uses the power of the written word to draw the unsuspecting Ginny Weasley into participating in his sinister agenda for, when Ginny writes her hopes and fears in the seemingly empty diary, the diary writes back to her, feeding her fears and gaining increasing power over her, forcing her to do Tom Riddle's bidding against her will.

The nature of books, and the power of the written word, is also connected to the theme of knowledge and education. The general setting of the novels is a school, of course, and this allows the opportunity for Rowling to consider the issue of education and learning. At Hogwarts, students are offered subjects such as "Potions", where students can learn ways of "bewitching the mind, ensnaring the senses [. . .] how to bottle fame, brew glory, even stopper death" (Sorceror's 137), or

"Transfiguration", where students are taught to change objects into animate things and vice versa. Hermione uses knowledge from the "Potions" class to brew the "Polyjuice Potion" which allows Harry and Ron to change their physical appearances in order to gain information which will help them solve the mystery in Chamber of Secrets, and knowledge gained in "Herbology" allows her to rescue Harry and Ron from a deadly plant, "Devil's Snare" in Sorceror's Stone.

What such an education offers, then, is subjects that have an importance and value in their use, not just as items to be learned (although the "History of Magic" lessons provide a steady stream of dates, names and places to be memorised), creating a vision of learning that is more liberal and practical. Indeed, Rowling explicitly satirises the contemporary British school system (although by implication, other school systems are brought within the purview of this attack) in Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix where Beryl Umbridge, a Ministry of Magic appointee to the school, embarks on a teaching strategy which has been formulated by experts, is premised upon the notion that strict discipline is vital, that sees no need for learning that will actually have to be used outside the classroom or academic environment, and where students' opinions are not wanted (Phoenix ch. 12, 15). In addition to the lessons learned in class that are genuinely useful, however, the kind of learning that is most prominently featured (and most clearly advocated) is that learning which comes from experience. As Hermione tells Harry, "Books! And Cleverness! There are more important things—friendship and bravery" (Sorceror's 287).The kind of learning that is most effective is not rote-learning, or memorisation, but moral learning of the power of such things as friendship, stoicism, and courage in the face of adversity.

The question of morality is also evident in another important theme, the nature of Good and Evil. It may be true that the figure of Voldemort is unremittingly evil, but on a much more practical level the Harry Potter books do not present any simple black and white Christian allegory, for here the nature of Good and Evil is not unambiguous. The books themselves have raised opposition by some Christian groups responding to the depiction of witchcraft in the books, yet there is undoubtedly a prominent moral message in them, and the clearest statement of that is that moral qualities are more important than intellectual ones, typified by Harry's recognition that school rules do not necessarily represent any kind of higher moral order, and that obeying the rules can sometimes conflict with moral requirements.

Harry and his friends do not usually transgress school rules for the sake of mischief. Rather, they do so on the basis that there is a higher good, and that, given the larger battle between good and evil in the world, obeying school rules is not necessarily the ultimate good. Thus, there are times when Harry reasons that defeating evil is more important than following rules, even when breaking those rules is opposed by his friends and might even result in his expulsion from Hogwarts. Harry and his friends usually do what is believed to be the right thing, and they usually feel pangs of conscience when they do wrong, but they are not innocents. Since their characters include the ability to do wrong, they can also recognise wrong and endure it.

The breaking of small rules, transgression of boundaries rather than blind acceptance, is seen, therefore, as a necessary part of gathering knowledge. The problem is that Harry's moral perspective gains validity only within the context of a larger story, one which involves a cosmic struggle between good and evil. For all the

magic in it (and, in fact, there is very little real magic in the books, since this is not the main focus), Harry's world includes good and evil, rules (some to be obeyed, some to be broken) good and bad people, good decisions and bad. The important consideration is that Harry and his friends are able to make their own decisions, choices, about the difference between good and evil, right and wrong. This quality in Harry is evident from the outset when Harry is told by Draco Malfoy, his school enemy, that he ought not to "go making friends with the wrong sort," and Harry replies, "I think I can tell who the wrong sort are for myself, thanks" (Sorceror's 108-109). Harry show his quality by choosing to battle evil, and also in his understanding of what is good and what is not, by not confusing evil with people or things which are merely different (such as muggle and wizards). Here then is a morality in contrast to the position averred by Professor Quirrell (who is a human carrier for the non-corporeal Voldemort) when he tells Harry about his own youth: "a foolish young man I was then, full of ridiculous ideas about good and evil. Lord Voldemort showed me how wrong I was. There is only power, and those too weak to seek it" (Sorceror's 292).

The notion that all authority automatically commands of respect, then, is shown to be dangerous and something which requires the exercise of disobedience in the face of injustice. The proposition, then, is that a healthy disrespect for authority need not necessarily be a bad thing. Furthermore, such opposition to the system is a long-standing tradition in folk and fairy-tales and also raises the notion of the carnivalesque. In such an apparently socially stratified and hierarchical society that is Harry's world, the subversive power inherent in carnival is not inappropriate. The Harry Potter books subvert the usual authorities, vilify the vain, celebrate individualism, and accommodate the grotesque in the bringing together all kinds of

beings (human and mythological – centaurs, winged horses, three-headed dogs - goblins, trolls, merpeople, giant spiders, dragons, elves and a host of other folkloric creatures), mixing them together in an interaction which often brings about the dissolution of hierarchical limits in what Bakhtin calls "carnivalistic mesalliances" that mingle "the sacred with the profane, the lofty with the low, the great with the insignificant, the wise with the stupid" (Problems 123).

In terms of Fisher's logic of good reasons, it is not only an assessment of values as expressed through themes, the message, that is required. Readers must also decide whether or not their determination of that message is justified by the reliability of the narrator or narrators, together with the words or actions of the characters, as well as the descriptions of characters, scenes, and events.

An assessment of the reliability of the narrator as required by Fisher's narrative paradigm is a more difficult task to accomplish in a novel, however, than in, for example, a political speech. Certainly, the narratorial voice that can be heard in the Harry Potter books is reminiscent of the third person omniscient voice, the kind of narrator which is particularly familiar in nineteenth-century novels, especially books for the young which have a didactic purpose. Rowling's narratorial voice is not an authorial voice self-consciously addressing the child however. This is a narrator who speaks to a dual audience, to both child and adult, both in the issues involved and played out in the themes, and in the subversion of existing genres .The narratorial voice speaks on more than one level in the style of the storyteller, recounting, not talking down to either child or adult reader. It is also possible to discern within the narratorial voice both Fisher's second motivational function for the author of 'reaffirmation', the revitalising or reinforcing ideas or images of friendship and stoicism in the face of adversity, whilst, at the same time, Fisher's

fourth motivation, that of 'subversion', or the undermining or discrediting of ideas or images can also be perceived in the parodies of stereotypes of teachers and education, and also of celebrity status.

The character of Harry Potter himself represents a subversion of the paradigm for a western hero through Rowling's depiction of Harry as being unlike the romantic and fairytale heroes who rarely if ever experience doubt, fear or despair. Harry experiences all these emotions and, in addition, shows himself to be caring, emotional, vulnerable, and usually non-aggressive. In a sense, this makes Harry a modern hero, for the traditional hero is a static figure whose acts of courage emerge from an existing character, and who consequently does not need to act consciously to effect a positive result. Harry Potter produces empathy as hero, not just through the promise of individual development, but through the endorsement of the individual who stands out from the crowd, and can rescue the community from the daily troubles to be found in modern society, including the more nebulous concept of evil. In the same way, other key characters support Harry in his tasks even to the extent of breaking rules, actions which, combined, reinforce the themes outlined above.

The third element of assessment is that of noting the results of the different conflicts which are present in the story, and for readers to observe both whose values appear to be the most powerful or worthy, and whether events are controlled by characters or by forces outside them. In the Harry Potter books, the resolution of conflict is always a vindication of Harry' actions, of his taking a stand against injustice and setting his stall against evil in the shape of Voldemort (whatever form Voldemort may take). Thus, in light of this, and the narrator's clear favouring of the actions of Harry and his friends, the conclusion must be that the reader will accept the narrator as reliable in this instance.

Finally, in Fisher's terms, comes the weighing of the discovered "truth" in the themes and how these play out through characters and events, and the set of conclusions advanced by the story, against the readers' perceptions of the world to determine their fidelity in respect of whether or not the message accurately portray the world in which the readers live, and whether, in turn, the truth and conclusion can offer a reliable guide to the readers' beliefs, attitudes, values, and actions; that is, are the values which the message offers such that, in the readers' estimation, they constitute the basis for human conduct. Certainly, in these terms, the Harry Potter books ought not to be considered simply escapist fantasy allowing a temporary release from the mundanity of modern existence.

The Harry Potter books are characterised by reference to the reader's own world, making it possible for the construction of the narrative for the reader to be placed as a co-author in the narrative. The connectedness of the wizard and the muggle worlds, and Harry's movement between the two maintains this sense of connection whilst at the same time positing a recognisable world that 'rings true' with experienced reality. Having elements of the real world represented or suggested as being in the wizard world, and the interpenetration of the two worlds suggests the way in which human beings live on more than one plane, with the life of the imagination and daily life moving in and out of our consciousness. Real and fantasy are so closely connected that they are not parallel as they are in C.S. Lewis' Narnia books, for example; the connection is (as is shown in the name of the street that is Harry's first glimpse of the wizard world, Diagon Alley) diagonal. Through offering such a pattern of connection, the narrative sets a context both for hearing affirmations, and for social questioning of prior beliefs. The consistency and

connectedness in the books facilitates the identification and integration of the messages which the narrative argues through suggestion rather than didacticism. This is not an exhibition of nostalgia for a lost childhood, or, for that matter, a lament for a lost England (as is seen in, for example, Kenneth Grahame's Wind in the Willows). This is a contemporary fantasy which offers a view of society as its readers perceive it, and a morality with which to deal with the contemporary problems, both material and moral, that readers see in their everyday lives. In Fisher's terms, it rings true to a modern society filled with temptation and greed, of education for the sake of learning, as an end in itself, rather than as a means to an end, where traditional values have not been forgotten, simply misplaced.

What the Harry Potter books do allow for, however, is an escape from the rationality of thought which ignores the element of the unknown in life. Moreover, although the books include some fairy-tale and mythological metaphors and symbols, they do not fall into the trap of becoming formulaic. Instead, they remain more flexible, more open to adaptation and interpretation and to individual response and creative use through their multivalency than many traditional fairytales. What Rowling seems to support, then, is a general human wish that the 'reality' of life opens onto a more magical world of possibility. Objectivity is a feature of the Muggles' well-adjusted life of consumption; the wizard world is where Harry finds both the magic of loving relationships and the darker magic of greed and desire, and in this, the books are really proposing humanist, liberal values of nonjudgmental tolerance, free thinking and understanding, values which it would appear a sizeable public find to be coherent and which, for them, 'ring true'.

# CHAPTER VI

# CONCLUSION

The predominant paradigm of history since the ancient Greeks has been the rational-world paradigm, a view which sees the world as a set of logical puzzles which can only truly be solved using argument, with reason and logic as the primary means by which humans make meaning for themselves. It is a paradigm, moreover, whose argument is reliant upon three elements: subject matter knowledge, skill in advocacy, and argumentative skill. In the advancement of these elements as predominant in the matter of human discourse, the rational-world paradigm inherently privileges certain truths, or meaning, over others (and thw ways that those truths and meanings are arrived at) whilst at the same time either ignoring some participants in the discourse, or, at the least, relegating them to an inferior position (an ideological position which contains its own irony, of course, since even such interpretations of the way the world is are, as truths that need to be believed and acted upon, themselves open to an assessment of the degree of coherence and fidelity which each of them contains).

At the same time, philosophers have praised or disparaged stories for evoking emotions or being concerned with the particular. Indeed, an even more essential feature of stories, one which sets them in distinct opposition to many of the notions which have predominated in Western civilisation since the time of the ancient Greeks, is that they have within them the ability to construct the world as an essentially active arena, as a world of actions and processes rather than a world of fixity and unchanging laws. Narratives focus not only on the changing aspects of human reality, those aspects which, quite because of their lack of stability, have been

considered simply appearance and, therefore, unimportant, but they also provide a means of understanding such mutability and the shifting nature of human experience. In this, stories enable the appreciation of processes rather than simply products.

It may be that, today, there is a fear of stories and story-telling. Indeed, for many people, it would seem, there is more safety in a reliance upon doctrine, whereby there is no need to enter the world of the child where strange new worlds, ideas, values and beliefs might be encountered. Indeed, much 'serious' fictive literature frames itself through irony in an effort to distance the writer from both story and the unacceptable pretension to truth. In this context, the appeal of a simpler world, where truth is found in the telling of a story, not in the means of its verification, is easy to understand. The power of maintaining this simpler world is, however, to be found in the nature of the complex of human experience which is itself brought together in the telling of stories.

Fisher's narrative theory, the narrative paradigm, is focused upon this sense of story, of narrative as a primary principle of human communicative practice in an attempt to counter the dominating discourse of *logos* and of reasoned truth as the exclusive arbiter of value, knowledge and truth. Despite possible limitations in Fisher's theory relating to the availability of new ideas and the possible being encountered and accepted through narratives when the tendency is to seek affirmation for extant beliefs, Fisher posits a position based upon coherence as a key aspect of rationality, a position which, although it might seem strange in a postmodern world which appears to revel in celebration of discontinuity and fragmentation, ultimately allows for keeping "a story free from explanation" where it is left up to the reader to "interpret things the way he understands them, and thus narrative achieves an amplitude that information lacks" (Benjamin 89). In this, and

despite the vagaries of modern (and postmodern) existence, there remains something tangible within the grasp of all human beings, something which anchors human existence to the past through a tradition, and that something is story and people's innate ability to draw from story and put into story their basic fears hopes and desires that, regardless of the lack of reality that may or may not be there, gives a sense of understanding for and of the moment.

Individuals, of course, do respond differently to story and narrative, and Fisher's theory can in many ways help to elucidate that process. However, whilst it is true that political rhetoric, for example, can provide clear evidence of the third element of Fisher's aim, to provide a philosophy of action, through tangible choices people make in electing representatives, the elucidation of literary narrative through the use of Fisher's theory is not so clear cut; the theory seems to lack a specificity of approach. Primarily, this would seem to be a result of the intention to provide a theory which responds to narrative as intrinsic to all human communication, and Fisher's theory does seem more appropriate to thos einstances of human communication which invoke and require both an avowal of belief and positive human action in response.

Yet, as has been seen in an analysis of one form of narrative communication, children's literature, Walter Fisher's narrative theory does offer a way of approaching narrative in general, but more specifically literary texts, which moves beyond the purely formal or structural to open up the narrative, through narrative rationality, to assessment through the suppositions of coherence and fidelity and the logic of good reasons in order for values and beliefs to be affirmed, re-affirmed or altered, and action to be taken, a process which is not the preserve of the few, but

which is available to all who encounter and recount narratives of whatever kind in their communicative practices.

Notwithstanding this, Fisher's theory of narrative does offer a way to repair the divide between logos and mythos and in this it has intrinsic value. Fisher's most important contribution to the understanding of narrative, then, lies specifically in his positing of the value and worth of "narrative rationality", for once free of the restrictions of the control which logos attempts to exert, the meaning and truth in stories can be sought in the multiple contexts of its appearance and use in human life. Certainly, then, the theory offers itself as an additional tool in the analysis and understanding of the place of narrative in the world, but as a philosophy of reason value and action the theory is hard to assess in terms of literature. In essence then, Fisher's narrative paradigm should be seen as a tool which can be of value in the assessment of literary texts, but it can not be considered as *the* tool although it may offer a starting point for one kind of literary understanding of narrative as literature.

Finally, in writing about a narrative and a narrative theory, the remaining task is to ask the reader to consider whether not only Fisher's narrative paradigm but also the foregoing is really a narrative communication and whether the logic of good reasons expressed in both Fisher's theory and this thesis are true to life, whether they 'ring true'. Ironically, perhaps, in making such a consideration, the first question is a matter of coherence, and the second poses the question of fidelity.

# ENDNOTES

[1] Here, the terms narrative and story will be used interchangeably. This does not, however, seek to deny the distinction made by narratologists, such as that offered by Bal, between text (a finite, structured whole composed of language signs - oral, gestural, and/or written) is not story (a fabula that is presented by the story-teller in a certain manner) because "the same story" can be told in different texts or media. Similarly, story is not fabula (a series of logically and chronologically related events that are caused or experienced by actors) since the same sequence of events can be seen and presented as having different significance or with different emphases (Bal 5).

[2.] Fisher, of course, is not the only thinker to advance a theory of this kind. As he himself says, the narrative paradigm "is not a radical or entirely new concept. [. . .] It reflects a set of ideas that is shared in whole or in part by many scholars from diverse intellectual disciplines, and especially by those whose work is informed by or centers on the character and role of narrativity inhuman life" (Human 85). At the time Fisher was formulating his ideas, others (notably Paul Ricoeur and Hayden White) were working along the same lines of thought. As Fisher notes, "except for the narrative paradigm's dramatism, the narrative paradigm is most compatible with the themes of the later Heidegger, Gadamer, and Ricouer" (Human 94). What Fisher feels he adds to the debate is in the wider applicability of these ideas, "in providing a 'logic' for assessing stories, for determining whether or not one *should* adhere to the stories one is encouraged to endorse or to accept as the basis for decisions and action" (Human, 87).

[3] Fisher's basic premises were initially set out in two journal articles before publication of his book: "Narration as a Human Communication Paradigm: The Case of Public Moral Argument" in Communication Monographs, 51, 1984, pp. 1-22, and "The Narrative Paradigm: In the Beginning" in the Journal of Communication, 35, 1985. 74-89.

[4] Here Fisher is not denying "the existence or desirability of genius in individuals" for his opposition is strictly focused upon a "hierarchy based on the assumption that some people are qualified to be rational and some not" (Human 67).

[5] The traditional notions of verisimilitude and mimesis appear to be very close to Fisher's notion of coherence.

[6] An "indispensable premise of narratology" (Culler 171) is the distinction between story, and discourse, between what is told and how it is told. However, for Fisher, "by viewing narration or any other kind of discourse only in terms of making meanings and by restricting understanding of praxis to linguistic constructions, structuralism neglects two of the most basic tenets of the narrative paradigm (Human 90). In essence, "structuralism approaches narrative formally; whereas, the narrative paradigm approaches it, along with other genres, rhetorically, as a mode of social influence" since "it holds that meaning is a matter of history, culture, and character as well as of linguistics, convention and interanimation" (Human 90). Even Roland Barthes proposed that readers make sense of stories by reference to a "proairetic code" based on stereotypic knowledge of human actions, a "patrimonial hoard of human experiences" (S/Z 204) which is, itself an appeal to the influence of schematic world knowledge.

[7] Interestingly, nowhere does Fisher specifically mention poetry as being suitable for analysis using his paradigm, even though, within his own terms, poetry

ought to equally be susceptible to the same analysis as drama or the novel. This issue cannot be pursued here, but it does bear further attention.

[8] In this, Doniger would appear to be following Bakhtin's concept of heteroglossia here.

[9].Lynch-Brown and Tomlinson define children's literature as "good-quality trade books for children from birth to adolescence, covering topics of relevance and interest to children of those ages, through prose and poetry, fiction and nonfiction" and add that "children's books are about the experiences of childhood, both good and bad" (2). This is not an uncontested definition, however. Although most people would agree that children's literature is writing and illustration designed for children, intended either to be read to them or by them, they would also agree that the forms of children's literature includes almost every type of writing and illustration, from the simplest alphabet books for very young children, to picture books, poetry, and full fiction in a variety of genres. At the same time, children's literature is often serious and sometimes features controversial material. It also includes texts no longer thought to be suitable for adults (although they might not actually be suitable for children). It also includes such forms as riddles, nursery rhymes, playground songs, as well as fairy tales myths, legends and fables many of which preserve some of the oldest material from the oral tradition.

[10] Pullman is most noted for his trilogy, "His Dark Materials," (a phrase taken from Milton's "Paradise Lost," The first book in the trilogy, "Northern Lights," was published in 1995. The trilogy, ostensibly aimed at twelve year old readers, is positioned as a response to Milton, and an attack on both the Church and Christian theology. The villain in the narrative is the head of the Church, and the trilogy portrays the death of God as a positive thing for the universe, freeing the teenage

heroes of the books, Will and Lyra, from a world full of guilt, oppression and false purity.

[11] In fact, an entire academic industry has developed around interpretations of the Alice books, finding in them theories of language, gender and race, moral subversion, and other such 'adult' topics.

[12]Frederick Crews' Postmodern Pooh (New York: North Point P, 2001) is an updated version of Crews' earlier The Pooh Perplex: A Freshman Casebook (1963), in which Crews had parodied the current literary trends of the day, with the addition of critical approaches based on deconstruction, feminism, new historicism, cultural studies, and post colonialism.

[13] Indeed, only one other critic, Roderick McGillis (who specialises in children's literature) appears to have seriously attempted to show how literary theories (archetypal, psychoanalytical, political, structural, post-structural, reader response and New Criticism) can legitimately be applied to children's literature (see The Nimble Reader: Literary Theory and Children's Literature, New York: Twayne 1996).

[14] Indeed, writers of books commonly denoted as being for children often protest this kind of pigeon-holing. P.L. Travers, for example, the author of the Mary Poppins books, has stated that "you do not chop off a section of your imaginative substance and make a book for children for – if you are honest – you have, in fact, no idea where childhood ends and maturity begins. It is all endless and all one" (qtd in Zipes, 86). In similar vein, the creator of the Pippi Longstockings series, Astrid Lindgren, remarks that, "I don't write books for children," and continues that "I write for the child I am myself. I write about things that are dear to me – trees and houses

and nature – just to please myself" (qtd in Zipes 86-87). J. K. Rowling, when asked if she writes for children or for adults replied, "Both. I wrote something that I knew I would like to read now, but I also wrote something that I knew I would like to have read at age 10" (qtd. in Nel 51)

[15] In the United Kingdom, Harry Potter books have also been published in 'adult' editions, with different, less colourful covers, it having emerged that so many adults were reading the books. The theory, it seems, is that adults did not wish to be seen in public immersed in a book intended for young children. The adult versions of the books are identical to the children's version apart from being more expensive.

[16] Zipes claims that he will dig beneath the surface and analyse the texts themselves rather than the commodity. Unfortunately, Zipes fails to do this, providing instead some brief plot summaries, and he generally fails to move beyond a response to the phenomenon of the Harry Potter books as well-marketed fodder for the masses.

[17] Part of the problem here in conflating the Harry Potter books themselves, their success in terms of sales, and the marketing effort which has been expended to promote their sales may be a cultural one. Traditional American marketing strategy is generally based upon major pre-launch advertising and sales promotion in order to create demand for a product. Conversely, the traditional British marketing strategy is the 'toe in the water' approach, where small-scale marketing activity is undertaken in order to gauge demand before the product is "rolled-out" on a larger scale if early indications suggest the product will be successful.

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