

Narrative

Tell me the old, old story...

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In this article Peter Titlestad rages against some of the contemporary uses of words and wrangled idioms.

But now it is a **narrative!** No longer can Sir Philip Sidney beguile us with his “a tale which holdeth children from play, and old men from the chimney corner,” nor can Macbeth, in despair, rage of “a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing.” What is this narrative, that has usurped story, tale, yarn? In days gone by one could spin a yarn, but no more.

For the trite little narrative the English word-hoard has lots of better options, more precise and more eloquent and revealing. What does one want to say? Idea, ideology, case, argument, philosophy, notion, propaganda: they each have a particular nuance. A story has a teller of tales, a story-teller. What does a narrative have: an expounder, a propagandist, a persuader, somebody with an axe to grind? Perhaps a philosopher. More likely, a theorist. In ghastly SAf-speak, somebody who “motivates”. Could it not at least be “argue the case for”, or “make a case for”?

Guardians of idiom

Our excellent man in *On Point (To the Point?)* still insists on signing off with “the buck stops here.” The other day he produced “holding down the fort.” Elsewhere I noted “the proof was in the pudding” and “hiding under a bushel.”

“The likes of” gets thrown about too freely. It actually implies something slightly unsavoury: “I shouldn’t be seen with the likes of him.” People like, like, are good enough. Some time ago I recorded “He was arrested with the likes of Archbishop Tutu.” What unsavoury company!

Why does everyone now say “bravery” and not “courage”? Why do we have to “put measures in place” and not just “take measures”? Why do we have to ask “what actually happened” when “what happened” means the same thing?

Give some quiet thought to this one from Rudi Giuliani: “It’s somebody’s version of the truth”.