

# The Narrative Trap: Do We Tell Stories or Do Stories Tell Us?

by [David Solway](#) (June 2025)



Truth Coming out of Her Well (Jean-Léon Gérôme, 1896)

**Triestine novelist [Italo Svevo](#)** once quipped that a narrative becomes true when it can no longer be told in any other way. Of course, it becomes true mainly for the ardent believer—the “man of fanatical faith,” as Eric Hoffer portrays him in [The True Believer](#). Facts, however, never *become* true, they *are* true. Too often, facts are surrendered when they violate the narrative in which one has invested one’s hopes, dreams, career, political preferences or, all too frequently, one’s entire personality. We are all in some sense men and women of “fanatical faith.”

When one considers, too, how the term “narrative” has become one of the most overused and vapid words in the cultural lexicon, a buzzword whose implications remain unexamined, it may seem as if there is nothing nowadays that is not a narrative. We speak of “changing the narrative,” of the “narrative for success,” of how to “change narrative strategies,” of “cultural and racial narratives,” of the “Oedipal narrative,” and so on *ad infinitum*.

The problem is that narratives, though inevitable in the commerce of most forms of human contact, will more often than not disguise or embroider or deny *what is*. Sometimes, in a moment of jaundiced reflection, one can’t help thinking that much of what we take for granted in the cultural, historical and political domains—and even in the scientific arena—is a lie.

Celebrity journalist Walter Lippmann was spot on when he wrote in [Public Opinion](#), “We are told about the world before we see it. We imagine most things before we experience them. And those preconceptions, unless education has made us acutely aware, govern deeply the whole process of perception.” The crux here is “education,” properly understood as the classical

engagement with reality.

Discerning what really happens or is really the case demands “education” in the broadest sense. It demands insight, strict analysis, a saving skepticism about teleology, a reasonable knowledge of the past, and a means of expository formulation that does not subliminally reflect a prior theory or a desired, neatly parcelled conclusion. It demands honesty. It requires astute historical understanding and the free transmission of ideas, which are not always selected for in an intellectual marketplace subject to narrative deflection and collectivist thinking. It demands a passion for truth and a willingness to acknowledge that there is no such thing as anybody’s monogrammed version of truth.

Pontius Pilate, the first postmodernist, was grievously wrong when he posed his notoriously rhetorical question: *What is truth?* We may say that only God has a lien on *absolute* truth, but human beings are capable of practising what I call *credible verisimilitude*, that is, of articulating and testing truth claims based on the best possible objective evidence—if they are willing to try and monitor their own biases, if they are willing to reject what [Roger Kimball](#) calls “epistemological incontinence,” if they are willing to act like historical archeologists, if they are willing to *dig*.

Aristotle points out in [On Sophistical Refutations](#) that “things made of litharge and tin seem to be of silver, while those made of yellow metal seem to be golden.” Narratives must be constructed to confirm the delusion. Salient examples from the current *zeitgeist* are the [Covid “narrative”](#) and the [“climate change” tall tale](#) that have mesmerized people across the world, and which are really about an experiment in social control and the usurpation of arbitrary political power by a globalist elite adroitly stoking public panic. Narratives tend to function as speluncular havens for hidden agendas and interests. And as in the U.K. today, the smallest deviation from an approved narrative may often be interpreted as a

criminal offense that can earn one a prison sentence and/or a ruinous personal fine.

A narrative must be compelling if it is to inspire belief, which means it must cover all the bases, *including manipulatable context and the property of duration*. As a consequence, it seems almost impossible to escape the adhesive nature of narratives, mucilaginous constructs not easily dislodged, as attested by the following examples:

Marxism is the greatest political narrative of the modern world that no amount of seismic failure, hecatombs of slaughter, and endless immiseration can put to rest.

Jew-hatred is a narrative so patently false, psychopathic, and literally unhinged, a millennial example of [Mattias Desmet's](#) "mass formation psychosis," that it appears to have sunk into the very depths of the human DNA.

The narrative that Israel is an illegitimate, apartheid state and that there is such a thing as a Palestinian state with an accredited history is a malignant, ahistorical fabrication that has been demonstrably and apodictically refuted innumerable times—to no avail.

The idea that human "evil" is really the product of bad upbringing and cultural prejudice is a narrative backed by the dodgy research of the so-called social sciences and the naïve liberal mind, accepted by all politically "advanced" countries.

The conviction that Islam is a "religion of peace" is predicated on a narrative with no foundation in history and no grounding in the literature and doctrines of the faith, yet it has come to dominate public sentiment and administrative policy.

The narrative that [the female body](#) is socially constructed rather than biologically given and that women are therefore

equal or superior to men in physical abilities, especially in demanding fields like sports, firefighting and soldiering, is widely accepted and pervasively harmful.

The narrative of the War on Terror soon veered from its original purpose of tracking Islamic terrorists and resulted instead in the expansion of military profits and surveillance powers over ordinary citizens, benefiting defense contractors and intelligence agencies while eroding privacy rights. The narrative continues in force.

The narrative that Indigenous peoples were peace-loving, innately good, attentive stewards of nature—the myth of the “noble savage” going back to [antiquity](#) and featured in the works of major thinkers like Michel de Montaigne (“[On Cannibals](#)”) and Jean Jacques Rousseau ([The Social Contract](#))—has for millennia confused and ravelled the literature and politics of the West. We see it in operation now in the idolization of First Nation societies. It is an abject absurdity and a clear illustration of the genetic fallacy of history, defined by David Hackett Fischer in his eye-opening volume [Historians’ Fallacies](#) as a form of thought “which converts a temporal sequence into an ethical system—history as morality.” According to Fischer, its politics are generally antidemocratic, its aesthetics are romantic, and it tends to raise unimpressive things or defective assumptions to a level of unmerited excellence.

The unreflected belief that the Democratic Party, as presently constituted, is both “democratic” and a “party” is a narrative accepted by a staggering proportion of the public. In plain fact, [it is no longer “democratic” nor a “political party”](#) in the common acceptation of the term rather than a Party of diabolical liars, connivers and political manipulators, in other words, a species of socialist mafia engaged in plunder and allegedly treasonous activity.

The narrative of manmade global warming, or “climate change,”



which posits that the world is heating up thanks to CO<sup>2</sup> atmospheric saturation, is so firmly entrenched as to be virtually immune to the actual truth, namely, that carbon is essential for life and fertility, as Robert Zubrin has shown in [Merchants of Despair](#), that we are facing an impending cold solar minimum, as the [CERN](#) physics lab has confirmed, and that there is compelling evidence for the prospect of cooling summers and harsh winters to come, further confirmed in Anrab Rai Choudhuri's fascinating 2015 study [Nature's Third Cycle](#). Such attestations by the best scholars and scientists are now legion. Although there is [no sound evidence](#) the planet is warming, largely due to anthropogenic factors, we continue to believe in the sacred narrative, subject to, as Nietzsche predicted in [The Will to Power](#), "the millenarian urge in temporal form." The narrative will remain intact until icebergs appear on the horizon.

One should be wondering what fantasy we are promoting now, what dangerous experiments and practices and fictions we are embracing whose effects are invariably destructive. Peter Merrick and Adrian Splitter in their 2025 publication [It Starts with Gold](#) warn about precisely this, a war against individual freedom and financial independence, called the Great Reset, that is fought not with bullets or bombs, but through *narrative control*. People are presumably being protected by their governments and institutions: masks work, lockdowns are essential, carbon taxes and caps are good for the planet, freedom of speech leads to disinformation and must be censored, diversity is our strength—these are part of the narrative that multitudes have accepted. The truth is: financial collapse, digital enslavement, biological manipulation, intensive surveillance, a disintegrating culture, pervasive mediocrity, and the elimination of personal sovereignty. The truth is beginning in certain quarters to nibble away at the edges of a malignant pastoral, but the narrative remains largely unquestioned and solidly in force. In any event, such controlling narratives are then siloed in

the public mind, so that the inevitable contradictions between them and reality will not have to be dealt with—generally until it's too late. The lie always come home with cataclysmic effect, as Catholic thinker Anthony Esolen warns in [\*Lies of Our Time\*](#).

Such narratives are lies masquerading as public truths and as a result seem largely impregnable. Major Russ Cooper, president and CEO of the [C3RF](#) patriot site, calls these romances “shopworn narratives,” that is, essentially pariah concepts. We tend to live in a narrative bubble, a vesicle inside which we form a working but largely inferential picture of the physical, political, cultural and historical world around us. In the narrative realm, facts are often elusive, escaping like wisps of radiation from a black hole, before evaporating.

As FBI Deputy Director Dan Bongino [said](#) alluding to media reports, “be cautious when you’re told ‘a story,’ and not *the* story.” By *the* story he means fact-based tagging, that is, the prioritization of objectifying and strictly methodical practices *that take their ramifications in the real world into account*; in other words, you judge a theory, a preconception or a narrative ultimately by its consequences, which intelligent people may foresee. The notion that “fact-checkers” check facts, for example, a fable valorized by the media and sundry political organizations, generally of the left, is nothing but an animation that belongs in the Disney world. Reality is the only infallible fact-checker. Inevitably, reality will confirm or falsify, either to our advantage or to our cost. In the long run we cannot cheat the final arbiter.

Sometimes a deeply rooted narrative can begin to fall apart as events contradict it, as reality doesn't play along, and as its supporters are gradually compelled to admit its fraudulence, as happened with the Biden “sharp as a tack” narrative. Sometimes *a section* of a narrative can be

perforated, as was the case [recently](#) with Michael Mann's spurious "hockey stick" graph describing a temperature spike that didn't exist—although the larger, encompassing narrative may persist. In another instance of narrative perforation, the Democrat Party has apparently "hatched [a plan](#) for a for-profit media company called AND Media, which stands for 'Achieve Narrative Dominance'." The intention is so obviously phony and disingenuous that here we may have a case where the narrative is too obviously a narrative, which is why it is not likely to "take."

Regrettably, such occasions tend to be few and far between. Troubling facts as they struggle to emerge from a riveted chronicle need to be faced. To repeat, it is now virtually impossible to change those narratives that have become so deeply embedded in the public psyche that they appear almost neurological rather than conjectural. Trump Derangement Syndrome is a marked contemporary instance. Exegetic sheep-dipping most often amounts to a fool's errand, yet it must be pursued or there can never be any hope of exiting the narrative illusion.

It is, then, for the most part too late to materially revise the official narratives and false axioms or debunk the hereditary myths espoused by a plenary majority of humans. But following the evidence wherever it may appear to lead rather than absorbing what has become a glandular hypothesis is good for the soul. Some individuals of a skeptical bent may puncture the narrative membrane. The challenge is to remain vigilant, to isolate the difference between the story one is living inside and the reality of things that is outside the frame of intrinsic reference, especially as we are inveterately narrative creatures.

Human communication above the level of vocatives, interjections, phatics, expletives and simple imperatives is predicated on a triangular model technically known as [Freytag's Pyramid](#), mapping the way in which plots or



narratives and stories are structured: exposition, climax and resolution. Journalists routinely refer to their reports as “stories,” which is often what they are. Even our dreams and fantasies betray a narrative armature, however absurd or chaotic.

Obviously, we have no choice in having to abide by the architecture of communication. Even the grammatical sentence is constructed as a narrative with a beginning (subject), middle (predicate or verb) and end (object)—the semantic triangle. There is no getting around the narrative machinery of language itself. At the same time the saving paradox of language is that we can use language to demystify language. We tell stories by nature, but, unpleasant as it may be, we must try to guard against the tendency of stories to tell us.

When mere narrative “becomes detached from the notion of truth and reality,” to quote philosopher Josef Piper in his study of language, [\*Abuse of Language, Abuse of Power\*](#), the borderline that separates truth from manipulation “grows blurred, and we lose our grip on things.” This is the danger of turning narrative into fetish. We would have to strongly disagree with the shepherdess Mopsa in Shakespeare’s [\*The Winter’s Tale\*](#), who innocently confides, “I love a ballad in print, a-life, for then we are sure they are true.”

## [Table of Contents](#)

**David Solway’s** latest book is [\*Crossing the Jordan: On Judaism, Islam, and the West\*](#) (NER Press). His previous book is [\*Notes from a Derelict Culture\*](#), Black House Publishing, 2019, London. A CD of his original songs, [\*Partial to Cain\*](#), appeared in 2019.

**Follow NER on Twitter** [\*\*@NERIconoclast\*\*](#)