



JAN HANSKA

Reagan's Mythical America

Towards a Narrative Theory of Prophetic Politics



ACADEMIC DISSERTATION

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I heard that you ask'd for something to prove this puzzle the New World,
 And to define America, her athletic democracy,
 Therefore I send you my poems that you behold in them what you wanted
 - Walt Whitman¹

I am not as crafty with words as Whitman, but I hope you will find some pieces of what you want on these pages. This work took me a long time to write - or perhaps it only felt like that. Paragraphs were added together piece by piece on three continents and mostly during the time I could spare from my work. I wish to thank my superior officers Col Keijo Suominen and LtCol Petri Riihijärvi for their understanding attitude toward my academic aspirations. My study on Reagan commenced mostly accidentally with the master's thesis, but the more I read about the man, the more fascinated I became with the stories he had spun and I just had to attempt to create this book you are now holding.

I want to thank my family and my friends for putting up with me as I immersed myself in the storyworlds of a dead president of a foreign country for innumerable hours and for patiently listening to my ramblings concerning narratology or something else of just as little interest to them. But what can I do, even before I went to school I had already fallen in love with reading stories and immersing myself in those imaginary worlds they opened up. Out of love of stories comes the passion that gave birth to this literary work but when it comes to the intellectual stimulation, it is harder to give credit to specific individuals.

I have been fortunate to meet and learn from numerous scholars who provided their support and extensive knowledge. Out of what they had to give me, it is a shame that I could only absorb so little. At other times the intellectual stimulus was received in libraries from authors, some of them perished long ago, who had published their intriguing theories. I have been given much by many scholars who might not even be aware of it and they are too many to name here. I can only include a few. My *Besserwisser* brother Dr Jussi Hanska led me along the academic path with his example and did some painstaking proof-reading of this manuscript. I owe a debt of gratitude to my external examiners Professor Ira Chernus and Professor Mika Luoma-Aho for their helpful comments and support. Naturally my supervisor Professor Vilho Harle deserves a big thank you for the encouragement

¹ Whitman (1981) p. 5

and guidance I have received and even a bigger apology for the amount of pages in various drafts of this manuscript he has read through.

My friends have knowingly or unknowingly given me a lot of ideas. This may have occurred while slouching on the green sofas in Tesoma or sitting crammed into a small room in Armonkallio. The birth of the ideas may have occurred in the Northern Areas of Pakistan I came to know and love just as well as in lush green Kashmir or even in a car along the historic Route 66. All the people who have provided me with their time and shared their ideas with me are the ones who should be thanked for everything that might be considered good or worthy in this dissertation. I personally should be held responsible for all the mistakes and shortcomings within it. But, to sum up, this dissertation is dedicated to YOU who matter to me and you know who you are. And while some of you are dispersed all around the globe, I am sure we will meet once again.

I wish to take this chance to thank Suomen Marsalkka Mannerheimin Sotatieteellinen Rahasto. This remarkable foundation provides research grants and other support for officers of the Finnish Defence Forces to pursue their academic goals and I can only wish more of my colleagues would attempt to do so. I am grateful for receiving a research grant which enabled me to take a trip to the roots of the American story and spend a few months living “On the Hill” in Boulder, Colorado. The academic serenity of the University of Colorado and especially the Norlin Library coupled with the lively and rowdy student life of the young “Buffs” provided a productive and intellectually stimulating environment.

Last but definitely not least I wish to mention the Ronald Reagan Presidential Library in Simi Valley, California. The assistance I received there was nothing short of wonderful. The staff of the archives was able to bring me exactly what I wished to have at my disposal even though more often than not I was not able myself to determine what exactly it was I wanted to lay my eyes on. I wish to express my gratitude to the library and wholeheartedly recommend using its research facilities and archives to anyone conducting a study on Ronald Reagan.

I dedicate this to my parents, Seija and Kari.

Sit down. Are you comfortable? I have a story to tell and I am afraid this may turn out to be a long one...

Parolannummi 30.6.2010

Jan Hanska

Contents

STORY PREFACE – INTRODUCTION INTO THE RESEARCH ORIENTATION AND METHODOLOGICAL REMARKS	7
1. THE NARRATIVE APPROACH TO REAGAN’S PROPHETIC POLITICS....	27
1.1. DEFINING NARRATIVE AND ITS INTERNAL STRUCTURE.....	30
1.1.1. NARRATIVE, STORY, AND DISCOURSE.....	43
1.1.2. EMPLOTTING THE NARRATIVE	48
1.1.3. CHARACTER, ACTANT AND STORYWORLD PARTICIPANT	56
1.2. WORLD-CREATING POWER OF NARRATIVES	76
1.2.1. POSSIBLE WORLDS	79
1.2.2. STORYWORLD	82
1.2.3. STORYVERSE	98
1.3. STEPPING OUTSIDE THE STORY	108
1.3.1 AUTHOR, NARRATOR, STORYTELLER – AND REAGAN.....	108
1.3.2. THE QUESTION OF ORIGINALITY	123
1.3.3. THE NARRATED REAGAN - A LIFESTORY	130
1.3.4. READER, STORYRECIPIENT, NARRATEE AND AUDIENCE.....	141
2. RELIGION IN AMERICA	152
2.1. POLITICS AND RELIGION.....	152
2.1.1. THE CHURCH AND THE STATE	163
2.1.2. AMERICAN SAINTS	173
2.1.3. THE ROLE OF PROTESTANTISM.....	182
2.1.4. DISCIPLES OF CHRIST AND REAGAN’S PERSONAL FAITH ...	195
2.2. “AMERICAN RELIGION”	214
2.2.1. ON CIVIL RELIGION	220
2.2.2. DEVELOPMENT OF PUBLIC TO CIVIL RELIGION	231
2.2.3. TOWARDS MODERN CIVIL RELIGION	235
2.2.4. SECULARISM AND CIVIL RELIGION	241
2.2.5. AMERICAN WAY OF LIFE AS A RELIGION	245
2.2.6. WAY OF LIFE OR A DREAM.....	264
3. NARRATIVES OF POLITICAL JUSTIFICATION.....	280
3.1. RELIGIOUS NARRATIVES	281
3.2. FROM RELIGIOUS BELIEFS TO MYTHICAL NARRATIVES.....	295
3.2.1. MYTH AS A NARRATIVE.....	296
3.2.2. MYTH AND THE FLOW OF TIME	302
3.2.3. MYTHS OF DOMESTIC AND INTERNATIONAL POLITICS.....	308
3.2.4. SACRED STORIES AND AMERICANONIZED MYTHS OF US POLITICS	315
3.3. IDEOLOGICAL AND CULTURAL NARRATIVES	336
3.3.1. IDEOLOGY IN NARRATIVE FORM	340
3.3.2. CULTURALLY DOMINATING NARRATIVES.....	349
3.3.3. MASTER AND COUNTER NARRATIVES.....	364
4. PROPHETIC NARRATIVES.....	377
4.1. PROPHECY AS A POLITICAL TOOL.....	378
4.1.1. THE FIGURE OF THE PROPHET	386
4.1.2. THE POSITION OF THE PROPHET	400
4.2. PROPHETIC GENRES	413
4.2.2. THE AMERICAN JEREMIAD.....	427
4.2.3. ARMAGEDDON AND APOCALYPTICISM IN PROPHECY	434

4.3. PROPHECY AND TEMPORALITY	447
4.3.1. NARRATING THE PAST	452
4.3.2. NARRATING THE THINGS TO COME.....	471
CODA	486
Bibliography	502

STORY PREFACE – INTRODUCTION INTO THE RESEARCH ORIENTATION AND METHODOLOGICAL REMARKS

I tell this story just to remind you of the magical, intoxicating power of America. We may sometimes forget it, but others do not.²
-Ronald Wilson Reagan

Very often to gain the attention of the listeners and to assert his or her right to dominate the discursive space with his story the narrator has to use a story preface. Story preface hints at a story to come. One example that Reagan often used is “And that reminded me of a story -- [laughter] -- something always reminds me of a story.”³ As I discuss the concept of prophetic politics throughout this dissertation a more suitable example might be “thus says Yahweh” that the biblical prophets used to announce that a prophecy is to follow.⁴ Story prefaces announce that there is a story pending and request the other potential speakers to allow it to get completed. At the same time when the preface demands the opportunity to speak, it also has to succeed in getting somebody to listen or pay attention to what is to follow. Thus a story preface both announces a story and tries to arouse interest in it. Occasionally the story preface may even provide information about what it will take for the story to be over and its ending by the mere fact that it hints at what is to come in the course of the story.⁵

This, and the demands of the academic world, causes me to in the future pages to start every chapter with a quick glimpse of the things to come. In this first chapter it is my intention to give some explanations as to why this dissertation has taken this very shape you hold in your hands and argue why I have made the choices concerning both the form and the content of this work.

² Reagan (19.1.1989) Remarks at the Presentation Ceremony for the Presidential Medal of Freedom <http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1989/011989b.htm>

³ Reagan (12.2.1985) Remarks at a White House Luncheon for the New Pioneers <http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1985/21285c.htm>

⁴ Naturally this was not an invention of the Hebrew prophets but belonged to the oracular terminology of the ancient world. See Lindblom (1962) p. 103, 109

⁵ Holstein-Gubrium (2000) p. 132-135, 139-142

The aim of this dissertation is *to explore in a hermeneutical manner Ronald Reagan's narratives about America*⁶ and *to gain a comprehensive understanding and provide an interpretation of them.*⁷ I argue that Reagan used stories as his tools of political leadership, and my purpose is *to define the manner in which they were used.* Another question is *how did Reagan use religion in his politics,* and this will be answered by my concept of prophetic politics. I will additionally draft some theory concerning how prophetic politics could be understood in a larger concept. While I make arguments concerning other aspects of politics, I still have chosen as my focal point the manner Reagan combined politics and religion to serve his political aims and how this tried to define a type of civil religion to unite Americans and return to them a feeling of passionate patriotism. Thus, *this dissertation will explore Reagan's civil religious narratives and how he drew from the religious sentiment and other beliefs common to the nation* to create his particular version of civil religion.

Ronald Reagan has not been analyzed with the tools of narratology as I propose he should be. I will attempt to act as the trailblazer. One of my goals is to show how the narrative approach can be used in Reagan studies, and I have taken the approach of narratology as my key empirical orientation to Reagan's texts and to explore his politics. I argue that politics creates such a work of fiction that even the narrative approaches dealing with stories that traditionally have dealt with works of fiction can be used in the study of political narratives as well. This, and other unorthodox approaches I have chosen, create a need to constantly legitimize my work and thus the relations of stories to whichever topic is under discussion.

Reagan's own life and his experiences were a crucial part of all the stories he told but this dissertation does not contain even a summarized biography of Reagan.

⁶ In this dissertation I will use the term "United States of America" to refer only to the official state. Most of the time I will be using the expression "America" to refer to the nation as an imagined community, which consists of a collectivity of people I call "Americans." The population of Canada, Mexico and South America are thus excluded from my concept of "America." Very often "America" is also used to describe the mythical version of the imagined community Reagan wanted to narrate into existence as a storyworld. But I trust that the reader will be able to follow which one of the usages is under discussion.

⁷ To clarify this point I would like to stress that I am mostly using traditional hermeneutics where the meanings of texts are produced in relationships between the author, the reader and the text. My standpoint is in between E.D. Hirsch who saw the intent of the author as giving meaning to the text and Hans-Georg Gadamer who argued that the meaning of the text is produced where the "horizons" of the reader and the writer meet. (Hirsch 1976 and Gadamer 1989) There is a long occidental tradition of interpreting texts beginning with Aristotle and later in the Christian tradition of interpreting the message of the Bible.

Facts about his life show up on the following pages only to illustrate the points I am about to make. As I will show, perhaps these “facts” need to be questioned as well because Reagan had a tendency to romanticize his own life to a degree that almost nothing unpleasant can be found in those stories. Should the reader wish to familiarize himself or herself with Reagan’s life in detail, I recommend reading Lou Cannon’s excellent biography “Role of a Lifetime.”

I have chosen English as the language of my thesis despite the difficulties it posed in the actual writing process out of respect for Ronald Reagan and especially his narratives. In order to make my methodological points and issues explicit, I wish to start with the fact that I write my study as an outsider. I cannot claim to be a part of the American culture in the sense that I could see Reagan through the eyes of that culture, or indeed that particular period of time Reagan occupied. Following the thoughts of Mikhail Bakhtin I argue that I can, nevertheless, use creative understanding in relation to Reagan’s America. For Bakhtin it is necessary for a person who understands to be located in time, space, and culture outside the object of creative understanding. One is not able to see one’s own exterior and comprehend it. Other people are needed for that. The exterior and interior of a given culture can only be fully and profoundly comprehended by outsideness and through the eyes of another culture and time. There will exist in this study a dialogue between two separate meanings and cultures, and this hopefully will result in asking questions that may not have been common in the American culture, and meanwhile Reagan’s America will reveal new aspects of itself.⁸ I cannot choose to inhabit a position as a complete outsider, but must immerse myself in Reagan’s world to some degree, because there can exist no position for an observer outside the world he observes and indeed, the observation itself enters the world as a constituent part of what is being observed.⁹ I cannot assume a totally isolated view from outside, from some vantage point distanced by time and space such as the Archimedean immovable point, from where this dissertation could be the metaphorical lever with which to move the world or, rather in this case, the story world. Story worlds cannot be better understood from the outside than mere utterances that compose the stories, which in

⁸ Bakhtin (1986) p. 7

⁹ Bakhtin (1986) p. 126

turn guide the construction of story worlds. The one who tries to understand, even the researcher, enters into the dialogue as the third party.¹⁰

Every text is “plurivocal, open to several readings and to several constructions.”¹¹ Narratives are interpretive in their nature, but at the same time require interpretation as well.¹² This is because we have to interpret texts at every moment of our interaction with them and allow symbols and tools of semiotic systems to replace the actual primary experience which we are denied forever. The act of imitating events and actions in a narrative, like the interpretation of this narrative I am writing, have a need for the ability to ignore. They have to leave some aspects without consideration since human perception involves simplification.¹³ Not all words, sentences, or even narratives are important within a given text.¹⁴ So is the case of my research on Reagan. I may attempt to tell “the whole truth and nothing but the truth”, but because I am writing a narrative on the narrative of another narrator’s narratives, the end result is my own literary creation. All I have to work on are the texts which represent only a selected and simplified reality and it is this narrated reality that I need to turn into another narrative and the meanings of both narratives are ambiguous to begin with.¹⁵

To be honest, the aim of my research project is to produce a commentary or criticism on the verbal works of Reagan. Frye defines commentary as something that “translates the implicit into the explicit, can only isolate the aspect of meaning, large or small, which is appropriate or interesting for certain readers to grasp at a certain time”¹⁶ Frye admits that the poet, in this case Reagan, has very little to do in this translation as an activity. My commentary is concerned with what I as its author deem important in the whole narrative production of Reagan, which is a vast network of storylines at the specific time and context of my writing this commentary. It is my decision to emphasize the importance of the connections between religion and politics which may be able to shed light on understanding contemporary American politics as well. As Frye further notes, there is a notable difference in bulk between commentary and a “sacred book,” where the amount of

¹⁰ Bakhtin (1986) p. 126. Bakhtin emphasizes that there is no “third” party in the arithmetical sense of the word because in every dialogue there potentially can be an unlimited number of participants.

¹¹ Rabinowitz and Sullivan. Cited in Riessman (1993) p. 14

¹² Riessman (1993) p. 22

¹³ Rabinowitz (1987) p. 19-20

¹⁴ Rabinowitz (1987) p. 48

¹⁵ See Riessman (1993) p. 15

¹⁶ Frye (1957) p. 87

commentary can be indefinite. There are always new aspects to study, research, and yes, to write commentaries about.

In 1967 William Labov and Joshua Waletzky wrote a ground-breaking paper on the mechanisms of oral narratives as a way to transmit personal experience. Their emphasis, however, is not in the “products of expert storytellers that have been retold many times, but the original production of a representative sample of the population.”¹⁷ All Reagan’s narratives certainly belong to the former group of constant, practically professional retellings, but even then, some of the fundamentals of orally transmitted experience are involved. When it comes to those Reagan’s public papers that were originally presented as speeches, one must consider the Bakhtinian concept of utterances, which are the real compositional units of speech communication and need speech subjects of individual speaking people to exist. The length of a single utterance is determined by a change of the speaking subject. Therefore each of Reagan’s speeches consists of a single utterance and when discussing question-and-answer sessions, each response to a question forms an utterance. The length of an utterance is indeterminate, it can be only one word or, for example, this study can be considered as a single utterance as well. For an utterance there is an absolute beginning preceded by the utterances of others, and an absolute end followed by the responsive utterances of others. An utterance is a whole, and the change of the speaking subjects is only possible because the utterance has reached its finalization, that is, the speaker has said or written everything he wants to say at a particular moment.¹⁸

Bakhtin nevertheless argues that a sentence as an utterance, or a part of it, can never be repeated and even used as a quotation, it is always a new utterance. Individual sentences can be repeated identically, but the utterance as a whole is shaped by extra linguistic aspects and exists only in relation to other utterances.¹⁹ This naturally poses a challenge for my use of Reagan’s quotations. I have to create new utterances, since some of the speeches are relatively long, and not suitable for being reproduced here in their entirety. Therefore I must make the conscious choice of recreating utterances by shortening and cutting the original ones. Paul Ricoeur, however, sees that the minimal meaningful unit for study in narrative discourse is a

¹⁷ Labov-Waletzky (2006) p. 1

¹⁸ Bakhtin (1986) p.71, 76

¹⁹ Bakhtin (1986) p. 108-109

sentence, because discourse is organized in sentences. However, “Understanding a text is always more than the summation of its partial meanings; the text as a whole has to be considered as a hierarchy of topics.”²⁰ Therefore I need to try to understand Reagan’s entire metastory as a unified text, a collage of smaller stories, while I use short citations to illustrate my points on different topics. Reagan himself gave a word of support for my choice of how to quote him while trying to remain true to the original purpose of the often long utterances out of which only a part is time after time included in this dissertation. Reagan said,

Anyone who expresses himself publicly from a platform of this kind must expect that his words can be used and repeated and reprinted by anyone. Once they are uttered, there can be no restriction on those who can reproduce them. Nor would we have it any other way. I retract no statements of mine that I have made in the past. My principles remain what they always have been. I will stand behind all of the quotes, if they are honestly and completely quoted.²¹

I have tried to remain honest to Reagan’s narration and I have made choices in including certain quotes from Reagan in this dissertation while excluding others. There is no doubt that some of the “major” speeches such as the speech after the destruction of space shuttle Challenger are central to the narrative construction of the civil religion and also for anyone who wants to gain comprehensive understanding of Reagan’s entire political metanarrative, but it is my argument that even speeches to smaller audiences and less publicity along with private discussions are important. To answer the question of what is desired in politics, it must be answered by recognizing following Lyotard that “it is impossible to trust the analysis of public addresses.”²² The nature of politics as exemplified in public and formal addresses is misleading, elusive and somewhat tending to mislead the senses.

The desires and true intentions of the narrative political leader cannot, and indeed should not, be attempted to decipher solely from the wording of his public addresses, or the expressions he uses, or even his rhetorical flourish. If the analyst takes this approach, he must beware the fallibility of his analysis. But indeed the intentions and purposes behind any political narration are objects worthy of study since the narratives told by politicians are always told for a political purpose; either to inflict change or preserve the status quo. Public addresses are traditionally in the

²⁰ Ricoeur (1995) p. 38

²¹ Address, “Republican State Convention, August 6, 1966” p.10, Speech, “Elk Grove, May 14, 1966” p. 257 Folder: 1966 Campaign: RR speeches and statements, Book II (2), Box C30, Research Unit, Ronald Reagan Governor’s papers, Ronald Reagan Library

²² Lyotard (1993b) p. 87

American context the means of “spelling the policy out loud,” but there is no guarantee that there would not be a hidden agenda behind this barricade of words. The texts of important public addresses should be approached with extreme caution, since they are the most refined and thought-out expressions of the policy, and less likely to offer any crack, which might be used to penetrate into the level of the intentions that lie behind the mere expression of those intentions. As Edelman writes, “public speeches and announcements of officials [...] are all heavily imbued with stylized and ritualistic components that justify policy to mass audiences.”²³

The most commonly found example is the inaugural speech of any President. According to John Kares Smith, the inaugural speeches fully consciously “recreates and reanimates the cosmogonic myth of the founding of the country: a litany of the great words and the great deeds of heroes past [...] a reaffirming of America as a special place chose by God for the enactment of divine purpose.”²⁴ But from the viewpoint of prophetic politics, or rather one who wants to study it and the myth function behind it, the inaugural speeches do carry a meaning. They are often the most illustrious verbal celebrations of the national unity, and highly integrative in their nature. But the actual policy content within them is very limited. They define and strengthen identity but do not define actual political actions. It is the task of the researcher to attempt to peek behind the façade of ritualized and stylized aspect to deduct the purpose why a certain narrative was told instead of innumerable others that could have been put to use. There is an intention behind every story to uncover and in most cases it is this intention that actually adds the political element into the story.

To overcome the dilemma of what to include and how to use Reagan’s public and private texts I have made the choice of immersing myself as thoroughly into them as possible. For this work I have read everything Reagan said publicly during his two-term presidency, all his pre-presidential radio speeches, all the campaign speeches that are available at the vast archives of Ronald Reagan Presidential Library²⁵ and in addition his two autobiographies and the edited

²³ Edelman (1977) p. 113

²⁴ Smith (1997) p. 813-814

²⁵ Unfortunately the further we move back in time the less documented material is there from Reagan’s speeches. This is partially due to the fact that in his GE speeches he began with a short introduction and then answered questions from the audience. As his speeches started evolving Reagan would bring in more and more political material but in these GE speeches as well as in many of his gubernatorial addresses before Reagan had full-time speechwriters he used “cue cards.” These

collections of his letters to individual people and his diaries. I have also read all of the memoirs written by the most influential Reagan aides to gain a better understanding of what Reagan's policies seemed to be like for the insiders of his story world. The people who have written memoirs include Edwin Meese III, Michael Deaver, David Stockman, Alexander M. Haig Jr and Donald T. Regan along with some insiders of the White House further removed from the President such as Peter J. Wallison or Peggy Noonan. In other words I have comprehensively read everything that relates to his public speaking and in addition have tried to obtain supportive information from his private papers. When it comes to these, a thorough study is as yet impossible, since the Ronald Reagan Presidential Library estimates that they might have as much as fifty million pages of material and by the summer of 2009 their estimation is that 20 percent has been catalogued. Naturally included in this is also the material inaccessible to the general public and researchers without special permits. John F. Wilson, a prominent scholar of American civil religion argues that "a vast array of pronouncements, messages, letters and memoranda [...] is to be viewed as potential linguistic evidence for religious constructions of the public realm."²⁶ I have tried to follow his advice of undertaking an exhaustive review on the material available. Based on all of this I argue that I have studied Reagan's narratives sufficiently in depth and use this acquired familiarization with the vast array of materials as the basis of my decisions, which utterances to include in this study.

I have chosen to take a somewhat untypical approach in the way I mark the sources of my citations, because when it comes to Reagan's speeches, the footnotes include more information than would be required. The reason lies in the thinking of Mikhail Bakhtin, who claims that the utterance should not be studied out of its context. He does not specify either the length of an utterance which in some cases can be an entire chapter or even the whole speech and sometimes only one word.

were 4x6 inch cards he carried in his pocket where his speech was in an abbreviated and compressed form. One single speech took easily a dozen cards since more often than not one topic he spoke of during the speech occupied one card. Acting upon the reactions of the audience Reagan altered the order of the cards and replaced some cards with others suspecting that they would influence the audience better or just added new cards depending on the composition of the audience he would address. The Ronald Reagan Presidential Library has boxes full of these cue cards and while analyzing them can tell a researcher what Reagan liked to talk about the fact that he kept intermingling them makes it an impossible task to fully reconstruct a speech given on any particular occasion.

²⁶ Wilson (1979) p. 65. He nevertheless goes on to argue that further research along these lines would not be remarkably productive.

Neither does he describe all the essential parts included in the context.²⁷ While it has been an unfortunate task of mine to somewhat take the responsibility for ultimately deciding what has to be included in and excluded from the utterance to keep this study within even relatively reasonable number of pages, I nevertheless find it essential, that included in the footnotes are some indications of the context of the citation. Since Reagan's speeches and other public papers are named in a very descriptive manner, I have chosen to include in the footnote both the date of the citation, and the name of the speech of textual source, which almost always reveals useful information on the nature of the citation. Thus the reader does not have to flip to the bibliography to find out if certain citation was from a pre-formulated speech, a written response or spontaneous answer to a journalist's question. Often the composition of the audience is included in the footnote as well, and this makes it easier for the reader too see the utterance in its context since there were certain storylines in Reagan's story world, that were only followed with certain audiences and narrativization was occasionally different to different audiences.

I am in fact at least partially trying to retell some of the stories Reagan told to his contemporaries and naturally even generations to come. Unfortunately it is impossible for me to arrive at a pure and unmediated story. The story I read from Reagan's papers is subtly different to any other reader's story and ultimately even the story I try to compose and recreate will result in another discourse than that of the original. While I create a new story within a new discourse, it is my claim that these nevertheless operate on the level of the story worlds that Reagan created. This thesis is a new literary work, new utterance or a new narrative on Ronald Wilson Reagan. I end up creating a new narrative of which I myself am an author, and no longer Reagan, despite the fact that I am using his utterances or parts of them in my composition. I have chosen Ronald Reagan's presidential speeches and other public papers as my primary source, but include other things he has authored as well. To better get the true voice of Reagan included in the storytelling I follow Mikhail Bakhtin's idea of including "extraliterary utterances and their rejoinders" such as diaries and letters and things Reagan has told to biographers. In other words I create a unified utterance from heterogeneous utterances, where not only my voice and Reagan's can be heard or read, but a multitude of others as well. Thus, getting the

²⁷ Bakhtin (1986)

voice of Reagan foregrounded as much as possible is essential to avoid this becoming simply my narrative on Reagan. In my process of trying to understand Reagan's utterances I become myself a participant in the dialogue their interrelations form.²⁸ Barbara Czarniawska claims that "after all, reading is writing anew."²⁹ I cannot help writing a new story even if I try to keep as close to Reagan's as possible. But, "storytelling, to put the argument simply is what we do with our research materials."³⁰

Gerald Ford wrote in his memoirs that Reagan was "one of the few political leaders I have ever met whose public speeches revealed more than his private conversations."³¹ I have chosen to use Reagan's personal diaries as my narrative data as well. In the case of the diary the narrator and the narratee are the same person, even if the diary is ultimately intended for someone else's eyes. The narrator of the diary may narrate events for his own edification and memory as well as work out his problems on paper but essentially he is talking to himself.³² I have used two of Reagan's autobiographies as my data as well.³³ When one uses autobiographical material as data, it is necessary to understand that is not important to determine whether biographical coherence is reality or merely an illusion, but what really matter is, "how individuals give coherence to the lives when they write or talk self-autobiographies. The sources of this coherence, the narratives that lie behind them, and the larger ideologies that structure them must be uncovered."³⁴ An autobiography is just another story and the metanarratives or foundational myths which help structure them are the most interesting factors.

It is hard to hazard a guess as to whether the politics created Ronald Reagan, the person or whether the person created the policies. I would say the two processes happened simultaneously so that the life story of Reagan (which is necessarily not the one told in autobiographies) worked to create his political stories and policies and on the other hand, the necessity for political coherence shaped the persona of the citizen-politician Reagan as well. But "every "shepherd king" in history is more

²⁸ Bakhtin (1986) p. 114-115, 125

²⁹ Czarniawska (2004) p. 88

³⁰ Riessman (1993) p. 1

³¹ Ford. Cited in Cannon (2003) p. 398

³² Chatman (1978) p. 172

³³ As I will later discuss, both of Reagan autobiographies were more than partially ghost-written. It is intriguing that a man who say everything in the form of stories, was not able to formulate his own story alone.

³⁴ Denzin (1989) Cited in Holstein-Gubrium (2000) p. 106

king and less shepherd than he pretends.”³⁵ There are roles a politician has to play. He can stick to the usual role of a stereotypical politician or he can attempt to “break free” from the bounds provided by that role. The process of changing the image of the role is hard after it has been established. Reagan compared politics and acting by saying,

In the movie business, actors often get what we call typecast; that is, the studios come to think of you as playing certain kinds of roles, so those are the kinds of roles they give you. And no matter how hard you try, you just can't get them to think of you in any other way. Well, politics is a little like that, too. So, I've had a lot of time and reason to think about my role not just as a citizen turned politician but as an actor turned politician. In looking back, I believe that acting did help prepare me for the work I do now.³⁶

Perhaps one of the reasons why the public relations move by Spencer and Roberts' company to label Reagan as a “citizen-politician” had such an appeal for Reagan was that it is, after all, “politics as Hollywood plot line.”³⁷ Stephen Weatherford and Lorraine M. McDonnell have claimed that seeing Reagan as more actor than politician underestimates his impact by failing to take seriously the role political ideology plays. “The error is hard to resist: underestimating Reagan has more than two decades of tradition behind it.”³⁸ One should in research evaluate and compare the ideas behind policies, their implementation and the effects. They claim that the American political culture is so pragmatic that ideology is “scarce enough in electoral campaigns, the ideologue in power is an unprecedented occurrence.”³⁹

While Reagan's presidency undoubtedly can be characterized as performed or enacted at least to some degree, my method of studying Reagan's public and private papers as well to see what stories arise from them, does not entirely support the assertion that Reagan would or even could have been solely a product of his aides or the citizenry. Reagan was an ideologue and he had his own values and policies. Despite the fact that the great rags-to-riches myth of an all-American success is personified in his life story, he was the actual person who created and crafted the policies he wanted to pursue. Because so much of Reagan's policies centred on stories and telling them, it is natural that he was himself drawn into the

³⁵ Niebuhr (1986) p. 26

³⁶ Reagan (31.5.1988) Remarks at a Luncheon Hosted by Artists and Cultural Leaders in Moscow <http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1988/053188a.htm>

³⁷ Wills (2000) p. 349

³⁸ Weatherford – McDonnell (1990) p. 123

³⁹ Weatherford – McDonnell (1990) p. 123

story world creation of his citizenry and was partially recreated there anew into a picture of what the story recipients wanted to see in their president. Essentially Reagan was the narrator and reasonably successful controller of the stories he told, and thus more than a speaking figure-head or an imaginary persona created to respond to the call of the citizenry.

One of my main focal points of interest in this study is what I choose to call “prophetic politics.” I ask the reader to bear with me throughout the numerous references to it, until it finally gets clarified gradually in later chapters. As a short definition to get started, suffice to say that I consider prophetic politics to be a form of charismatic political leadership that focuses on the use of future-oriented storytelling as well as narrating the past differently as it was to create in the present each actual moment of politicking into a moment of choice, where the decision made will echo unto eternity. The citizen is depicted as having to choose the direction politics and the country takes, either towards Gomorrah or actualization of a “glorious future.” For me a prophetic politician is first and foremost a leader, who uses stories and narratives of promise and greatness to contrast the gloomy present with a future beyond all imagination, if only the choices he advocates are made. He has to be a skilful narrator, who can manipulate and exploit a multitude of the myths and the metanarratives that shape our existence and identity for his political purposes. One of these “grand narratives” which still plays a large role for us is religion, and while it is convenient to put to use, the prophetic politician does not have to be a religious figure. If he chooses not to use religion it is his task to transplant the religious faith to something else, for example patriotism.

I argue that for the best results in drafting a civil religion for a nation, the political leader should assume this prophetic role. The Reagan era was a great example of the production of civil religion and the entire fifth chapter of this dissertation is devoted to describing the different types of narratives at the disposal of the prophetic politician. Nevertheless, it would be a mistake to restrict the use of prophetic politics to mere civil religion or identity politics. It can create momentum in every sector of policy, but I have had to restrict my focus somewhere.

For the concept of prophetic politics, I am indebted to David Gutterman and his excellent book “Prophetic Politics; Christian social movements and American democracy.” But I feel the need to apologize for taking his concept and using it in ways he never intended. I am not so much talking about the good accrued to the

society as the good of the political establishment, when it is chosen as a tool of political leadership. One of the reasons for studying Reagan lies in the fact that to understand contemporary America one has to understand its past as well, lest one gets entangled in an illusion. It is one of my crucial arguments that in the context of the United States of America religion, when it is involved in political leadership, often takes a prophetic cast. This was as true in the age of Reagan as it is today. Nevertheless, it is no use limiting the study to the present period in the life of a society. As Claude Levi-Strauss writes, “everything is history: what was said yesterday is history, what was said a minute ago is history [...] Only the study of historical development permits the weighing and evaluation of the interrelationships among the components of the present-day society.”⁴⁰

Every now and then in the course of my writing I refer to the figure of the prophetic politician with the pronoun “he”. In these occasions I ask the reader to bear with me since this is not due to the fact that women would in any way be excluded or marginalized. My native language is gender-neutral and the same pronoun refers to both genders. So does the “he” in this narrative. It is my wish that no-one would feel insulted by this and I must personally adhere to the words of Reagan in describing the influence of the women on the world, “It has always been my belief that women brought civilization to the world. Without their influence, we males would still be carrying clubs and, in recent years, we’ve come pretty close to doing that again.”⁴¹

In the beginning this research concentrated solely on Reagan as the object of study. But as things progressed I felt more and more compelled to extrapolate on the concept of prophetic politics as a form of narrative leadership and thus I try to create a theory about this as well. It could be argued, that since I have started to wander along this path of narrative research I should include other politicians to use as further examples to illustrate my theory. I do not see this as a necessity. I started my work on Reagan and the insight I have gained into his narrative political leadership brought into the forefront the need to call it something. I am at the same time studying Reagan as a political narrator and arguing that he is a manifestation of the

⁴⁰ Levi-Strauss (1969) p. 12

⁴¹ Radio Broadcast, Taping date – 1976, September “Women’s March” Edited typescript 2/4, Folder Speeches and Writings ,Box 1, Reagan, Ronald: Pre-presidential papers, Series I Speeches and writings, Ronald Reagan Library

type of political leadership I consider prophetic. The theory of prophetic politics emerged in connection with Reagan and he can be considered as an exemplary showcase of this type of political leadership which naturally can be used to analyze other political leaders as well. First and foremost the object of this study is to understand and decipher Ronald Reagan's use of narratives as his tools of leadership, and out of these narratives aimed at creating patriotic sentiments and an American civil religion grew the theory of prophetic politics as poetic leadership, which I attempt to draft for the benefit of the reader.

It has to be said immediately that in this context "theory" does not refer to empirical theory where the theory itself is being tested with empirical data from Reagan's speeches. In this case theory refers to both narrative and political theory and it is being drafted out of earlier theoretical discussion, Reagan studies and also Reagan's own texts. This dissertation is an attempt to move towards creating a theory of prophetic politics. As such, it is rather situated in the realm of Political Thought and could be summarized as all what has been said, or speculated, of narratives, narrative leadership in politics and prophetic politics and in this context Reagan's storytelling about his mythical America is used to illustrate the theory.

For better or worse, I have had to take into account the words of Horace about writing and publishing. Horace advises an inspiring writer to let what he has written come first to the ears of critics such as himself and *then* to store the papyrus in his desk drawer for nine years since "you can always destroy what you have never published; the word sent forth can never be recalled."⁴² Neither can I follow the advice of Alexander Pope who provides guidance: "Be sure yourself and your own reach to know, How far your genius, taste, and learning go. [...] One science only wills one genius fit; so vast is art, so narrow human wit."⁴³ While I cannot even call myself a genius to begin with, I shall also try to work with the overlapping sections of political science, narratology and theology as well.

I am a scholar of IR and while at the casual glance this dissertation concerns itself with American identity politics and construction of civil religion in a typically American context, I argue that the construction of civil religion is more universal and applies to every country, albeit with different stories and myths used. In addition, America is at the time of writing this an uncontested superpower in the

⁴² Horace (1940) p. 73

⁴³ Pope (1903) p. 2

realm of international politics. Because of its multinational origins and the self-image as the last, best hope of mankind and other powerful foundational myths which describe America to Americans as the fulfilment of human freedom and the nucleus of civilization itself Americans tend to have a worldview which endows them with a special, hallowed task of keeping freedom and democracy alive in the entire world. This view of the role of the United States of America in the realm of international politics paves way for the argument that American domestic politics are a matter of global concern, or rather, that American politics views the international aspect of politics as part of their domestic policy. As Reagan put it to the General Assembly of the United Nations,

America is committed to the world because so much of the world is inside America. After all, only a few miles from this very room is our Statue of Liberty, past which life began anew for millions, where the peoples from nearly every country in this hall joined to build these United States. The blood of each nation courses through the American vein and feeds the spirit that compels us to involve ourselves in the fate of this good Earth.⁴⁴

When it comes to the narrative theories used in this text a short explanation is in order. I have not found a single theorist who would write at least in length of the narratives of the political leadership and the stories used to lead people.⁴⁵ This will be a part of the novelty and contribution of this dissertation. I will attempt to show how culturally dominant narratives and foundational myths offer tools for actual political leadership. I go from theorist to another, discarding some thoughts and bringing some to this text. Occasionally I might have a structuralist viewpoint, then formalist, post-structuralist, phenomenologist, constructivist, postmodernist or whichever vantage point. This is due to reason of necessity since in each theory and its theorists there is something, which is invaluable to increase my understanding and ground my theory. And the theorists themselves do not remain set in stone either. One example of this can be found within the writings of Roland Barthes, who began as a structuralist, slowly discarding that and moving to find *jouissance* and

⁴⁴ Reagan (24.10.1985) Address to the 40th Session of the United Nations General Assembly in New York, New York <http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1985/102485a.htm>

⁴⁵ Most of the study of political narratives seems to concentrate on "giving voice to the silenced" and not discussing the stories used to silence them in the first place. While researchers such as Molly Andrews have made important contributions to the study of political narratives it speaks volumes about the level of research put into political narratives in general that the Routledge Encyclopedia of Narrative Theory (2007) does not even contribute a mention to "political narratives" while such genres as "pornographic narratives" have their own entries. When it comes to the narratives of political leadership, there is even less work that has been done.

even eroticism in the free textual play. The Barthes, who tried to organize the text into structures, is far removed from the one who wrote that “The text is [...] that uninhibited person who shows his behind to the Political Father”⁴⁶ While I do not go so far as to suggest that there would be erotic pleasure in political texts for (at least the average) reader, there is nevertheless the element of the story escaping from the structuralist boundaries of the text. It is this somewhat freed play of texts, their intentions and interpretations and political outcomes that is the object of this study.

For Roman Jakobson poetics is an integral part of linguistics and could be defined as the “linguistic study of the poetic function in the context of verbal messages in general and in poetry in particular.”⁴⁷ Just because it can be used in the “general” context, I can so boldly use many theorists and theories of poetics in my story of political narratives. Indeed, most of these theorists themselves use the term “poetics” to refer to all kinds of literature and not merely poems. *Poesis* is making something, and thus a poet is etymologically a maker and his produce, poetry, is quite literally make-believe.⁴⁸ “Fabulation,” which is often used to designate the storytelling faculty, is a mental activity which “stands midway between the strictly cognitive and the vaguely intuitive; and it is out of that limbo between rational intelligence and the unconscious that fictions are created.”⁴⁹

Northrop Frye defined literature as an area of verbal imitation between events and ideas. Poetry faces simultaneously “in one direction, the world of *praxis* or action, a world of events occurring in time. In the opposite direction, it faces the world of *theoria*, of images and ideas, the conceptual or visualizable world spread out in space, or mental space.”⁵⁰ Poetics is then something which exists between the immanent and material world, partly action, partly ideas, and with the function to imitate actions in words in the world of ideas. It exists between rational thoughts and the dreams and visions of the unconscious. It creates something and this creation, the actual poem or literary product, reflects the higher world of pure ideas. Politics ideally aims at making the world better and its ultimate goal is to “create a heaven on earth.” Storytelling can be a powerful political force because of its

⁴⁶ Barthes (1973)

⁴⁷ Jakobson cited in Culler (1975) p. 56

⁴⁸ Levin (1969) p. 105

⁴⁹ Levin (1969) p. 105

⁵⁰ Frye (1969) p. 119

position between the often sad reality and the vision what is conceptually possible, and it can reflect a better state of being for mankind. Poetics is, or can be, the stuff of political visions of a better future. It does not need to limit itself to depicting what is, but what *could* be.

It is a sad fact, that narratology and the study of narrative discourse are too often centred on invented stories or fictional narratives, and this is an obstacle that a researcher has to bypass. This mode of thinking derives from seeing fictional narratives as exemplary models for all narratives. Gerard Genette was among the first theorists to focus his attention to whether the applicability of results or even methods of narratology fit into examining factual narratives, or rather fact-based narratives.⁵¹ But, it is one of the main functions of good stories to appear as if they were not fabrications of anyone's imagination, but instead true and fact-based. Stories often aim at blurring the distinction of fact and fiction, and as becomes apparent, even the "truth" of the narrative is not a clear-cut thing. I argue that some of the methods of studying purely fictional narratives can be used effectively to study political narratives as well.

I argue that for my purposes in studying political as well as religious narratives it is permissible to use theories which focus on fictional narratives without distortions to the stories told. Actually I shall go so far as to argue for the idea of fictionality in politics. It is not just that Reagan, as he appeared to us, was a narrated or fictional personality, but that the world of politics becomes fictional when it is narrated to us, and many of the theories concerning fictional literature can be applied to the stories of political leadership as well. Since we most often cannot see or tangibly feel what is going on in politics, we rely on the stories told about the political process. This is most evident in the realm of international politics, since the actions in that realm are often far removed from the sphere of our daily life. We read the stories in the newspaper and see the visual narrations on the news, and can never be sure that we have been given the "true" story. The story that creates the news may have been modified and altered, but in any case, it is a story, description of states, actions and events, which has been put together or emplotted by someone, so that it would be easier for us to again emplot for the benefit of our own understanding and ultimately digestion.

⁵¹ See for example Genette (1993) p. 54-84

Since the story of events in the realm of politics does not arrive to us in unmediated form, it is better to take it with a pinch of salt. If we start to doubt the “truth” of the news, it is only one more step to take to view them as fictional, at least to the degree that the things described are embellished to make them more reportable, and the whole array of theories concerning fictional narratives are at our disposal. The political narrative does not indeed need to be true or follow the “reality” as we know it, since it can abide by another set of rules. I argue that it is sufficient for a narrative to only be plausible enough to appear lifelike. Things do not need to be true as long as they appear to be true and this is a great asset for all political narratives. By treating political matters as fictional and only plausible instead of true, the politician is able to some degree supplant the “real” world of politics with a story world.

After this introduction I will discuss narrative theory in the first chapter and connect the theory to how Reagan used narratives in the *praxis* of his political leadership. The second chapter will be devoted to a discussion of American religiosity. First section of the chapter will shed light on the development of religion in America and some of its particular characteristics like the fact that religions seem to absorb American characteristics into their dogma. Second section will deal with the concept of civil religion. I will, again, discuss its development and focus on the fact that the object of faith can be found in “universal American values,” as manifested in the American Way of Life or in Reagan’s version, the American Dream. The focus is to decipher how Reagan attempted to create his version of it with the aid of narratives, but I shall also attempt to provide a suggestion as to how it could perhaps be made to be even more unifying than Reagan was able to make it. As I will argue in the second chapter, politics need religion as justification.

The third chapter will discuss the types of narratives political justification relies on. I will argue that religious narratives, myths and culturally dominant stories, when connected to political ones, create a web of stories that support and legitimize each other. This story web becomes so strong that it can even shape the other stories that can be told about related subjects. I argue that it becomes a metanarrative which shapes the political world as well and after taking a look at the counter-narratives one could to in opposition determine that it is excruciatingly difficult to demolish such a mythical master narrative.

In the fourth chapter I will finally initiate a more thorough discussion of the concept of prophetic politics. It grew out of Reagan religious-political-mythical narratives and will follow the reader through this entire work. I will be constantly drawing conclusions along the text and do not save them entirely to this chapter. I will define the figure of a political prophet and outline some of the most important narrative types that he can use to communicate his vision. The management of time and temporality is crucial in prophecies, whether religious or political, and I shall describe how time can be manipulated for the benefits of the political prophet. The fifth and final chapter is a quick summary of the thoughts that arose in the course of this work and will attempt to suggest some paths for future studies. As a coda, it will end the telling and can be described as a discussion on where my narrative path has taken me and how one might choose to proceed.

If the order of the chapters seems occasionally arbitrary to the reader and the work to be repeating certain themes constantly, an explanation is necessary. In this dissertation I will discuss many matters that are so tightly bound with each other that separations are artificial. Religious beliefs blend into myths about being America, which have influenced the culture which is in turn a shaper of the ideologies policies rest upon. In the previous sentence any concept could change place with any other one. This concept creates a web of meanings and one aspect cannot be picked out for closer study so that the meaning in itself could remain intact. My argument is that in the realm of politics the web of beliefs, customs and common sensical worldview join together to create a metatext, where each is partially justified by the others through intertextual means and the entire metatext will act as the legitimizer of political action. It is this entire metatext that I wish to unravel for the reader to make sense of how Reagan used parts of it in his creation of the mythical America that was the basis of his civil religion. As there is in political studies a deeply set sentiment and tendency to see political action as logical and rational, I have to constantly attempt to justify my approach by pointing out how stories can be used in the creation of these meaning making systems and again justify that myths and religious beliefs along with culturally and ideologically dominant stories justify and legitimize politics.

Finally, before we start the narrative path I wish to point out that the Actual person of Ronald Wilson Reagan, born a poor son of a Mid-West shoe seller remains hidden from our eyes. This dissertation is an attempt to turn the tools of narrative

analysis to study Ronald Reagan, president, political narrator, storyteller, and, yes, a prophetic politician. All of these things we can study, but there are limits to where we are allowed to enter. The actual person, stripped of his politics and the stories he spun around himself remains a mystery. This is because of the power of narratives in creating the public Reagan as contrasted to the private person. Reagan was an actor and his public persona was at least partially a role, which was drafted by himself as well as the expectations of the citizenry and the demands of how to succeed in carrying out the presidency. But it does not matter, since after all, I am studying the 40th President of the United States, Ronald Reagan. The stories that whirled around recreating and shaping him anew again and again are part of his prophetic politics and the person stripped of these stories, and his political role is of no consequence to me. Therefore, if I argue in the upcoming pages that Reagan wanted to do something, this refers always to the prophetic politician, a combination of the person^a and the role he was cast in. To summarize what is to come in the course of the next five hundred pages or so; I can do no better than to quote Bruce Lincoln, who described his own work by saying,

*In the following pages, my chief goal is to tell a story about the stories others have told about the stories of others till, and my point is that one should treat all these narratives with considerable care and caution.*⁵²

⁵² Lincoln (1999) introduction

1. THE NARRATIVE APPROACH TO REAGAN'S PROPHETIC POLITICS

There are countless forms of narrative in the world. First of all, there is a prodigious variety of genres, each of which branches out into a variety of media, as if all substances could be relied upon to accommodate man's stories. Among the vehicles of narrative are articulated language, whether oral or written, picture, still or moving, gestures, and an ordered mixture of all these substances; narrative is present in myth, legend, fables, tales, short stories, epics, history, tragedy, drama, comedy, pantomime, paintings (in *Santa Ursula* by Carpaccio, for instance), stained-glass windows, movies, local news, conversation. Moreover, in this infinite variety of forms, it is present at all times, in all places, in all societies; indeed narrative starts with the very history of mankind; there is not, there has never been anywhere, any people without narrative; all classes, all human groups have their stories and very often those stories are enjoyed by men of different and even opposite cultural backgrounds; narrative remains largely unconcerned with good or bad literature. Like life itself, it is there, international, transhistorical, transcultural.⁵³

-Roland Barthes

In this chapter it is my intention to shed some light on what a narrative actually is and what kind of changes it is able to bring about in the world we inhabit. This is a long and tedious chapter to read. It begins by defining the concept of narrative to the purpose of this study and discusses the elements needed and often present in it. The aim of this chapter is two-fold. It will familiarize the reader with some of the crucial concepts of narratology and at the same time provide examples of how Reagan used these concepts in his political leadership. This will not be merely an isolated chapter that focuses on the narrative theory or how it can be used as a method of political analysis. It will simultaneously initiate the analysis of the stories Reagan told. With the use of numerous quotations from Reagan I will not only justify the narrative approach, but analyze specific aspects of Reagan's political storytelling and draw conclusions while presenting the reader with some essential elements of narratology. Alasdair MacIntyre claims that "man is in his actions and practices, as well as in his fictions, essentially a story-telling animal"⁵⁴ Therefore, here and in the later chapters as well, I proceed to tell you stories about stories.

⁵³ Barthes (1977) p. 79

⁵⁴ MacIntyre (1984) p. 216

The chapter is divided into three sections. The issues discussed in the first section are the ones located within the bounds of the narrative. I discuss what a narrative actually is and how it can be defined. I offer a glimpse into such essential qualities of a story like plot or genre, and then proceed by extrapolating the actors within the narrative framework, be they called actants, characters, or story world participants. While the first section is about things contained within the narrative text itself, the second section introduces the idea of interaction of the text and the world outside it and discusses how such interaction takes place.

The second section deals with the world creating power of narratives and I propose that by narrating into existence several “story worlds” the political narrator is able to blur the differences between the actual world and the worlds he has spun out of words and use this for great political benefits. When the narrator uses several slightly different story worlds for his benefit, I argue, he is using a story verse, a theoretical invention of mine which enables the story worlds themselves to blend together as well. Story world or a story verse is given birth to by the narrative itself, but only in interplay with the story recipient and with subtle guidance from the narrator. Thus its creation takes place on the interphase of the narrative framework within the story and the “real” world outside the story.

The third section deals with aspects of narrative ulterior to the story itself. There I shall discuss concepts such as author and narrator and how Reagan performed these roles. When I have discussed in length what it takes to produce and communicate a story, I shall venture to explain the other half of the interpretive process. That is, I take a look at the receiving end of the story. I shall write about how the audience, narratee or the story recipient in general, both shapes the telling of a tale, especially in political narration, and is ultimately responsible for how the story is interpreted. These are all concepts outside the textual boundaries of the narrative; they are external aspects, so to say. Thus it is the task of the second section to bridge the gap between what is bound within the narrative and what is located outside it to create a proper story.

Barbara Czarniawska notes that there is a growing fascination among young scholars to proceed to do studies that merely show the presence of stories in their data. Czarniawska labels the resulting type of studies as “Look, Ma, there is a narrative!” Mere pointing out that stories exist, is not enough to produce an interesting study. The point should be what the consequences of storytelling are for

those who tell them, and those how study them.⁵⁵ Naturally, when one chooses to study political narratives, one of the main points of emphasis should be the consequences for the citizens or other people whose lives are affected by the narrativized politics. I try to avoid this banal approach Czarniawska wrote about, but occasionally I might slip into it. But in the case of Reagan's political speechmaking, it would actually be harder to point out parts where stories are not used. "Ma, seems like almost everything IS a narrative." My intention is to study the effects of political storytelling, but also the mechanisms involved in this process either as the types of stories used, or as the stories or metanarratives behind them, which legitimate the new stories. I focus on how Reagan's stories were created and for what political purposes.

The proper name for the study of narratives is narratology, and as David Herman notes, the mere idea of narratology is a battlefield of two competing stories. One story claims that narratology is a dead science with its "forbidding terminology and mania for taxonomies."⁵⁶ The days of high structuralism have undoubtedly passed and the research conducted in the structuralist tradition is bound for trouble since that particular story has been developed to its ultimate and stories have been analyzed and classified to their most minuscule detail already, and thus the field can be seen as obsolete. In addition the structuralist viewpoint has led to other dilemmas which are not fruitful to discuss here. The second competing story argues that narratology has merely entered a state of crisis and recent research has focused on those areas classical narratology chose to ignore, or was not able to explore. These include, for example, types of narratives that were not earlier recognized as stories at all, or the extra textual effects of narrative on its reader among a multitude of other topics.

One must recognize the problems involved in using narratology as a paradigm for further research and broaden and diversify the conception of stories and provide new ways to analyze both their structures and effects. Narratology has only moved with the times from its classical structural phase into postclassical or post-modern phase. This phase may not be as enthusiastic and even utopian as that of the semiological revolution of the 1960's, but compensates by not even trying to aim for any kind of unified grand theory which would once and for all explain

⁵⁵ Czarniawska (2004) p. 40-41

⁵⁶ Herman (1999) p. 2

everything within every kind of narrative. Narratology has become a more open-ended project and focuses on the areas that have been overlooked by using a more multidisciplinary approach.⁵⁷ This is where narratology needs to develop further. The tools of narrative analysis have to be boldly applied across the occasionally rigid lines between disciplines and assail new topics. When applied to politics more vigorously, narratology might open new vistas in understanding political leadership, for example. We tend to see politics as an altruistic system that functions rationally and with logic to make life better for each citizen. If we would gain more insight into the system by which stories operate in us and change our lives as political subjects, perhaps hitherto unforeseen vistas could open for us as the rationality of political decision-making is questioned by the study of those narratives which are used to excite political passions and power plays. Stories play a larger role in our lives as citizens and political subjects that we often even comprehend. They largely create who we are through establishing themselves as “common sense.”

1.1. DEFINING NARRATIVE AND ITS INTERNAL STRUCTURE

Philosophy ages; Poetry rejuvenates.⁵⁸
-Mohammad Allama Iqbal

The mere concept of what constitutes a narrative varies greatly throughout different theories. For Gerald Prince a narrative is the “representation of at least two real or fictive events or situations in a time sequence, neither of which presupposes or entails the other”⁵⁹ In earlier writings he has claimed that three conjoined events are required. The first and third events are stative so, that the third is the inverse of the first, and only the second event is active. These events are organized in such a way that the first event precedes the second which in turn precedes the third and actually causes it.⁶⁰ Mieke Bal adds to this by defining an event as “the transition from one state to another state, *caused or experienced by actors.*”⁶¹ Here is an important addition, because events or narratives themselves would contain no meaning, if they did not happen to someone or were not caused to happen by someone. There needs

⁵⁷ Herman (1999) p. 2-3

⁵⁸ Iqbal (1992) p. 92

⁵⁹ Prince (1982) p. 4

⁶⁰ Prince (1973) p. 31

⁶¹ Bal (1997) p. 182 Italics mine.

to be someone experiencing the event for it to have significance. However, lot more complicated definitions for narrative exist. David Herman argues that a narrative consisting solely on transformations of events would not be a narrative. In his recognizable style Herman writes that “Stories, rather, interweave states, events, and actions, with different narrative genres creating different patterns of propositions about states, (intentional) behaviours, and (unintended) occurrences, as well as more or less underspecified representations of actions.⁶² Events alone could not make for narrative and neither could a text consisting entirely of actions be called a story.⁶³ For Herman the minimum condition of a narrative can be defined as the “thwarting of intended actions by unplanned, sometimes unplannable, events, which may or may not be the effect of other participants intended actions.”⁶⁴

Labov and Waletzky present us with a workable diagram about the structure of the narrative. The originating function of the narrative is reacted to with telling the originating section, which is followed into the apex of the narrative by the complication of the story. It is most often the evaluation which is the high point of the narrative where action is suspended. After that the narrative proceeds into its resolution and by the means of the coda returns to the point in time where the narrative was first elicited.⁶⁵ Labov and Waletzky’s minimal narrative with a complication and a resolution is exemplified with “He hit me hard and I hit him back.” The more complex the narrative is, the more likely it is to follow the pattern first described.⁶⁶

Nevertheless, the minimum requirements of the narrative for my purposes can be found in the two examples given by Prince above. The second example gives us a closure, a sense of a story reaching some kind of “result” or a conclusion and in the first one the story gives the impression of continuing still. Both are in a way opposed to Todorov’s description of an ideal narrative, which begins with a stable situation that is disturbed by some outside force and this intrusion leads to a state of disequilibrium. By another force that is directed into converse or opposing direction than the equilibrium, it is re-established anew. The second state of equilibrium, or

⁶² Herman (2002) p. 82-83

⁶³ Herman (2002) p. 83

⁶⁴ Herman (2002) p. 84

⁶⁵ Labov-Waletzky (2006) p. 37

⁶⁶ Labov-Waletzky (2006) p. 37

the end state, is not identical to the first, although it is quite similar.⁶⁷ For Todorov there is no necessity for such clear inversion, while Czarniawska allows that the only similarity between the initial equilibrium and the resulting one is that there indeed exists equilibrium. The latter may as well be a reverse of the first.⁶⁸ The end state of the story can be practically almost indistinguishable from the initial state, or alternatively so different, that the only thing in common is the state of equilibrium itself. The story of the American way of life that Reagan tells fits into this pattern very well. The initial state is the original sinlessness, in which the American is in touch with his family, community, and God, and freed to pursue his dreams as liberated to do so by the Declaration of Independence. The government causes the shift into disequilibrium by intervening on the rights and the freedom the citizen enjoys by limiting them. The American Revolution continued in Reagan's administration's politics will be the converse force that eventually will bring harmony into the society again. Herein lies the uniqueness of Reagan's prophetic narrative, and yet it conforms well into Todorov's basic narrative. The initial state and the eventual state are not identical. There is a difference and in Reagan's telling the two stable states of bliss are different, because the latter somewhat surprisingly is qualitatively better. The tomorrow in Reagan's prophetic tale is always better than yesterday. "And it's no exaggeration to say that we stand at the outset of a new golden age -- a golden age of freedom that is sweeping across both the old world and the new."⁶⁹ Therefore the golden past is transformed into a more glorious future in the process of narration.

This definition of a "basic narrative" is perhaps not sufficient when one undertakes to study the use of narratives in politics. Labov and Waletzky argue that a narrative which "contains only an orientation, complicating action, and result is not a complete narrative [...] Such a narrative lacks significance: it has no point."⁷⁰ In order for the narrative to have a point it should be told as an answer to some *stimulus* from the outside, and in order to establish some personal point of interest. It often is designed in a manner as to emphasize the strange and unusual character of

⁶⁷ Todorov (1981) p. 51

⁶⁸ Czarniawska (2004) p. 19

⁶⁹ Reagan (7.5.1985) Remarks to Community Leaders in Madrid, Spain
<http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1985/50785b.htm>

⁷⁰ Labov-Waletzky (2006) p. 28

the situation.⁷¹ Very often this type of definition would exclude a lot of stories. After all, how many times in the course of our lives are we forced out of politeness to listen to a story which has no point, nor meaning? But, the argument essentially is sound. To have any impact, a political narrative has to have some significance, it has to argue a point, and it cannot just be a long winded yarn, if things are to be changed with the telling of the story. Labov and Waletzky want to add into the narrative structure the means of making its importance explicit. For them, the *evaluation* of the narrative is the part of the narrative "that reveals the attitude of the narrator towards the narrative by emphasizing the relative importance of some narrative units as compared to others."⁷² The aspect of evaluation is to some degree emphasized in the political narratives, where the story of states, actions, and events may not suffice to clearly spell out the importance of the story. When the political narrator adds an evaluation section into his narrative, he can more effectively point out what is important in the narrative and make its meaning or "lesson" more explicit. He can guide the interpretation process of his listeners by including into the narrative he tells a "preferable" version of interpretation ready-made for the story recipients to accept.

Perhaps the most famous –as well as the most simplified - narrative in the history of politics was Caius Julius Caesar summarizing an entire military campaign in three words: "*Veni, vidi, vici.*" While this story is in its simplicity still more elaborate than it would have to be, according to the minimum requirements of the narrative, (since it provides the narrative with all three Aristotelian components, the beginning, the middle and the end which provides closure,) it is yet not powerful as a story, but usually works only as a quotation. It indirectly implies to the state which existed before Caesar arrived, indeed it gave the reason for Caesar's arrival. Just as well it only hints to the equilibrium Caesar created by conquering. But instead of only the one necessary action to be called a narrative this offers three different actions; arriving, seeing and conquering. But for the purposes of narrative political leadership the stories told need to be more than basic descriptions of states, events, and actions. To actually lead the people with storytelling, the stories need to be elaborately constructed and bestowed with minuscule detail and true talent in the telling. The stories must be as easy and simple or difficult and multifaceted as the

⁷¹ Labov-Waletzky (2006) p. 29

⁷² Labov-Waletzky (2006) p. 33

purposes they are told to attain. In the discussion of the essential characteristics of a story or a narrative Sacks offers a good addition by claiming that a story always takes more than one sentence to tell, and that the initial challenge for a storyteller is to extend the story beyond that one sentence in order to create a full-blown telling of what he will communicate.⁷³

Aristotle's idea of a fable is a combination of incidents which creates an imitation of an action that is complete and entire with a certain magnitude. In order to be entire the fable has to have a beginning, middle, and an end. By saying "entire", he means that the story ought to form a complete whole.⁷⁴ Aristotle argues that,

A beginning is that which does not necessarily suppose anything before it, but which requires something to follow it. An end on the contrary, is that which supposes something to precede it, either necessarily or probably, but which nothing is required to follow. Middle is that which both supposes something to precede and requires something to follow. The poet, therefore, who would construct his fable properly, is not at liberty to begin or end where he pleases, but must conform to these definitions.⁷⁵

Another classical source, Horace, disputes Aristotle's assertion that the narrator should begin the storytelling at the beginning of the events. For Horace the narration should always begin *in medias res*, in the middle of the things it portrays. This is not as easy. Choosing the place where to start the telling the story defines the narrative, and thus it is not always beneficial to start in the middle. Molly Andrews writes about the events of 9/11 as a beginning for a new story used to vitalize the national narrative. She notes that the shape the story takes is highly dependent on the starting point. The story would be different if one allows stories like Chalmer Johnson's book "Blowback" to enter into an intertextual relationship.⁷⁶ If one begins telling the story from the moment the planes crashed into the World Trade Centre towers, the story is completely different than when it takes into account the American behaviour globally during, for example, the previous ten or twenty years. A story that begins in 2001 requires no soul-searching, but allows a celebration of national identity, because those who participated in the massacre did so because they

⁷³ Holstein-Gubrium (2000) p. 132

⁷⁴ Aristotle (1940) p. 17-18, 46

⁷⁵ Aristotle (1940) p. 17-18

⁷⁶ Johnson (2000). Johnson predicts using the vocabulary of the CIA that the consequences of American imperialism and/or dominance globally will result in violent actions against the USA

allegedly resented the freedom America stands for.⁷⁷ One could perhaps oversimplify by saying that if one starts to tell the story even before the events it describes are set in action, the story would be more comprehensive. But choosing the point of commencement for a story is a political decision and once it is done correctly, a lot of politically sensitive material can be excluded from the story and resulting story world. The ability to choose the right time to initiate the story and at the same time to focalize the starting point of the story in the most suitable spot on the time line of the story is important for any political narrative, because it helps to create precisely the kind of story that will maximize the political gains.

Molly Andrews' notion of the importance of the beginning for the political story is enlightening. Stories need to have beginnings and endings from the focal point of their recipients. There is a sense of disappointment, if the story is not brought into conclusion. Likewise, if the story starts at a point the audience deems "wrong," it does not matter how well the story is told. It still remains a disappointment and leaves the audience unsatisfied. Even the entire meaning or moral lesson of the story can be altered or even spoiled by failing to locate the most beneficial starting point. From the focal point of the author or narrator of a political story there is even more importance. The beginning and the end define the story in a very concrete manner. As Barthes has remarked, the beginning of a narrative is "an extremely sensitive point."⁷⁸ Beginnings and endings need to be chosen with a clear view of which story the politician wants to tell. The political strategy lies in making these choices.⁷⁹ However, there is more importance yet in the beginning, because the ending can sometimes be left open. If we take the tale of the Hansel and Gretel as an example, by switching the starting point of the story it can tell us of the inhumane cruelty children exhibit toward a hermit-like old lady as they fry her in her own oven. The huge metanarrative of the American experience that I try to burrow into starts most commonly either with the Puritans landing in New England, or at the time when the Declaration of Independence was signed. These are prestigious moments in American history and sources of many of the national myths.

⁷⁷ Andrews (2007) p. 108-109

⁷⁸ Barthes (1977) p. 129

⁷⁹ Andrews (2007) p. 187

All plotlines should not be tied up at the end point, because imagining a definite end may create a too-perfect satisfaction with the present and exclude the need for progress. Both Louis Mink and Hayden White agree that the world is presented to us “as mere sequence without beginning or end or as sequences of beginnings that only terminate and never conclude.”⁸⁰ It is up to us as storytellers and story recipients to emplot these sequences, that is, to set the beginnings and endings into such places as best fit our storytelling. According to Louis Mink “stories are not lived but told. Life has no beginnings, middles and ends.”⁸¹ To create a coherent and plausible story these elements have to be placed at politically right junctures in the timeline of the sequences in order. As Andrews notes, “the lifeblood of politics demands constant movement; the narrative must always be unfolding, a perpetual process of renegotiation, reconstruction, and retelling.”⁸² In the particular case of Reagan’s prophetic politics this is exceptionally true. His politics were based on portraying every moment as a moment of choice and the future would get better and better progressively. There could not be endings in his political story, because to narrate endings would have stunted progress and would contradict with Reagan’s eternal optimism of things getting better and better. Instead of an ending the “closure” suggested by Jacques Derrida fits political storytelling. The closure is ever changing and anything within it can continue indefinitely. Derrida argues that a book cannot end anymore than writing can begin. The closure is positioned at the end of the story, but does not put an end to the story itself. It only causes the process of telling to cease. Once a story is put into writing the text excludes meanings and events.⁸³

To extrapolate this thought, one may argue that closures are important to political narratives, because there needs to exist some “endpoint”, where meanings of earlier events are formulated since politics traditionally aims at making things better in a teleological manner. The closure allows the story to continue after this evaluative moment and offers another advantage as well. It creates a nexus in the web of stories where it is possible to change the direction and even the function of story by switching storylines and plotlines. I shall return later to this idea when discussing story worlds in further detail. By avoiding the end, which is absolute in

⁸⁰ White. Cited in Polkinghorne (1988) p. 68

⁸¹ Mink. Cited in Polkinghorne (1988) p. 68

⁸² Andrews (2007) p. 189

⁸³ Derrida (1988) p. 21-22

its nature, the story can take off again and at every closure there exists *in potentia* another expectable horizon for the story. In Reagan's narratives every political decision made by the congress or any other minor or major victory as an achievement or a milestone in the road to the glorious future can be seen as a point of closure, which opens up new vistas of things to achieve and choices to make. If the story would be narrated so as to have an ending, a *fait accompli*, there would be no need for politics anymore, since the ultimate goal would have been reached. By using closures a skilful political narrator can turn his narration into a never-ending story of political progress where the ending in form of something concrete is replaced with the elusive beginning of an age of glory.

Barthes seems to be talking about closures as well when he criticizes the Western need to "writing 'the end.'"⁸⁴ In our cultural model there seems to be a necessity to participate in setting forth the end of every action. He uses words like conclusion, interruption, closure and *dénouement* to describe how the writerly text declares itself to be historical. By superimposing an ending the text tries to gain permanence so that it could not be altered or subverted without a scandal by creating artificial places, where the action would seemingly stop at the same time as telling about it.⁸⁵

We've done our part. And as I walk off into the city streets, a final word to the men and women of the Reagan revolution, the men and women across America who for 8 years did the work that brought America back. My friends: We did it. We weren't just marking time. We made a difference. We made the city stronger, we made the city freer, and we left her in good hands. All in all, not bad, not bad at all. And so, goodbye, God bless you, and God bless the United States of America.⁸⁶

As a farewell address to the nation this text can be considered to be the "ending" of Reagan's presidential narration. According to Rabinowitz, there exists a widely applicable interpretive convention that sees these last presidential words as a "conclusion", which aims to sum up the entire work's meaning. Rabinowitz stresses the notion that readers assume that authors put their best thoughts last instead of author actually crystallizing or summing up his points.⁸⁷ Reagan's farewell address seems to work in the way of trying to sum up his administrations accomplishments. Endings can be superimposed on a story later as well. Among Reaganites such an

⁸⁴ Barthes (1974) p. 52

⁸⁵ Barthes (1974) p. 52

⁸⁶ Reagan (11.1.1989) Farewell Address to the Nation
<http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1989/011189i.htm>

⁸⁷ Rabinowitz (1987) p. 160-161

end often is portrayed to lie in the collapse of the Soviet empire as Reagan's ultimate achievement. Reagan is often seen in these stories as the man who ended the Cold War. In a similar manner his story is picked up and continued anew. George H. W. Bush chose to a large degree to continue the Reaganesque storytelling in his own politics. Even if the telling finished when Reagan's presidency ended, there was no end to the story, only a closure and Bush took advantage of this, while he was not able to continue the story in such a plausible manner. While Reagan's narration ended with his farewell to the nation, the story itself continued with only a change in the narrator. Thus, George H. W. Bush took over the responsibilities of the presidential narration after this point of closure in the story.

As Wallace Martin notes, the author or the narrator is not after all so confined to the endings either. Sometimes good stories end in a very disappointing manner. A good example from popular literature would be the seven-volume series spanning thousands of pages by Stephen King, "The Dark Tower," where the author himself recommends to his readers not reading the epilogue, where the story draws to a close. At the same time author is able to alter the endings at will and without having to change the events that lead up to them, like Dickens did in "Great Expectations." The ending, no more than the beginning, is not set for a narrative. "The idea that narration involves a structural integration from beginning to end would seem to be at best dubious."⁸⁸ The story no longer has to follow the Aristotelian definition, because our literature has evolved (or regressed) to a point where a wider variety of stories are recognized for what they are. In addition to that, our world view allows stories to better take new directions at each point of closure and continue further and further.

In connection with the endings, especially in folktales and many other stories as well, there exists the purpose of the story. In many of the stories we tell our children and each other, there is a moral lesson to be learned. Occasionally the teaching of the story does not even reach for the moral plane, but aims at giving a more down to earth lesson concerning the behaviour and actions one should take in one's daily life. The closure of the story can attain this function as well. Sometimes the lesson may be subtle by nature and sometimes the face of the story recipient is

⁸⁸ Martin (1987) p. 83-84

rubbed in it. In political narratives the lesson often is there to be learnt, and it can be either so vague that it affects the way of thinking almost on a subconscious level, or it can be spelled out in detail. When Reagan spoke of the Soviet Union as the focus of evil in the modern world, the lesson was crystal clear, but the agenda may be hidden a lot deeper. Nevertheless, a large part of the political importance and effect of the storytelling lies in the lessons and teachings the narrative tries to convey to the story recipients. The lesson is often based in the entire narrative, but its existence is not tied to the ending or closure as such. The lesson can be taught gradually, each point of the storyline may add to the amount of “learning” instead of an ending which would draw conclusions.

Claude Bremond sees all narrative sequences either as of improvement or of deterioration. An improvement sequence begins with a lack or disequilibrium and finally establishes equilibrium, which can either be the end of the story or the equilibrium may again be disturbed and deterioration follows. At each state the story may start a new period of improvement, or the situation can deteriorate until a rock bottom stage is reached, and the story either has to end, or improvement sequence must take place. In theory a story construed like this can go on forever.⁸⁹ The difference to Todorov is that the initial state is disequilibrium in this model, but this does not have to be an unsurpassed object. It is just a question of the point where to begin the process of storytelling. Bremond’s model makes stories not circular, but theoretically able to continue forever with improvements or deteriorations taking place and making the story linear but gradual, and the essential sameness of each period allows the narration to start at any moment without leaving the story lacking in credibility. The narrator does not have to go back in time to the very beginnings like the bad speaker, who begins his speech talking about the “ancient Romans.” The politician can take any moment of actual time as the reference point of his narration and portray it as a moment of either disequilibrium or equilibrium. This is basically what Reagan does when he portrays every moment as “a Time of Choosing.” In every moment lies the political choice for the citizens, and that choice determines whether the story gains a sequence of improvement or deterioration.

In the days just ahead, whether we like it or not, you and I are going to write a page in history. It can describe the rise and fall of the United States of

⁸⁹ Rimmon-Kenan (1983) p. 27

America or it can be a recital of our finest hour. Men will live a thousand years in the shadow of our decision.⁹⁰

This lies at the heart of narrative prophetic policymaking. The politician gives at least the impression that the citizen plays an interactive role in the story, and that his decision will determine the direction of the story. In each moment lies the beginning of a new narrative path and a choice. Every decision made in politics is then a moment of closure, where improvement or deterioration commences or continues. These are the knots of the story web which allows for radically altering the direction of the story.

If the typology proposed by Kenneth and Mary Gergen were adopted, there would be only three prototypical narrative forms; the progressive narrative, the regressive narrative, and the stability narrative. Actual plots would then be composed by combining these rudimentary forms in various ways. In progressive narrative there is a goal and progress towards it is enhanced, in regressive hindered or impeded, and in stability narrative there is no change.⁹¹ This does not sound meaningful in the specific case of Reagan's narration, since there is only continuous progress, and has to be, if the story is to remain meaningful. But the threat of regression is always there, since it is at the heart of prophetic narration. "What a great moment we have before us, and, oh, how future generations will dishonour us if now in a moment of sudden folly we throw it all away."⁹² While the threat of things going wrong with only one wrong decision is always there, the actual occurring of stagnation and regression must be avoided in the narratives told by political leaders. They are tools for the political counter-narrator to use in order to supplant the previous occupant of a prestigious political position. The story cannot be allowed to pause and enter a moment of where progress is not made. The narration must go on and portray the politics as progressing constantly. At a time like Iran-Contra scandal, or rather at the time when Tower Board was investigating it, Reagan did not make many public appearances and avoided speechmaking, the story about moving to the future lost a lot of momentum and politics faltered as well. Story, like the apocryphal show, must always go on.

⁹⁰ Speech draft, no date. Box 43 Subseries E, Reagan, Ronald: Pre-presidential papers, Series I Speeches and writings, Ronald Reagan Library

⁹¹ Polkinghorne (1986) p. 168

⁹² Reagan (14.9.1988) Remarks at a Republican Party Rally in Cape Girardeau, Missouri <http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1988/091488e.htm>

Seymour Chatman makes an interesting argument about the Aristotelian notion of a story containing a beginning, middle and an end. He claims that such a thing applies to narratives only, that is “story-events as imitated, rather than real actions themselves, simply because such terms are meaningless in the real world.”⁹³ We have all felt the disappointment when at the end of an episode of our favourite weekly TV-series the words “to be continued” appear on a screen. We want our stories to have endings, clear and definite endings instead of things left hanging in the air. The traditional ending of a bed-time story, “and they lived happily ever after” is a definite *endpunkt* of the story. Even when our story tries to convey actions, events, and happenings from the real life, we have to turn what we tell into a story and thus give the events, actions and happenings a beginning and an end. We have to turn the things from the “real life” and “real world” into narrative constructs within the story world. We have to “story” them in the telling. While the actual ending is not a prerequisite of a political narrative, especially when it is so intertwined with the life story of the politician as was in the case of Reagan, we still yearn for endings. It seems to be an inbuilt factor of our human condition. Naturally a prophetic politician can sprinkle his metanarrative with smaller anecdotes and ministories which satisfy at least to some degree our hunger for clear endings while allowing the large narrative to continue and continue. Because the metanarrative behind Reagan’s politics is the grand myth of America and the American Dream, it must be narrated to continue unaltered from generation to another as prophetic politics will bring its realization for everyone closer and closer. Thus the closures must be confined to the more down-to-earth anecdotes the storytelling is sprinkled with.

An interesting aspect of the theory of Labov and Waletzky is its addition of the *coda* into the structure of the narrative. The coda takes place at the end of a narrative. Many narratives end with a resolution section. The resolution may as well coincide with the evaluation or be a separate part of the narrative. Usually the actual sequence of the states, actions, and events described in the narrative does not extend to the present, and a coda can work as a “functional device for returning the verbal perspective to the present moment.”⁹⁴ In the simplest case the coda may tell us that “they lived happily ever after,” but it would be a misunderstanding to view all codas

⁹³ Chatman (1978) p. 45

⁹⁴ Labov-Waletzky (2006) p. 35

as such uncomplicated punch lines. A coda is not a description of events nor does it answer to questions of what has happened. Reagan used many codas to tie his narratives of the past golden ages into the present of America. In his version codas, however, are primarily used not only to tie the past into the present by bringing the story time up to the time of the telling. Reagan's codas more often than not tie the past directly into the glorious future, while only stopping briefly in the time of the telling tend gain momentum into the future.

And come January, when I saddle up and ride off into the sunset -- [laughter] -- it will be with the knowledge that we've done great things. We kept faith with a promise as old as this land we love and as big as the sky, a brilliant vision of America as a shining city on a hill. Thanks to all of you, and with God's help, America's greatest chapter is still to be written, for the best is yet to come.⁹⁵

Coda is not the only way to end a narrative and it is not even appropriate in all occasions. Coda can be described as marking the transition from the story world into the real world. The story recipient exits the story world, and is returned to the present with a coda. In addition Reagan often used what I could call rather more tangibly an “exit story,” a little anecdote that is designed to leave the audience smiling, and which can terminate a political speech at a desirable moment. This was not meant to allow the story recipient to exit, but him. It allowed Reagan to slip out of the situation and the moment of narration and leave. An example could be:

This little girl gave me a great deal of advice on what to do and how to handle the problems that I would meet – 11 years old – and then she just said, “Be happy that you’re not God.” And with that, she wound up with a P.S. in her letter. She said, “Now, get back to the Oval Office and get to work.” So I will.⁹⁶

This is one of Reagan's favourite exit-lines from speech situations. He told it almost unflinching at the end of his speeches on informal occasions to visitors to the White House. Some other versions of the story explain more clearly that this advice was from a letter Reagan received from a little girl. An important thing to note is that this was one of those stories that kept its shape well and was told and retold during all the years of the Reagan presidency, while most of the stories fell out of use at some point.

⁹⁵ Reagan (1.12.1988) Remarks at a Dinner Honoring Representative Jack F. Kemp of New York <http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1988/120188c.htm>

⁹⁶ Reagan (15.9.1982) Remarks at a White House Ceremony Celebrating Hispanic Heritage Week. s. 1158

1.1.1. NARRATIVE, STORY, AND DISCOURSE

I sometimes think that an awful lot of us in this country today, if not the world, are sort of like a writer who has come to a great plot problem and is really stuck and doesn't know how to make it work and finally goes back and does a little studying of the pages previously written and discovers that maybe the plot was based on a false premise.⁹⁷

-Ronald Wilson Reagan

The most common distinction made in narratology between the sequence of actions or events told about, and the means by which these are told, is the “story-discourse dichotomy.” It is usually portrayed so that “story” refers to characters, events, and settings, or the content, and “discourse” refers to the form of expression, presentation, or narration of the story.⁹⁸

Gerard Genette commonly uses *récit* translated as “narrative”.⁹⁹ For him narrative means three different things. First it refers to the narrative statement in oral or written discourse, which undertakes to tell of an event or events. Secondly it refers to the succession of real or fictitious events, which are the subjects of discourse, and to their interrelations. Thirdly it once again refers to an event, but in this case an event, that consists of someone recounting something or, in other words, the act of narrating itself. All of Genette's work focuses on the first of these meanings.¹⁰⁰ His choice of vocabulary uses “story” to refer to the signified of narrative content, and “narrative” “for the signifier, statement, discourse or narrative text itself, and to use the word *narrating* for the producing narrative action and by extension, the whole of the real or fictional situation in which that action takes place.”¹⁰¹

In another sense a story is the content, and narrative is the form in which a story is presented by narrating action or in a wider sense producing “the real or fictional situation” which could be labelled a story world. Northrop Frye writes that form has two complementary terms; content and matter. Form itself can be thought

⁹⁷ Speech, “Californai Council for Adult Education, International Hotel 12 March 1966”, p. 99, Folder: 1966 Campaign: RR speeches and statements, Book I (3), Box C30, Research Unit, Ronald Reagan Governor's papers, Ronald Reagan Library

⁹⁸ Polkinghorne (1986) p. 90-91

⁹⁹ The original french term “*récit*” in some cases within narratology is used to refer to “story” as is the case with Claude Bremond.

¹⁰⁰ Genette (1980) p. 25-26

¹⁰¹ Genette (1980) p. 27

of as either a shaping or a containing principle. “As shaping principle, it may be thought of as narrative organizing temporally [...] the matter of his [the poet] song. As containing principle it may be thought of as meaning, holding the poem together in a simultaneous structure.”¹⁰² Rabinowitz uses form to refer to the shape of the work as perceived by the reader either during reading, or, after it having reworked its elements into a coherent pattern.¹⁰³ Story and narrating exist for Genette only by means of the intermediary of narrative, but the narrative discourse can only exist, when it tells a story. Thus, the analysis of narrative discourse for Genette is “a study of the relationships between narrative and story, between narrative and narrating and [...] between story and narrating.”¹⁰⁴

In the words of Seymour Chatman a story is the “content or chain of events (actions, happenings), plus what may be called the existents (characters, items of setting)” and discourse is “the expression, the means by which the content is communicated. In simple terms, the story is the *what* in a narrative that is depicted, discourse the *how*.”¹⁰⁵ Or, elsewhere, Chatman claims that “story is the content of the narrative expression, while discourse is the form of that expression.”¹⁰⁶ Donald E. Polkinghorne sees discourse as a unit of utterance: it is something written or spoken that is larger than a sentence. “A discourse is an integration of sentences that produces a global meaning that is more than that contained in the sentences viewed independently.”¹⁰⁷ For him narrative is one form of discourse, and unlike the levels of words or sentences, discourse is the only level where understanding can be gained by sentences being organized into meaningful wholes. Indeed, Labov sees narratives as “privileged forms of discourse.”¹⁰⁸ “Combinations of sounds and marks” produce words, certain rules are needed to turn individual words into sentences, and only the level of discourse, with its own rules, is able to produce higher-order meanings. But in order for this order to be created, there has to be the presence of a hearer and speaker, or author, who draws on communal conventions, with the mutual expectation that both symbolize meaning according to the same set

¹⁰² Frye (1957) p. 83

¹⁰³ Rabinowitz (1987) p. 110

¹⁰⁴ Genette (1980) p. 29

¹⁰⁵ Chatman (1978) p. 19. Italics in the original

¹⁰⁶ Chatman (1978) p. 23

¹⁰⁷ Polkinghorne (1988) p. 31

¹⁰⁸ Labov (2006) p. 76

of transforming covenants, and only then narrative meaning emerges from the discourse.¹⁰⁹

This is the task for Reagan or any political narrator; he has to help special meanings emerge from the discourse with their political implications. The creation of special meanings is the purpose of prophetic politics. The ordinary or mundane components of our existence need to be turned into something meaningful and even spectacular. Chatman further divides the discourse part of the narrative into two subcomponents, the narrative form itself and its manifestation. Form is the structure of narrative transmission and manifestation its appearance in a specific medium. Narrative transmission concerns things like the source of authority for the story, narrative voice, and point of view, among others, and Chatman admits that the medium has an influence of the transmission.¹¹⁰ Ultimately he argues that a story can only truly exist as an abstract concept, since “any manifestation already entails the selection and arrangement performed by the discourse as actualized by a given medium.”¹¹¹ For A. J. Greimas discourse was “not only the place of manifestation of signification but at the same time the means of its transformation.”¹¹²

Prince defines the dichotomy between story and discourse so that story is the content plan of the narrative, the what of narrative, and the narrated. Discourse then is the expression plan of the narrative, how to narrate and the narrating itself. Catherine Kohler Riessman uses the term “story” within her own discourse to refer to oral narratives only, but this idea is not often used.¹¹³ These are often referred to in other terminology as *sjuzet* and *fabula* by Russian formalists following Vladimir Propp’s groundbreaking work on Russian folktales.¹¹⁴ Chatman translates them “fable” and “plot” and clarifies that fable is “basic story stuff, the sum total of events to be related in the narrative” and plot conversely is “the story as actually told by linking the events together.”¹¹⁵ *Fabula* and *sjuzet* are the two central aspects of a story. Jerome Bruner calls these the timeless and the eternal, and these elements are always in interplay.¹¹⁶ The third concept the Russian formalists used was the

¹⁰⁹ Polkinghorne (1988) p. 32-33

¹¹⁰ Chatman (1978) p. 22

¹¹¹ Chatman (1978) p. 37

¹¹² Greimas (1983) p. 131

¹¹³ Hyvärinen (2006) p. 18

¹¹⁴ Propp (1968)

¹¹⁵ Chatman (1978) p. 19-20

¹¹⁶ Bruner (1986) p. 17

forma. Bruner roughly translates the three as “theme, discourse, and genre.”¹¹⁷ It is the *sjuzet* that realizes the timeless *fabula* in the form of a plot and a net of language. The ancient themes of love, hate, jealousy, and loyalty get entangled into plotlines of characters representing their own times and discourses. According to Frank Kermode the joining of *fabula* and *sjuzet* in a story is like the blending of timeless mystery and current scandal.¹¹⁸

When we read an autobiography by Reagan or read his speeches which to a large degree contain autobiographical material we have to at the beginning try to ask of this and on any self-told life what genre it belongs to. “What is its *fabula* (or gist or moral or leitmotiv); how is it converted into an extended tale and through what uses of language; and into what genre is it fitted.”¹¹⁹ Myth is just as timeless as *fabula* and eternal as *sjuzet*, and these elements endow a narrative with the mythical qualities and thus take the myth out of time. I argue that for all of Reagan’s narration the *fabula* is America as shrouded in myths about itself, and the narrative is built around its almost sacerdotal duty in the world affairs.

It is this heritage that evokes the images of a much-loved land, a land of struggling settlers and lonely immigrants, of giant cities and great frontiers, images of all that our country is and all that we want her to be.¹²⁰ It is because of the mythical elements that Reagan’s America manages to escape time and still be the country of “struggling settlers.” The *fabula* is provided into the story by the mythical past of America and *sjuzet* is provided by Reagan when he sets the contemporary affairs of politics in contrast and interaction with the myth.

Alan Palmer adds the concept of the story world to story-discourse distinction,¹²¹ but there are also numerous other divisions by narratologists made by splitting the discourse plane into pieces such as text, narration, or textuality. Another difference between story and discourse for Palmer is that a story contains mental as well as physical events. In other words, story describes the characters’ reasons for the actions taken as well.¹²² For the purposes of analyzing political narratives the three-part model of Palmer is sufficient to separate the content of narration from the form of narration and also to add the results or outcomes of narration into the analysis.

¹¹⁷ Bruner (2006) p. 103

¹¹⁸ Bruner (2006) p. 103

¹¹⁹ Bruner (2006) p. 104

¹²⁰ Reagan (20.3.1981) Remarks at the Conservative Political Action Conference Dinner. s. 279

¹²¹ Palmer (2006) p. 18-19

¹²² Palmer (2006) p. 18-19, 76

For many theorists working in the field of narrative studies there is a wide variety of tendencies concerning the use of terms “story” and “narrative.” Jerome Bruner is among those who use the two terms synonymously.¹²³ Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan distinguishes story, text and narration from each other. Story is essentially a succession of events abstracted from the text and reconstructed in their chronological order, and a text is a spoken or written discourse, which undertakes the telling of these events. The text is “what we read”. Within a text, there is not necessarily any chronological order; participants are dispersed and all items of narrative content are filtered through some focalizer. Text can be either written or spoken, and thus implies someone who speaks or writes. This production of the text can be called narration. All three are connected. Only through the text does the reader acquire knowledge of the story and its objects and of the narration. But the text is in turn defined by the other two, because if it did not tell a story, it would not be a narrative, and without the actual process of narration, it would not be a text at all.¹²⁴ David Herman gives a different reading on the distinction of narrative and story. He sees story as mental representation and narrative as mediated representation and thus requiring a narrator and some form of narration to be present.¹²⁵ Chatman writes that “narratives are communications” and it is the story, which is communicated as the formal content element, and it is communicated by discourse as the formal expression element. “The discourse is said to state the story.”¹²⁶

E. M. Forster sees story as the backbone of all literary works. While his basic conception of a story, that is “a narrative of events arranged in their time sequence,” is too simplified for my purposes, his idea of criticisms one can make on a story, is more profound. The only merit a story can have is that its audience wants to know what happens next and its only fault is in not succeeding to perform that function.¹²⁷ Like the stories of Scheherazade, every story that can be judged “good” must be able to fascinate its audience and leave them yearning for more. It is only through this mechanism that the political storyteller is able to maintain his status.

¹²³ Bruner (2006) p. 99

¹²⁴ Rimmon-Kenan (1983) p. 3-4

¹²⁵ Hyvärinen (2006) p. 3

¹²⁶ Chatman (1978) p. 31-32

¹²⁷ Forster (1953) p. 29

Only as long as his stories leave the audience of citizenry asking for more, can he remain in political power.

The traditional vision concerning narratives ever since Aristotle claims that the events of a story constitute an array called “plot” (*mythos*) by “arrangement of incidents,” but structuralists argue that the arrangement is the operation performed by discourse, which is explained as the modus of representation. Discourse is essentially seen as having an inner structure which is qualitatively different from all and any of its possible and potential manifestations.¹²⁸

We need to understand the difference between story and discourse just as well as that between narrative and story and what part *sjuzet* and *fabula* play in turning a theme or a myth into a contemporary story. To some degree we can view the eternal *sjuzet* as the discourse which gets its particular expression in *fabula*; it is tied down into a story. While narrative is a description of events that someone recounts, it may not be political enough. Such a recount may tell of events that are interrelated but to make up connections between events that have no clear causality, Such as the revolution which spawned the independence of the United States of America and the Reagan Revolution, we need to emplot the events to create a sense of connection between them. Next we need to take a look at how to create a story with the help of a plot.

1.1.2. EMPLOTTING THE NARRATIVE

For Forster the plot is a highly developed creature. In Forster we can find the often used example of the dying king and queen. “The king died. The queen died.” These are just statements or descriptions of individual events. “The king died and then the queen died” is according to Forster, and many later theorists, a narrative or a story. It is only “The king died and then the queen died of grief” which creates a plot. When we consider the death of a queen, if it happens in a narrative, we tend to ask “and then?” If in a plot, we ask “why?”¹²⁹

Supposedly the plot demands intelligence and memory and thus could not be told to cavemen. It could not uphold the interest of the tyrannical sultan, or our contemporary apolitical citizenry, who need to be kept interested by “and then – and then –” type of structure. Our more interested and intellectual audience members

¹²⁸ Chatman (1978) p. 43

¹²⁹ Forster (1953) p. 82-83

want plots and according to later theorists such as David Herman, they are able to construct plots themselves out of plain and simple stories or construct the stories themselves out of isolated sentences. Polkinghorne claims that the “appropriate question to ask of them is what the events have *meant to someone*.”¹³⁰ It was argued by the structuralists that out of the story no deductions can be made concerning the intentions or perspective of the author and that everything is in the text itself. Nowadays perspectivalism is again in action and while one cannot be sure about the intentions of the author in the field of political storytelling, educated guesses are easy to make, and additionally some special emphasis on the plots of political narratives should concentrate on their affects to the society, what they have meant to the citizenry.

Polkinghorne defines “narrative” as a referent “to the process of making a story, to the cognitive scheme of the story, or to the result of the process [...] “narrative and its cognates refer to both the process and the results [...] the term story is equivalent to narrative.”¹³¹ He further notes that while “story” can carry connotations of unreality, fictionality and imaginary realms, he does not limit its meaning to these. Neither do I in my study.

But the distinction of a story and a storyline must be made explicit. Storylines are structured like complete stories but are restricted to one set of individuals. As soon as there are more than one character in the story events can become simultaneous and the story multilinear rather than unilinear.¹³² Reagan’s storytelling combines multiple metanarratives and stories as well as storylines. The American Dream can be thought of as one metanarrative. Reagan’s story of his realization of the Dream in his own life is a story composed of multiple storylines, for example that of his wife Nancy Davis Reagan. The storylines can intersect, interconnect and intermingle and the same applies to stories as well within the framework of the metanarrative thus forming what I later on will call a “story web.” It should be the aim of any political narrator to create as many storylines as possible to build a story web, which enables him to choose the most fitting storyline for each occasion that arises in the fast-paced world of contemporary politics. The stories to

¹³⁰ Polkinghorne (1986) p. 160. Italics mine

¹³¹ Polkinghorne (1988) p. 13

¹³² Rimmon-Kenan (1983) p. 16-17

use in leadership have to be established beforehand and already told into existence, so that they can be evoked instantaneously if the need arises.

While a story can be seen as an emplotted narrative and thus these two can be separated on the level of terminology, the story cannot in practice be separated from narrative since the separation of the “authentic from fictional [...] is purely theoretical. According to Genette every narrative introduces into its story an “emplotting”.¹³³ Paul Ricoeur echoes this view by claiming that “A story is made out of events to the extent that plot makes events into a story.”¹³⁴ Plot governs a succession of events within any story and connects them to the story. Donald E. Polkinghorne argues that a plot actually adds something into the narrative because the plot can weave into the narrative historical and social contexts and thoughts and feelings of people. “A plot has the capacity to articulate and consolidate complex threads of multiple activities by means of the overlay of subplots.”¹³⁵ This reads that most political texts have several plots, which have to get interconnected in some manner by the narrator. Well structured plots, whether by the narrator or the story recipient, or by both of them, are often connected to other plots. To follow this thought, every storied narrative with sufficiently complex structure acts as a metanarrative, because within it are many different emplotted narratives, that is stories, and these have to be interconnected as well. The more complex the storytelling evolves, the more the stories told start to have the shape and structure of spider webs, if one chooses to follow the storylines or plots and try to make sense on their interrelations. Along with other subplots the text draws subtexts or sub stories to it. When the plot weaves historical and social contexts into the story the stories told in the aforementioned contexts tend to get interwoven with the story as well and the result is a narrative network. As Barthes writes,

To interpret text is not to give it a [...] meaning, but on the contrary appreciate what *plural* constitutes it. [...] In this ideal text, the networks are many and interact, without any one of them being able to surpass the rest; this text is a galaxy of signifiers [...] we gain access to it by several entrances, none of which can be authoritatively declared to be the main one.¹³⁶

While each and every narrative needs to be emplotted to turn it into a story, a plot can also act as a tool for combining different narratives together. As long as there is

¹³³ Genette (1993) p. 27

¹³⁴ Ricoeur (1981). Cited in Ochs-Capps (2001) p. 207

¹³⁵ Polkinghorne (1987). Cited in Czarniawska (2004) p. 125

¹³⁶ Barthes (1974) p. 5

a unifying plot, many different storylines can be brought to co-exist and they are tied into a thicker strand of stories. With careful emplotting several smaller and “mundane” stories can be brought together to create a metanarrative or a “sacred story,” a concept of which I shall write more later on. A very complex but accurate definition of a plot and its meaning is offered by Polkinghorne and I cannot resist the temptation to quote it here in its entirety:

Plot is the logic or syntax of narrative discourse, it is a linguistic expression that produces meaning through temporal sequence and progression. Narrative discourse is one of the large categories or systems of understanding that we use in our negotiations with reality, most particularly in our negotiation with time. Narrative constructs meaning out of our time-boundedness and our awareness that human existence occurs within the limits of mortality. The emplotment of events into narrative form is so much a part of our ordinary experience that we are usually not aware of its operation, but only the experience of reality that it produces. We inherently accept that certain kinds of knowledge and truth can be understood only sequentially, in a temporal narrative unfolding. Plotting is an activity in which temporal happenings are shaped into meaningful units. It manifests itself not only in the construction of experience but also as conversations between people and their literary creations (primarily oral, but also written) that rely on experience: myths, fairy tales, stories, novels and histories. When we are in the role of hearers or readers of the narrative experiences – the creations – of others, we understand the stories through the linguistic processes we use in constructing our own narratives. We call this kind of understanding – of hearing the meaning of a story – hermeneutic understanding.¹³⁷

Plot is for Polkinghorne a narrative schema for organizing information. People explain their and others’ actions by means of creating plots. Thus every event is understood to have been properly explained when, and only when, its role and significance in relation to some human project is identified. Events in a story can naturally happen by themselves, but unless they are connected to some human action or endeavour, they remain outside the plot, in the background of the story. If narrative explanation of every event is configured among other events into a storylike causal nexus, a person is likely to account his actions in a narrative mode and events are explained by connecting them to their relations to other events. Narrative explanations unlike scientific ones tend to “exhibit an explanation instead of demonstrating it.”¹³⁸ Plot is the factor which efficiently collects and organizes states, actions, or events from the narrative world, and combines them into a more or less unified whole. As story recipients, we tend to get irritable by those things

¹³⁷ Polkinghorne (1986) p. 160

¹³⁸ Polkinghorne (1988) p. 21

within the narrative, which are not in direct relation to following the plot of the narrative. We want all the things told to us to be part of a unified whole, and plot is the factor which ultimately produces an illusion of unification and makes a story out of isolated events.

One must be careful when defining what a story must “be” in order to be a story. Jerome Bruner wants the constraint to be as loose as possible and therefore suggests that the most serviceable definition is that “narrative deals with the vicissitudes of human intentions.”¹³⁹ David Herman writes about narrativity and narrativehood of the story. Conceptually Herman defines narrativehood as the difference between sequenced events or scripts and a narrative, the essence of what makes a story a story. Narrativity means how readily a narrative can be processed as one.¹⁴⁰ Narrativehood is a binary predicate, something either is seen by the readers and listeners to be a narrative or not, while narrativity is a scalar predicate, so that a story can be more or less prototypically story-like. Narrativity can be correlated with the idea of “canonicity and breach,” so that to attain maximal narrativity, the story has to have a balanced combination of both. As Bruner put it, “For to be worth telling, a tale must be about how an implicit canonical script has been breached, violated or derived from.”¹⁴¹ Story starts to lose narrativity when it either uses too much stereo typicality or, at the other end of the spectrum is so particular that it “cannot help but stymie and amaze”¹⁴²

Ryan writes about the same thing distinguishing between being a narrative and possessing narrativity. Any semiotic object regardless of its medium can be a narrative if it is produced with the intent to create a response which involves the construction of the story. Possessing narrativity refers to the ability to inspire a narrative response.¹⁴³ Narrativehood and narrativity do not yet mean that a story is in anyway tellable. Stories about situations, events, and actions can be more or less tellable and at the same time display different degrees of narrativity. Tellability is another scalar predicate and “attaches to configurations of facts and narrativity to sequences representing configurations of facts.”¹⁴⁴ What does this mean?

¹³⁹ Bruner (1986) p. 16-17

¹⁴⁰ Herman (2002) p. 86

¹⁴¹ Bruner (1991) p. 11

¹⁴² Herman (2002) p. 90-91

¹⁴³ Ryan (2005) . Cited in Hyvärinen (2006) p. 4

¹⁴⁴ Herman (2002) p. 100

Simply that in the case of Reagan, the story about Soviet Union walking away from arms control negotiations is rather more tellable than, say, the gradual progress during one day of negotiations. If there are two contesting stories, for example one by Reagan and one by Gorbachev, about the walk-out from the negotiations at Reykjavik, one may be deemed to have more narrativity than the other.¹⁴⁵ This is only one example but many more abound in Reagan's politics even on such a scale, that one of the reasons for his "Teflon coating" may be hidden in narratives. When Reagan told a story about almost anything in the realm of politics, there were too few well-told counter narratives among the Americans. Even when some critic told a story of his own to counter that of the president, they were not told well enough to really contest the version of the same events told by Reagan, or, in other words, had less narrativity.

They [the Democrats] would have us believe that the days of growth and expansion in our land are a thing of the past. We must devote ourselves to a more equal sharing of what we have and accept a diminished standard of living. They preach a philosophy of resignation and despair; the sharing of scarcity instead of the creation of plenty. They have lost faith in the system handed to us by our fathers – they have lost faith in us.¹⁴⁶

If the political narrator is able to give his story recipients a prepared emplotment of the counter narrative, he can take the edge of that narrative. Thus trying to cue the participants to emplot and interpret narratives, both the ones told by himself and his opponents, is important to gain wider acceptance for the narrative political leadership.

A political narrator should tell stories of different genres and even manipulate his stories so that they might switch genres in the course of telling. This is beneficial, since when we consider a story to belong to a certain genre, this influences the way we understand the story. Genres are guidelines and story can be made to use several genres and fluctuate between them and this provides an asset for the political narrator.

Paul Ricoeur focuses on written narratives, and text is for him "primarily a work of discourse, that is a structured entity that cannot be reduced to a sum of

¹⁴⁵ On the plane back Reagan wrote himself a speech to be given to Americans concerning the halt in arms reduction negotiations which had stalled due to Reagan's unwillingness to compromise on SDI. It was an example of Reagan's aptitude that he could portray the meeting as a success.

¹⁴⁶ Speech, Folder Hannaford/CA HQ – R. Reagan Speeches – 4/6/1978, Eisenhower Silver Jubilee. Box 23, Ronald Reagan 1980 Campaign Papers, Series I, Ronald Reagan Library.

sentences that create it.”¹⁴⁷ The structure rests upon rules, which allow the narrative to be recognized as belonging to some kind of literary genre, or transgressing the boundaries of that genre. While texts within one genre are structured more or less similarly, as Vladimir Propp proved in the case of Russian folktales, they all have unique compositions, and when composition gets repeated in the work of the same author, one can speak of style.¹⁴⁸ In detective novels the story usually starts with finding a corpse and then the detective is brought into the story to discover “whodunit.” Slowly the reader finds out more and more about the dead character. If we took a story of “two star-crossed lovers,” *Romeo and Juliet*, the story really would not get wind beneath its wings, if it started by Juliet awakening and finding the self-poisoned Romeo next to her, i.e. by finding a corpse. A good definition for the word “genre” is offered by Jonathan Culler as

a conventional function of language, a particular relation to the world which serves as norm or expectation to guide the reader in his encounter with the text [...] Indeed, an account of genres should be an attempt to define the classes which have been functional in the processes of reading and writing, the sets of expectations which have enabled readers to naturalize texts and give them a relation to the world.¹⁴⁹

Genette argues that literature “like any other activity of the mind, is based on conventions of which, with some exceptions, it is not aware.”¹⁵⁰ These conventions can be thought of as not only implicit knowledge of the reader, but also as implicit knowledge of the authors. Whenever one writes something, he is engaged with some literary tradition or at least an idea. This is made possible by the existence of the genre that, “the author can write against, certainly, whose conventions he may attempt to subvert, but which is nonetheless the context within which his activity takes place.”¹⁵¹ Therefore, every writer has to operate with a genre or genres. There is no escaping the fact that different genres shape the stories told. Additionally genres, or rather the possibility given to a story recipient to mentally label a story as belonging to a certain genre, puts some practical restrictions on the narrator when he is shaping the narrative. Even when Reagan’s narration is transgressing the boundaries of genres, switching from one genre to each other, he is still in a way

¹⁴⁷ Czarniawska (2004) p. 69

¹⁴⁸ Czarniawska (2004) p. 69

¹⁴⁹ Culler (1975) p. 136

¹⁵⁰ Genette, cited in Culler (1975) p. 116. This is more or less the “political unconscious” of Frederic Jameson

¹⁵¹ Culler (1975) p. 116

bound to narrate so, that he is at least conscious of the rules of different genres while attempting not to remain bound within them. Indeed, he constantly tries to alter the specifics of genres as well. While the author or narrator can cross from one genre to another during his or her narration, he is still bound to some degree to the conventions, if only to be able to communicate the things he wishes to relay to the story recipients with minimal chances of being interpreted differently than is purposeful. Genres create a discourse of their own and the narrator cannot write or narrate from outside this discourse.

Stories are created by using other, older stories and their plotlines. But in order for these to be new stories, elements in the plots are changed to produce something different, instead of just copying the previous story. This causes the stories to “mutate,” and more and more different reproductions emerge.¹⁵² Even while the plotline remains the same, the story itself can be completely different. To take the example of Romeo and Juliet again, when the plotline is simplified enough, it is a story of boy meets girl, boy gets girl despite all the obstacles he has to cross. Even while the beginning and the middle remain unaltered, the double-poisoning at the end makes it a tragedy. Had they lived happily ever after, it might have been a fairytale. Even if the ending remains unaltered and only the setting changes from Verona to a star ship and year 3000, the story changes genre. It becomes science fiction. But the tragic elements are still there, so it must be a tragedy as well. It is hard to pin a story down to a genre and state that it indeed belongs to this genre and not that. The divide into genres as a typology is more or less only a guideline. One who researches narratives should not limit one’s options by labelling a story to belong to this or that genre. Indeed, stories can fluctuate between genres and the genre may be altered even in the course of the narration as a reaction to outside pressures, such as for example a change in the political atmosphere. Story does not have to belong to any certain genre -but putting a label on it makes the analysis easier.

In short, I will use the word “story” to refer to an emplotted narrative in my work. A story is something political which emerges after events in the political arena, or any other part of human experience, are told so that they create a unity out of the plurality of isolated happenings. This emplotment will have to be to some

¹⁵² See Polkinghorne (1986) p. 167

degree performed or at least aided or suggested by the narrator. The freer hands the audience is given to do the emplotting of what is being told to them, the more likely I am to write about “narrative.” A politician is likely to guide the emplotment of what he tells by guiding the audience to accept his mode of thought and policies. The less he emplots what he tells in advance, the more confident he must be in his ability to enthrall the citizenry with his narratives. It cannot be said that the more detailed in terms of its emplotment by the narrator the story is, the more political would its aspirations or intentions be. But one can safely say that a story with a highly detailed plotting by the narrator is more likely to try to inflict a change in politics than a story, which leaves a lot of the burden of emplotment to the narratee. The latter type of story may have even more profound political ramifications, but they might not be precisely of the type intended. Since there are always some contrasting counter narratives, it is beneficial for the prophetic politician to try to emplot them as well for his story recipients, and to do that in a manner most supportive towards his own narrative.

1.1.3. CHARACTER, ACTANT AND STORYWORLD PARTICIPANT

Now it is time to take look deeper within the stories themselves and search for the states, events, and especially actors within them. The upcoming section discusses the roles given to the characters involved in the stories told; the inhabitants of the story worlds, so to say. Who or what are the things that inhabit the stories, act, and live their lives in them? Greimas came up with the concept of “actants” which he organizes into four categories according to their functions; “subject”, “object”, “sender” and “receiver”. He sets subject and object in opposition to each other and likewise sender and receiver. These actants, along with predicates, are the things that organize signification into a structured whole on a higher level than that of mere classes and sememes. Furthermore, it is the actants and their interrelationships which “constitute the message as a signifying event, that is to say, as a drama [*spectacle*] of the event”¹⁵³ Actants are then the things which actually create a story as such. Later on Greimas adds to the four actants two “circumstants” of “helper” and “opponent.”¹⁵⁴ The category of actants is actually wider than that of a character,

¹⁵³ Greimas (1983) p. 146-147, 151

¹⁵⁴ Greimas (1983) p. 178

since actants do not actually have to be living things at all. In the story by Hemingway, *Old man and the sea*, the sea itself is an actant and could be categorized as “opponent”. Likewise, in Reagan’s narration “America” is not just a circumstance or the locus of the story, but an actant and, depending on the particular story he tells, it assumes different functions.

Story worlds are full of events and these are things that the actants do in the story worlds, or what is done to them in turn, or what just happens. Chatman argues that in the narrative sense “events are either *actions (acts)* or *happenings*. Both are changes of state.” If this is brought about by an agent, and is “plot-significant,” the agent that causes it is called a “character.”¹⁵⁵ So, a character emerges out of an inhabitant of the story world only by the means of action. A character becomes a character only when it plays a part in some event described. One could say that a story world inhabitant becomes a character only by acting or refraining from action and if the result of this is significant for the story, might even become an actant.

There are many different typologies of the actants or characters of a tale, and a more detailed structure can be found in the writings of Propp. He pointed out in his groundbreaking study of Russian folk tales that one specific characteristic of a tale is that “components of one tale can, without any alteration whatsoever, be transferred to another.”¹⁵⁶ While Propp’s analysis was limited to a very strict and exclusive genre of tales, the same argument applies to other types of tales as well. He uses as an example the witch, *Bába Jagá*, who appears in many different types of tales, but just as well the “component” of the tale could be Lincoln, or even the myth-laden concept of “America”. As a matter of fact, I suggest that while the analysis Propp performed naturally applies in its entirety only to Russian fairy tales, he has made significant points which can individually be extended to cover other genres as well.

Propp argues that a tale attributes often identical actions to various personages and that this makes it possible to study the tale “according to the functions of its *dramatis personae*.”¹⁵⁷ While there are many types of characters, they often perform similar functions and this “explains the two-fold quality of the tale: its amazing multiformity, picturesqueness, and colour, and on the other hand,

¹⁵⁵ Chatman (1978) p. 44. Italics in the original

¹⁵⁶ Propp (1968) p. 7

¹⁵⁷ Propp (1968) p. 20

its no less striking uniformity, its repetition.”¹⁵⁸ The *dramatis personae* are a variable, but the functions they have are more or less a constant. As a matter of fact, the *dramatis personae* are involuntary carriers of the tale, since their feelings and intentions do not have an effect in the course of action at all.¹⁵⁹ “Functions constitute the basic elements of the tale, the elements upon which the course of action is built.”¹⁶⁰ The functions are the fundamental components of the tale and their number is limited. This would help the researcher, since the accumulation of material could in theory be suspended at the time when new tales would present no new functions.¹⁶¹ This might be true in relatively simple folk tales within one cultural context, but in the case of political storytelling there is a wider array of functions created to elicit a wide variety of appropriate responses. Furthermore, for Propp, “one function develops out of another with logical and artistic necessity”¹⁶² and a politician should not allow the stories he tells to restrict the way in which his story is able to proceed in the future, if political circumstances change drastically.

We seldom refer to the *dramatis personae* or even actants when discussing any story but rather choose to use the expression “character.” Both the formalist and the structuralist viewpoints in general treat the characters within the narrative in a manner, which is perhaps too limited.¹⁶³ They argue that characters are essentially “products of plots, that their status is “functional”, that they are, in short, participants or *actants* rather than *personages*, that it is erroneous to consider them as real beings.”¹⁶⁴ I argue that in political narratives especially the characters are multifunctional from the viewpoint of the narrator. On occasion, like for example on the case of the creation of an “evil enemy,” it is necessary to depict characters as merely functional, non-individualistic, and not as real and actual human beings. Here the Proppian definition of a character as “product of what the tale requires him to do,” is fitting.¹⁶⁵ They only serve a function, that is, to manifest the enemy in an assailable form. On other occasions, for example in the creation of civil religion or

¹⁵⁸ Propp (1968) p. 20-21

¹⁵⁹ Propp (1968) p. 78

¹⁶⁰ Propp (1968) p. 71

¹⁶¹ Propp (1968) p. 23

¹⁶² Propp (1968) p. 64

¹⁶³ This statement is a generalization, since for example Roland Barthes shifted his thinking into a more psychological view of character and was by no means the only one. Barthes’s *S/Z* is a good example of this shift. But essentially in structuralism the characters are “slaves” to the structure and serve its needs rather than have deep meanings *an sich*.

¹⁶⁴ Chatman (1978) p. 111

¹⁶⁵ Propp (1968) p. 20

in the building of a national identity, the characters are rather portrayed as possessing immeasurably valuable inner qualities as humans. The Founding Fathers fit into this concept. Even in stories, they are more than the real people who once walked the earth. Reagan described the Founding Fathers, and through them the contemporary Americans as well, “little minds and timid men do not build great societies; only a great people can do that and we are a great people.”¹⁶⁶ The character cannot be always seen as either a functional concept or as a real-life person. It always depends upon the situation and the perspective and aim of the story.

Chatman argues for a theory of character which treats it as an autonomous being and not as a mere plot function. He claims that a character is “reconstructed by the audience from evidence announced or implicit in an original construction and communicated through the discourse.”¹⁶⁷ Thus character is created in the interplay between the narrator and the story recipient, but it is the narrator, who holds the keys to the construction of the character. He can to a large degree determine what the “product” by the story recipient will ultimately be like. The narrator offers all the valuable clues as construction blocks, and if he is skilful in storytelling, he can shape the product to his liking, and the story recipient may not even notice that his “free thought” is in any way tampered with.

Alasdair MacIntyre notes that certain social roles in the form of “stock characters” are to be found especially in the United States. They are culture specific and furnish us with recognizable characters, and the ability to recognize them is socially crucial, because knowledge of a character provides an interpretation of the actions of those individuals who assume a certain character. Character lays a moral constraint on the personality of those who inhabit them, and define in a very limited way the possibilities of action for those persons. Characters become “moral representatives of their culture,” because through them the moral ideas assume an embodied existence in the social and political world.¹⁶⁸ Reagan was because of his acting profession a particularly gifted politician in assuming multiple and varying characters to use when escaping from the confines of his role as a narrator, and entering his own story worlds as a character. He was not confined to the limits of

¹⁶⁶ Speech draft, no date. Box 43 Subseries E, Reagan, Ronald: Pre-presidential papers, Series I Speeches and writings, Ronald Reagan Library

¹⁶⁷ Chatman (1978) p. 119

¹⁶⁸ MacIntyre (1984) p. 27

“cowboy”, “conservative” or even “president” but able to remain in continuous flux or a state of metamorphosis switching from one type of character to another. The idea of “stock characters” is also illustrated by almost every hero or villain in Reagan’s speeches. They are only tools through which Reagan manipulates real people by translating their complicated lives into two-dimensional *dramatis personae* embodying only vices or virtues.¹⁶⁹ A fitting example of a virtuous type is the stock character of the “American hero” or “unknown soldier.” In the quotation Reagan shows how a social role can be imposed on a person; or rather a deceased person can be turned narratively into something that fits this function.

An American hero has returned home. God bless him.

We may not know of this man's life, but we know of his character. We may not know his name, but we know his courage. He is the heart, the spirit, and the soul of America.

Today a grateful nation mourns the death of an unknown serviceman of the Vietnam conflict. This young American understood that freedom is never more than one generation away from extinction. He may not have wanted to be a hero, but there was a need -- in the Iron Triangle, off Yankee Station, at Khe Sanh, over the Red River Valley.

He accepted his mission and did his duty. And his honest patriotism overwhelms us. We understand the meaning of his sacrifice and those of his comrades yet to return.

This American hero may not need us, but surely we need him. In Longfellow's words:

So when a great man dies,
For years beyond our ken,
The light he leaves behind him lies
Upon the paths of men.

We must not be blind to the light that he left behind. Our path must be worthy of his trust. And we must not betray his love of country. It's up to us to protect the proud heritage now in our hands, and to live in peace as bravely as he died in war.

On this day, as we honor our unknown serviceman, we pray to Almighty God for His mercy. And we pray for the wisdom that this hero be America's last unknown.¹⁷⁰

This case is a fitting example of the way Reagan turns actual people into character myths to use those myths to advance his policies. Barthes notes that the “myth hides nothing: its function is to distort, not make disappear.”¹⁷¹ The Unknown Soldier is no longer an actual person, he becomes part of a myth and specifically the signifier the myth requires. The signifier has two aspects. One, that is full, is meaning, and

¹⁶⁹ Erickson (1985) p. 51

¹⁷⁰ Reagan (25.5.1984) Remarks at a Ceremony Honoring an Unknown Serviceman of the Vietnam Conflict <http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1984/52584c.htm>

¹⁷¹ Barthes (1991) p. 121

the other, which is empty, is the form. The meaning is what gets distorted in mythmaking. The Unknown Soldier, astronauts on the Challenger Shuttle, or George Gipp,¹⁷² all these people are deprived of their history and changed into gestures. The form is not obliterated but not left as it was either. It also changes, because the concept needs its form. The soldier and Gipper remain in existence. “They are half-amputated, they are deprived of memory, not of existence.”¹⁷³ They are not longer what they once were in form, but they still have a form. Their meaning changes greatly but the form is altered as well, in between the lines of the narration.

More often than not Reagan’s storytelling aimed at not making some glorious hero the focal point of identification for the people, but rather by the means of narration turning normal, boringly average, people into heroes, so that people could more easily identify themselves with these “common heroes.” Reagan was always ready to assist his story recipient in feeling the heroism burn in his veins. Every single American could be a hero.

We don’t have to turn to our history books for heroes. They’re all around us [...] there are countless, quiet, everyday heroes of American life – parents who sacrifice long and hard so their children will know a better life than they’ve known; church and civic volunteers [...] millions who’ve made our nation and our nation’s destiny so very special – unsung heroes who may not have realized their dreams themselves but then who reinvest those dreams in their children.¹⁷⁴

Reagan’s true originality lies in his ability to take his rhetorical symbols and story *sjuzets* from the less exalted, if not even down to earth, areas of the daily lives of Americans and contemporary forms of folklore like movies or television. Reagan’s heroes are “unsung,” and often they are the true “salt of the earth.” As Reagan said, “I am never happier than when I come across a story that reaffirms my belief in the capacity of our people for great deeds.”¹⁷⁵ Perhaps it is this ability to create heroes

¹⁷² George Gipp was a character that Reagan got to play in one of his most memorable movies, “Knute Rockne – All-American.” Reagan even borrowed his nickname “the Gipper” from this character, a rebellious young man (but naturally smoothed over in the Hollywood presentation) who played football for Notre Dame and died young of pneumonia. A more thorough discussion on this character can be found in White (1998) p. 1-6

¹⁷³ Barthes (1991) p. 122

¹⁷⁴ Reagan (26.1.1982) Address Before a Joint Session of the Congress Reporting on the State of the Union. s. 78-79

¹⁷⁵ Radio address, Folder Speeches and Writings – Radio Broadcast, Taping date – 1979, March 6 “The 100 Club” Typescript 3/4, Box 32, Reagan, Ronald: Pre-presidential papers, Series I Speeches and writings, Ronald Reagan Library

out of the people that compose the mass of citizenry, and use the mediums of storytelling most common to them, like television, as sources for his own stories, that enabled him at the same time to have multi-millionaire friends and still be seen by American's as "one of us." The average American is endowed with epic and heroic characteristics in Reagan's narration.

Heroes. You know, we seem to be in a kind of a cult. And the entertainment world is partly guilty of this, as well as other things. We seem to be obsessed with wanting to tear down our heroes. But you know something? We're a country of heroes. And the greatest unsung heroes in the world go unnoticed. No, they're not out there manning the parapets or riding to the rescue. They're getting up every morning. They're sending you, their sons and daughters, to school. They're going to work. They're contributing to their church and their charities. They're making this society run.¹⁷⁶

Reagan claims constantly that America is a country of heroes. This is evident in the type of stories he tells as well. For Reagan, the story of America was always an epic saga, abundant with heroes who overcame villainy at home and abroad. His intention to put pride back into America rested on the idea of communicating to citizenry, especially young adults, the meaning of their lives by relating them to the "legitimate narrative of the society to which they belonged."¹⁷⁷ Thucydides noted that it is not hard to praise Athens to Athenians, and this principle certainly was at play, because who would not like to conceive himself as a hero. Reagan helped the majority of Americans to solve their value-related problems by giving them the answers they always wanted to hear concerning their characteristics anyway.¹⁷⁸

Reagan often used his State of the Union Addresses to present American heroes, they could be ordinary people who had done something special, but they became mythical heroes that exemplified the values Reagan wanted people to believe he stood for. And while presenting them, he presented his own ideology. While he was presenting people like Jean Nguyen, a former boat refugee who graduated with honours from West Point he acted as the host, just like in his GE Theatre days, but the ordinary people due to his presentation became mythified.¹⁷⁹

For Barthes, in a myth "the meaning is always there to present the form; the form is always there to outdistance the meaning. And there is never any

¹⁷⁶ Reagan (29.6.1983) Remarks and a Question-and-Answer Session With Participants in the National Conference of the National Association of Student Councils in Shawnee Mission, Kansas <http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1983/62983b.htm>

¹⁷⁷ Czarniawska (2004) p. 6

¹⁷⁸ For this see also White (1998) p. 178

¹⁷⁹ See White (1998) p. 70, 76-77

contradiction, conflict, or split between the meaning and the form.”¹⁸⁰ Thus the person mythified may become unreal, but the core of the form is ever present should one choose to look for it. The Unknown Soldier becomes “everyman.” He is at the same time only a nameless unknown soldier, but also every soldier lost in the battles ever. He becomes in Reagan’s narration the universal missing son for every father and mother to mourn over, while at the same time he is only a body that could not be identified. A mere chunk of decaying flesh becomes a powerful object of civil religion. It is everybody and nobody at the same time. It turns into a definite “He” that compensates for every young man whose carcass could not be brought back. No matter whom the soldier actually was, with Reagan’s narration he becomes a myth that can be applied to anyone. As W. Lloyd Warner writes, “the American Unknown Soldier is Everyman; he is the perfect symbol of equalitarianism.”¹⁸¹ An earlier version that Reagan used of similar stock character was the forgotten hero,

There is an American out there who has been a forgotten man, perhaps because he asked little of government except freedom. He holds the whole bureaucratic structure of government on his tire back and he works two and a half hours of each day just to pay its cost. [...] This forgotten American is black, he is white, he is all the shades in between, and sometimes he wasn’t even born here, but he built this country and he can do it again.¹⁸²

While Reagan was very adept in using the social roles or stock characters to the advancement of his politics, Reagan seemed to genuinely enjoy the grandeur and the mytho-religious function of the American presidency. As Smith has argued, Reagan very easily mastered all the most important roles previous presidents had assumed; “the president as father of the country, as cheerleader for his policies, as heroic commander in chief. Further, to have survived an assassination attempt with grace and good humour produced a wave of popular support and contributed to the perception of Reagan as Hero.”¹⁸³ Even when Reagan had “true” stories to tell of real people, in the words of Wills, “he casts a mythic, even religious, aura over them and makes complex operations the story of one man.”¹⁸⁴ People have to become mythic characters but the relationship goes both ways. In order for myths to become

¹⁸⁰ Barthes (1991) p. 123

¹⁸¹ Warner (1962) p. 13. See also Smith (1997) p. 816

¹⁸² Speech draft, no date. Box 43 Subseries E, Reagan, Ronald: Pre-presidential papers, Series I Speeches and writings, Ronald Reagan Library

¹⁸³ Smith (1997) p. 821

¹⁸⁴ Wills (2000) p. 197

real to people, they have to see them acted out by actors in dramas of cultural significance.¹⁸⁵

James Phelan claims that a character consists of three components; “the mimetic (character as person), the thematic (character as an idea) and the synthetic (character as artificial construct)”¹⁸⁶ The relationship between these components varies from narrative to narrative.¹⁸⁷ Reagan’s use of character varies according to what his intention in depicting characters is. Naturally characterization is not Reagan’s sole privilege just because he is the narrator. Characterization is an ongoing process, and ultimately the characters get their form from the story recipient, and intertextuality is a strong aide in this. Here lies one reason why Reagan is so interested in using quotations from other presidents. One of the advantages gained by characterization is that, following the thought lines of E. M. Forster, by creating characters out of actual persons, we are able to know everything about them. Perfect knowledge about an actual person is always only an illusion, but about a character, such as those in novels, we are bestowed with omniscience and we can know everything. Characterization banalises the actual people into characters, which are both simpler and thus easier to understand. They become shallow and less complex since have some of their depth is removed. All that there is to know becomes equivalent to everything the story tells us. In general, the works of fiction and political narration as well, “suggest a more comprehensible and thus a more manageable human race, *they give us the illusion of perspicacy and of power.*”¹⁸⁸ It must not be forgotten that the “god-view” provided by narrative politics into each political actor, is nothing else than an illusion. Everything cannot be deduced about the actors, but the important thing is that the illusion can be created when actual people are taken out of the actual political world and inserted into the story.

A good example of Reagan’s characterization is the figure of President Calvin Coolidge in his stories. While he claimed Coolidge to be one of the presidents he admired the most, the *narratis persona* of Coolidge differed a lot from

¹⁸⁵ Combs (1993) p. 7

¹⁸⁶ Phelan (1996) p. 29

¹⁸⁷ Phelan (1996) p. 29

¹⁸⁸ Forster (1953) p. 62. Italics mine

the actual person.¹⁸⁹ On a superficial level it is somewhat surprising that Reagan chose Calvin Coolidge as an object of his admiration, because the nature of character of the two presidents is so different. When Reagan was grudgingly called the Great Communicator even by his adversaries due to the eloquence of his speeches and the exhilaration he got from speaking to audiences, Coolidge was nicknamed “Silent Cal” and seemed to have a profound distaste for public oratory.

One explanation is offered by D’Souza who compares the two presidents ideologically. Coolidge had a philosophy that a free society basically runs itself and politicians often need not interfere.¹⁹⁰ There may be a point in this, because Reagan did not want to get involved in the actual “running the society,” but chose a similar standoffish approach to his presidency. With his *laissez-faire* style of leadership Coolidge managed to preside over a prosperous time, and was re-elected in a landslide. Another explanation is the point Reagan made in his pre-presidential radio address commenting on the image of Coolidge in the minds of the people. He defended this “do-nothing” president by arguing, that America was prosperous and everything was well during his term in the office.¹⁹¹ “So what if he was a ‘do-nothing’ President. Do you suppose doing nothing had something to do with reducing the budget, reducing the debt and cutting taxes four times?”¹⁹²

But it is easy to see, that Reagan had created for himself an image of Coolidge which was the actual object of idolization. Reagan was by no means a racist, in fact he hated racism, but the fact that Coolidge was a racist, did not affect his thinking at all. Racism was just another fact about “Silent Cal” that Reagan chose to exclude from the story he told even to himself. Martin E. Marty writes that Coolidge had published at least one popular article in defence of Nordic purity, and while signing in 1924 an act excluding most immigrants, said that “America must be kept American.” Coolidge was quite persistent that racial unity would be a basis of

¹⁸⁹ For this, see Reagan (25.9.1982) Candle-Lighting Ceremony at the White House. s. 121 or Nozfiger (1997) p. 391. Elsewhere Reagan had claimed that Lincoln is his “favourite” of the presidents. See Reagan (3.11.1984) Written Responses to Questions Submitted by France Soir Magazine <http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1984/110384a.htm>

¹⁹⁰ D’Souza (1997) p. 87

¹⁹¹ Radio address, Folder Speeches and Writings – Radio Broadcast, Taping date – 1975, August “Images” Holograph, Box 1, Reagan, Ronald: Pre-presidential papers, Series I Speeches and writings, Ronald Reagan Library

¹⁹² Radio address, Folder Speeches and Writings – Radio Broadcast, Taping date – 1976, September “President Coolidge” Edited typescript 2/4, Box 2, Reagan, Ronald: Pre-presidential papers, Series I Speeches and writings, Ronald Reagan Library

national cohesion.¹⁹³ The Coolidge Reagan used in his narration was not the same as the historical person.

Barthes notes that the narrator as well as the characters within the narrative “are essentially “paper beings” from our and the readers perspective; the (material) author of a narrative is in no way to be confused with the narrator of that narrative.”¹⁹⁴ He simply means that there are historically large mass of narratives without authors such as epics, folktales, and oral narratives. The person who speaks in the narrative is not the same person who writes in real life and who writes is not actually who that person is.¹⁹⁵ To gain a better understanding, one should not make the mistake of viewing Reagan only as the occasional author, and the always vociferous narrator of the stories told during his presidency.

It is necessary to simultaneously understand President Ronald Wilson Reagan as a fictional character that was created and recreated by stories of his own and others, and to distinguish this entity from the actual historical personality in order to study him narratively. I wish to emphasize the factor Reagan himself played in turning himself into a character, since this was intentional. He wanted to play a role in his narrations, and thus in a way continue his acting career. When viewing Reagan’s character one must acknowledge that it is not, following Jonathan Culler’s argumentation, merely a collection of different features, but instead a teleological set based on cultural models and transmitted intertextually. Reagan’s speeches, as well as everything else told about him, cue us to construct a personality for him, but our formal expectations play a part as well. Characterization is a teleological process in such a manner that characters are not supposed to fit within stereotypes, but the mere existence of these stereotypical models cue the way characters are constructed.¹⁹⁶

The textually created Reagan is not merely a collection of attributes and action structures but rather teleologically fitted to fill a necessary role in the United States of the 1980’s. He was an imaginary persona created, mostly by his own initiative, to fill a gap of leadership, and the need for a strong and consistent leader itself helped to create him after that image. After certain failures of the previous Carter administration Reagan was conjured up textually to be a “political messiah”

¹⁹³ Marty (1984) p. 391

¹⁹⁴ Barthes (1977) p. 111

¹⁹⁵ Barthes (1977) p. 111-112

¹⁹⁶ Culler (1975) p. 234-237

to return hope and prosperity to America once again. My point is that the role he needed to fill influenced his persona as a president as well as his actual personality. Reagan may not actually have been the answer to America's need for leadership, but was given shape and form by that need. He is even himself a non-actual individual in the words of Uri Margolin.¹⁹⁷

But even more important is the way the political party groups itself around the one man they have chosen for candidacy in order to reach the intelligence of the crowd. The name of the candidate becomes a symbol, and all theories of the party are personified in him.¹⁹⁸ The candidate is no longer only himself, but becomes the entire party he represents in flesh. Besides all theories the party has concerning politics, all its stories find a communicator and narrator in the candidate. Everything is personified in him, everything the party stands for becomes a part of the candidate's nature, and everything the party wishes to tell as stories becomes a part of his repertoire as well. In the same manner if the candidate becomes the president, as Reagan did, he is a collective entity that is composed of all of his own party.

Reagan frequently said to Edwin Meese III that he did not know how he could have done his job as a President, if he were not an actor.¹⁹⁹ Acting was indeed a large part of Reagan's politics. Hollywood had specialized in creating mythic American heroes ranging from lone rangers and sheriffs to citizen crusaders and soldier-heroes ready for the ultimate sacrifice for America.²⁰⁰ Reagan had played them all, and knew when to evoke a certain stereotypical character from his persona.

Reagan's official biographer Edmund Morris extends his understanding attitude to Reagan's supposed short attention span and the rumours of dementia during the presidency. His explanation lies in Reagan being an actor, a person who moves from one production to another. An actor's life consists of entrances and exits and shorter or longer scenes, takes and retakes and productions. Reagan forgot people with suddenness, but adapted to new people at the scene just as easily. An actor lives for the future and remembers forward, not backward like most of us. Yesterdays scenes are in the can. Today is rolling inevitably and tomorrow is the main focus, because the lines of tomorrow have to be memorized today. Whenever

¹⁹⁷ Palmer (2006) p. 38

¹⁹⁸ de Tocqueville (2000) p. 127

¹⁹⁹ D'Souza (1997) p. 44

²⁰⁰ On this see the excellent Jewett – Lawrence (1977) and their discussion on the "American Monomyth" which they define as a myth of innocent, Eidenic, society which is under a threat but is saved by a mysterious hero who appears from nowhere and vanishes again after performing his deed.

Reagan gave a speech or any other public performance, it was a single shot within a large eight year production of his presidency. That explains why he so often between the “performances” was so unfocused.²⁰¹ Even Reagan himself once joked on the campaign trail about his future governorship, “If only I could think of it as a script that would run for four years.”²⁰²

Reagan did not see actors as fakers, but rather people who were capable of transmitting noble ideals.²⁰³ What they created was often better than the real thing in the same manner as Reagan’s narrated America was closer to ideal than the real one. The story worlds he helped construct, as well as the images and ideals behind them, were what needed to be communicated to other people. Reagan understood that there is always a strong element of stagecraft involved in statecraft, and that is why he built his entire political leadership on both the storytelling he used, and the more visual dramatic effects his public personality radiated. Reagan was always as if he was in camera, and his skills in acting enabled him more efficiently to assume a prophetic role and become a mythical figure. Associates disillusioned with Reagan’s 1976 unsuccessful campaign stated that he did not actually run his own campaign, but treated it as a Hollywood movie and himself as a product to be sold by others. “He is an actor, not the centre of the action. [...] His act is completely natural; it has no pretence. He takes himself for real. He’s been playing his role for so long, it seems real to him.”²⁰⁴ While voicing intense critique towards Reagan, this associate as a by-product reveals one of the strengths of Reagan. Whether his political performance was “the real Reagan,” or just an act performed for the audience of Americans, he was natural in his role to such a degree that it became, if it already were not, the real Reagan.

When it comes to the *dramatis persona* of Reagan as a public figure, it can be said that Americans were forced during the 1980 and 1984 elections to render judgement not only on his qualifications and later achievements as a president, but also all the characters Reagan brought to life on the screen during his 30-year film career. It was not only Reagan but George Gipp, Andy McLeod, Dan Crawford, Brass Bancroft, Jimmy Grant, Johnny Hammond, Web Sloane and other characters that had to be evaluated, and Reagan consciously sought to portray himself as a real-

²⁰¹ See Morris (1999) p. 181, 394

²⁰² Morris (1999) p. 333

²⁰³ D’Souza (1997) p. 45

²⁰⁴ Anonymous campaign associate. Cited in Linden (1981) p. 122-123

life politician embodying all traits of action figures engaged in heroic acts of leadership on the silver screen.²⁰⁵

I seem to remember a famous country and western song warning mothers not to let their babies grow up to be cowboys. [Laughter] The song forgot to say that cowboys can sometimes grow up and be President.²⁰⁶

Cowboy as a hero is tightly connected to a certain social strata as the prototypical American hero. Another stock character is the frontier hero, as exemplified by Daniel Boone or Davy Crockett. They occupied a middle ground in a civilization that still was in contact with its origins in nature.²⁰⁷ The Western hero exemplified by the cowboy has even been argued to combine the most useful characteristics of the Old Testament God and the New Testament Christ to play the role of the redeemer.²⁰⁸ Daniel J. Boorstin argues that the strongest American myth is that of the “loner” moving west across the land. For him the pioneering spirit is the synonym of individualism and that on the other hand has given birth to the entire American way.²⁰⁹

Knelman notes that in the age of vast technological progress, as was experienced throughout the Reagan era, the American hero of folklore, cowboy, was replaced by another hero of the frontier, that is, the astronaut.²¹⁰ Technology was all but neutral in the Reagan era, and space served not only as a new basis to “start Americans dreaming again,” as Reagan claimed, but also as a guidance for the context of those dreams. Space was the new frontier, perhaps the “final frontier” to paraphrase the expression from the popular TV-series *Star Trek*. The hero of this frontier, where America could once again strive for its manifest destiny, was not the cowboy with his six-shooter but the astronaut, a new breed of an American hero and a new frontiersman. The effect of an emphasis on technological advances and especially those connected with space should not be underestimated when studying the story worlds of Ronald Reagan. Indeed, Knelman even proposes a new role for Reagan along his more common depictions – that of Buck Rogers, a comic book

²⁰⁵ Smith (1997) p. 822

²⁰⁶ Reagan (5.6.1985) Remarks at a Fundraising Luncheon for Senator Don Nickles in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma <http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1985/60585b.htm>. The song was called *Mamas, don't let your babies grow up to be cowboys* sung by Waylon Jennings and later by numerous other big stars of Country music.

²⁰⁷ Zelinsky (1988) p. 44

²⁰⁸ Jewett – Lawrence (1977) p. 44-45

²⁰⁹ Boorstin (1965) p. 51

²¹⁰ Knelman (1985) p. 224

lone hero of the space.²¹¹ The cowboy as a role should not be completely cast aside, since Reagan upheld that side of his *narratis persona* as well. The American mythic cowboy was a strong, moral and a God-fearing character, which are personal traits a prophetic politician can adopt as well. While it is a popular metaphor for many other presidents and political figures as well²¹², Reagan heightened its suitability by spending a lot of time during his presidential terms on his ranch, the Rancho del Cielo.

Well, that's when the American people rounded up a posse, swore in this old sheriff, and sent us riding into town, where the previous administration had said the Nation's problems were too complicated to manage. Well, we said of course they are; so government should stop trying to manage them, stop putting its faith in the false god of bureaucracy, and trust the genius of the American people instead.²¹³

Reagan differs from the traditional narrators in the way he wanted to place himself into his stories. He was not content just to remain the narrator, but often wanted a part or a role in the story itself. We are not even talking about the type of “walk-in” appearances Alfred Hitchcock made in his movies, but a much larger role. Reagan often narrated himself into his stories in a heroic role. Reagan could infiltrate his stories partially because so much of his storytelling concentrated on his own life experience and even his life story. Reagan narrated himself as a character in many of the stories he told, and thus even his own persona and image were partially created in the narrative dialogue and story world construction, which took place between his narrations and the interpretations of the audience. What Reagan was to the American public was partially a result of how they wanted to interpret the stories he told about himself.

During the Geneva summit Gorbachev made a tremendous impression for the media and Speakes along with other White House media people was afraid that Reagan was losing the public relations battle. Speakes openly admits in his memoirs to drafting quotes for Reagan. News reported these quotes as having taken place off-camera and the Soviets never chose dispute them. One of these quotes which got high media exposure was “There is much that divides us, but I believe the world

²¹¹ Knelman (1985) p. 239

²¹² See Rantapelkonen (2006) p. 27

²¹³ Reagan (13.12.1988) Remarks to Administration Officials on Domestic Policy
<http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1988/121388a.htm>

breaths easier because we are talking here together.”²¹⁴ This quote was so close to the style of Reagan, and so suitable in content, that he personally would in all likelihood not have disavowed this utterance, but this works as a good example that not all the stories “told” by Reagan were in fact ever actually uttered by him but manufactured by his aides. Nathan writes that the presidency is much more than just one person. He is rather “congress covered with skin.” He is a leader of a very large system.²¹⁵ We could treat the character of Reagan as a collective persona that consists of the all the officials in his administration, who basically tell the same story, all the speechwriters and aides, and even the public that acts as recipients to his stories, and thus form a mental image of Reagan based on these stories and elaborating and extrapolating from them the imaginary figure of a leader who goes by the name Ronald Reagan. To borrow the words of Roland Barthes,

The language produced and spread under the protection of power is statutorily a language of repetition; all official institutions of language are repeating machines: school, sports, advertising, popular songs, news, all continually repeat the same structure, the same meaning, often the same words: the stereotype is a political fact, the major figure of ideology.²¹⁶

If this line of thought is chosen, then at the centre of this study is the *dramatis*, or rather the *narratis persona* of Ronald Reagan, or Reagan as a character in his own stories, than the actual person who occupied the post of the President of the United States of America. One would see Reagan as a fictional personality that has only the characteristics endowed him by the story in the interactionary process between the narrator and the story recipient.

This approach would bring up interesting questions, such as how was Reagan’s persona created in the stories and resulting story worlds by the authors of the stories, for which the actual Ronald Reagan only served as a vessel for communication, or on the other hand, how did the recipients create an image of the leader that would respond to their hopes, fears, and expectations. As Edelman writes, “leaders and other authorities come to symbolize fears or hopes.”²¹⁷ In fact, he even argues that the political function of public officials is to attract blame or praise, and that individual political leaders always “evoke praise, blame,

²¹⁴ Speakes-Pack (1988) p. 136

²¹⁵ Nathan (1990) p. 195

²¹⁶ Barthes (1990) p. 40

²¹⁷ Edelman (1977) p. 144

enthusiasm, distrust, or hero worship.”²¹⁸ Hannah Arendt has argued that “in politics, more than anywhere else, we have no possibility of distinguishing between being and appearance. In the realm of human affairs being and appearance are indeed one and the same.”²¹⁹ There is no way for a member of the general public to distinguish between the real person and his public image. The two are confused to such a degree, that the appearance takes the place of the actual person behind that image. Reagan himself acknowledged the role of images and their creation in modern politics.

All of us have grown up accepting with little question certain images as accurate portraits of public figures – some living, some dead. Very seldom if ever do we ask if the images are true to the original. Even less do we question how the images were created. This is probably more true of Presidents in our country because of the intense spotlight which centres on their every move.²²⁰

The creation of President Ronald Reagan is an interesting example on the interwoven relationship of the story and its teller and the audience as well. “Reagan’s media strategists understood that they could sell this message because their messenger was perfect. Governing was to involve the presentation of image – not of the self but a projection.”²²¹ The Reagan team understood the power of images in the television age and produced pictures which were better than the real thing.²²² To a degree the public persona of Reagan was an answer to the needs, hopes, and wishes of the citizenry. The people demand certain things of their president, and he, or at least his image, is shaped by those demands and desires. Indeed, the president or other political leader needs in order to be successful to fit into the typecast given by the citizenry.

I argue nevertheless that the relationship is not that simple. Reagan finally gained the Presidency after Jimmy Carter, and it can be argued, that almost any alternative to him would at that point in time have been preferable for the voters. Reagan had a long career of public speaking – always on political topics – behind him and he could not have started anew, only as vocalizing the will and need of the

²¹⁸ Edelman (1977) p. 151

²¹⁹ Arendt (1963) p. 94

²²⁰ Radio address, Folder Speeches and Writings – Radio Broadcast, Taping date – 1975, August “Images” Holograph, Box 1, Reagan, Ronald: Pre-presidential papers, Series I Speeches and writings, Ronald Reagan Library

²²¹ Berman (1990) p. 7. The same idea can be read between the lines in Speakes-Pack (1988)

²²² Berman (1990) p. 8

citizens. He had in the course of his career already given himself a *narratis persona*, which was too well established to change in a short time. Reagan himself claimed that

The imperative need of this nation at all times is the leadership of the uncommon men and women. We need men who cannot be intimidated, who are not concerned with the applause meters, who will not sell tomorrow for cheers today.²²³

At the same time he recognized the importance of the cheers and negotiated very carefully during the Presidency between what he saw as best, and what would be politically fitting. Reagan allowed the aspirations of the public to change his persona somewhat, but the essential core of values he had made his own remained intact. Reagan was always Reagan and he used his political storytelling as a tool to describe to the American public what his political persona was like and at the same time to manipulate with the stories the wishes of the public. Reagan certainly was more than only an image resurrected from the common hopes of the voters, but it was a conscious decision he made as an actor to allow his stories and the hopes of the public to recreate him anew with slight alterations to the original. Instead of being a mere marionette, Reagan was in charge of the narrative creation of his image. But at the same time he was bound by the image that had followed him from the days of the Governorship. Since his life had been used in the stories he told, the stories shaped him by shaping the image people held. Ironically while Reagan was not talking about himself, these words of his fit this situation as well,

There's a great deal of false image-making and an effort made not to dispute the views you really hold, but to invent some and hang them on you with the hope the false image will appear real.²²⁴

As Boorstin argues, there is strictly speaking no way to unmask an image. Every time an effort is made to debunk it; it only grows even more interesting. The creation of the image fascinates us, and just like a magic show, even showing us that the image is deception, we can still enjoy its pleasures.²²⁵ Stories can be used in the creation of political images. Reagan's image was so strong that even on those numerous occasions he was proved to be making false utterances the image of an

²²³ Statement, "San Bernadino County Elementary School Admin. Assn. Luncheon. Casa Loma Hall – Redlands University. February 15, 1966, p. 18, Folder: 1966 Campaign: RR speeches and statements, Book I (1), Box C30, Research Unit, Ronald Reagan Governor's papers, Ronald Reagan Library.

²²⁴ Speech, "A Plan for Action: Announcement of Candidacy", January 4 1966, Folder: 1966 Campaign: RR speeches and statements, Book I, Box C30, Research Unit, Ronald Reagan Governor's papers, Ronald Reagan Library.

²²⁵ Boorstin (1962) p. 194-195

honest man still remained unblemished. A story world cannot be destroyed, only another better crafted and more intriguing story world can take its place, and the same applies to images. While many of Reagan's adversaries tried to take the role of an iconoclast, nobody was successful enough.

Ultimately, while I have discussed the narrative creation of the Ronald Reagan as he was shown and narrated to us as political subjects, I still wish to make a strong argument on behalf of the fact that Reagan himself played a major role in the narrative construction process of his identity. There were protests aimed at the people in charge of his campaigning to "Let Reagan Be Reagan." But this is essentially what he was. Since he was both a narrator and character of the stories told, he naturally was shaped by the story. But since his own life created a backbone for many of the stories he told, he shaped the stories simultaneously. The creation of Reagan's public persona was a self-feeding cyclical process. To a large degree his pre-presidential persona influenced his political storytelling. The image dominated the narrative creation and fuelled itself. Reagan was then essentially Reagan, but only the narrated Reagan and by the Presidency the actual, real-life Reagan had been engulfed by the story.

If it is a little difficult to view a political leader as a character in the drama of politics, a *narratis persona*, if you will, there arises another problem as well. How do we treat the collectivity of the citizens, be it a community or a larger society in a political narration? Paul Ricoeur sees generally a problem with the tendency of history to deal with such social entities as societies, states, and communities since these entities are composed of individuals, and exist only by virtue of individual's sense in belonging to them and participating in them. These are not and cannot be a product of a historian's conceptual activity, since their existence is independent of him. In our everyday communication these entities are given personal subjects and viewed as genuine subjects of action.

Paul Ricoeur calls these entities "quasi-persons" and events and actions they participate in as "quasi-plots."²²⁶ A quasi-person of the state is an imagined community just because its existence is justified only if individuals believe in its existence, and want to be a part of it. But these social entities are undoubtedly at least partially a product of political action. Political narratives are told to people

²²⁶ Ricoeur. Cited in Polkinghorne (1988) p. 65

precisely in order to get them to participate in these social entities and give the people a strong sense of belonging to them. America is often personified as if it was an independent person in Reagan's narration and indeed it can almost become one. An example where Reagan almost anthropomorphises America is his statement that "Uncle Sam is a friendly old man, but he has a spine of steel."²²⁷ Uncle Sam can on one hand be interpreted as merely a jocular symbol of the United States of America as a nation. Seen like this there is no practical difference for example to the Russian bear or the British John Bull or any other way people create an anthropomorphic image of their country. On the other hand, this process of creating a fleshy manifestation of a country can be viewed as transubstantiation. Just as wine becomes the blood of Christ, the image of Uncle Sam becomes America. Just as creating an image of the entire nation in flesh profanes the nation or brings it closer and graspable for the citizenry, the process works the other way around. If the word becomes flesh, the flesh may become a word as well.

The unification of the entire people of the USA into "America" was the goal of Reagan's political storytelling. He wanted to bring Americans together and unify them with a renewed nationalist and patriotic feeling. Once the individual subject of politics, the citizen, sees his own identity as a part of a larger whole, America, the object of politics can be transferred from doing what is good to individuals to doing what is good and right for America. Individual social troubles and problems drown when individuals are formed into a collective. If the narration is seductive and successful enough, the individual is even willing to drown his own rights for the benefit of a collective. The quasi-person becomes an actual person with the consent of the actual persons themselves.

America is in a danger of losing her soul. – Yes, in a manner of speaking, a nation does have a soul; the soul of a nation is the spirit of its people."²²⁸ While Reagan created himself in the course of his storytelling another important creation was "America." The America he narrated into existence arguably has never existed. It is a creation of myth. The American people he told stories about were also created anew into a mythical race of men in the course of the narration. One should not confuse the real American people and the collective character or actant

²²⁷ Reagan (26.9.1984) Remarks and a Question-and-Answer Session at Bowling Green State University in Bowling Green, Ohio
<http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1984/92684b.htm>

²²⁸ Speech: Men of All Saints Episcopal Church Dinner, Los Angeles, 3/21/69. Box 44 Subseries E, Reagan, Ronald: Pre-presidential papers, Series I Speeches and writings, Ronald Reagan Library

that Reagan gives birth to. The people are endowed with all those qualities Reagan deems worthy in a person, and it is always this mythical community of people he addresses when speaking to Americans.

Peterson notes that the tendency of Reagan to use his perfected America as a standard and a characterization made him unable to address directly some deficiencies of the society such as racism, violence, and socio-economic maladjustments. “The failure of such subjects to work their way to a significant place on the president’s public agenda was the consequence of both what Reagan chose to emphasize and how he chose to emphasize it.”²²⁹ By creating narratively his Normal Rockwell style America Reagan simultaneously disabled himself. He was no longer able to include in his narratives anything that existed in the shades and not on the sunny side of “Main Street, U.S.A.”²³⁰ But essentially the small-town paradise myth was not Reagan’s invention, nor has it sprung from experience. It is just the old Edenic myth, which for a long time has been among the organizing forces of American culture, one which arose with the discovery of America itself.²³¹ But by trying to use this myth to his benefit Reagan runs into a political *cul de sac*. By choosing to perfect his America, Reagan made it difficult for himself to address serious wrongs within America, because they would have violated his story logic and in the worst case scenario, crumbled the entire story world built.

Now that we have discussed the fact that Reagan in his political storytelling created not only himself partially anew as a character of his stories, but in the dialogic process a mythical America as well, that his narrates persona inhabited, it is time to burrow deeper into the mechanisms how such a story world is created. We have discussed some aspects within the narrative framework and further on we shall get acquainted with extra textual aspects of narration such as narrator himself and his audience.

1.2. WORLD-CREATING POWER OF NARRATIVES

This section is relatively theoretical, but its purpose is to explore how Reagan was able to narrate into existence the mythical America which had never existed in

²²⁹ Peterson (1997) p. 76

²³⁰ Reagan (19.7.1982) Remarks at a Rally Supporting the Proposed Constitutional Amendment for a Balanced Federal Budget. s. 939

²³¹ Jewett – Lawrence (1977) p. 171-172

history. My argument is that a narrative has the power to create such worlds, imagined communities, or mythical nations, which on certain occasions can supplant the “real” world in the mind of the story recipient. I choose to call them story worlds and the next pages delve deeper into how these worlds are created and what their political function is. This section will deal with the creation of story worlds and an actual universe of story worlds which I shall label a story verse. These concepts are created on the boundary or frontier of the internal and external structures of the narrative framework. They are not directly given birth to by the text itself, not solely by the *intentio auctoris*, nor by the interpretation of the text by the audience. Rather the story verse emerges on the interface of the external and internal aspects of the story itself. The contents of the story itself interact with the story recipient, his experiences and worldviews to combine the elements within the story to everything situated outside the boundaries of the story. Each individual story world, and the story verse as well, is a result of a play between the elements of the story and those of the “real” world and as such connects the fictional, or what is being told, with the “factual,” or what the story recipient experiences in his everyday life. And the purpose of political storytelling is to create this membrane of boundary where the elements interact so permeable that the worlds blend together.

The manipulation of these multiple story worlds is a crucial part of prophetic politics, since by escorting the story recipients in and out of these story worlds and blurring the boundary between real and fictional has many advantages for the prophetic politician, as I shall show in the upcoming pages. I shall initiate the discussion with the development of the possible worlds theory into story worlds and end up with a concept of “story verse” which is my own theoretical construction. I shall present it as a conceptual tool for understanding not merely one story, but multiple stories told and the manipulation of the different story worlds they bring to existence. The concept of a story verse is crucial in understanding how several, each slightly different stories within the same narrative framework can be used for the same purpose. By presenting in this section the idea of a story verse, I attempt to show how multiple story worlds can be used in the same narrative discourse to fully exploit the benefits storytelling can provide for the political narrator.

For Hayden White narrative is not a neutral discursive form but “entails ontological and epistemic choices with distinct ideological and even specifically

political implications.”²³² Narrative, instead of a neutral medium for telling what has happened, “is the very stuff of a mythical view of reality [...] which, when used to represent real events, endows them with an illusory coherence”²³³ and meanings characteristic to dreams. For Jerome Bruner not even language can ever be neutral for much the same reasons. It “imposes a perspective in which things are viewed and a stance toward what we view.”²³⁴ It guides our view of the world and most of our encounters with the world, especially the world of politics, are not direct encounters. The world that emerges for us is a conceptual world and if the emergence is aided by narratives, a story world. The “realities” of society are “meanings that we achieve by the sharing of human cognitions.”²³⁵ In other words this could be expressed by saying that culture is an ambiguous text that is constantly interpreted by all those who participate in it, and thus language and narratives as vessels of transmitting world views interpersonally are parts of the creation of the entire social reality. Culture and reality are negotiated by all participants and in the context of a state, by all its citizens. Reagan offered his version and vision of social and political reality, which he effectively communicates in his narratives, which are naturally language-mediated. Language is both a mode of communication, and a medium of representation of the world about which it is communicating, and therefore “*How one talks* comes eventually to be how one *represents* what one talks about.”²³⁶

Greimas talks about concepts such as “semantic universe, which can be understood successively as a virtual universe.”²³⁷ It is a universe of manifested possible combinations and ultimately a discourse. The virtual universe of Greimas is purely textual in its nature. It is composed of words and texts and not concerned about the universe these words and texts bring to life, but the ones that consist of them. The universes and worlds I’m interested in and will discuss in this upcoming chapter are the possible worlds which are given birth by the stories and are created in interplay between the teller of the story and its recipient. A story world is a construct beyond a mere semantic universe which only has the textual ingredients to

²³² White (1987) p. ix

²³³ White (1987) p. ix

²³⁴ Bruner (1986) p. 121

²³⁵ Bruner (1986) p. 122

²³⁶ Bruner (1986) p. 131

²³⁷ Greimas (1983) p. 135

give birth to this higher construct on another, extra textual level. But how exactly is a story world brought into existence?

1.2.1. POSSIBLE WORLDS

Paul Ricoeur writes “what is to be interpreted in a text is a *proposed world*, a world that I might inhabit and wherein I might project my utmost possibilities. This is what I call the world of the text, the world probably belonging to this unique text.”²³⁸ This world of the text creates a “distanciation that we can call a distanciation of the real from itself [...] fiction introduces into our apprehension of reality.”²³⁹ Ricoeur’s most important contribution is the fact that this world can be “inhabited” by the story recipient, because a good story might “swallow” the reader and immerse him or her totally in its world. But what Ricoeur omits, is the dialogic relationship between the text or story and its recipient. The “proposed world” by the text is not the same as the world of the text, because it does not solely belong to the text, but is created in dialogue with the reader, the human who reacts to the text.

For Lubomir Dolezel all worlds we humans are capable of producing, or creating with the means of language, are merely possible worlds. There is no modern Prometheus, who could bring us such divine language that uttering words could bring the actual signifieds of those words into concrete existence. These possible worlds do not exist in a transcendental or metaphysical level but are constructed by human minds.²⁴⁰ He divides possible worlds into physically possible and impossible worlds depending upon whether the natural laws of the actual world exist in them, and the conditions of existence and acting in the worlds depend on this juxtaposition of possible/impossible. While the fiction maker is able to “roam over the entire universe of possible worlds,” historical worlds are restricted into the physically possible worlds.²⁴¹ There exists nevertheless a certain amount of ubiquity depending on our conception of the physical laws that rule our actual world. Is the world of past alchemists only fictional since lack of knowledge about the atom-level structure of matter made them try to turn lead into gold? We still lack the unified theory physics has been ever searching for, and we can question whether our

²³⁸ Ricoeur (1995) p. 43. Italics mine

²³⁹ Ricoeur (1995) p. 43

²⁴⁰ Dolezel (1999) p. 253-254

²⁴¹ Dolezel (1999) p. 256

knowledge of the physical laws is sufficient to decree something as physically impossible. Every day science produces new wonders that widen our conception about the limits of possible. Thus even a non-fictional storyteller can interject some amounts of impossibility into his possible worlds. This process is further helped by our attraction to imagining the impossible.

Dolezel wants to separate history and mythology from each other with the divide into physically possible/impossible, but this does not work in the intended manner. In mythology things were accredited to supernatural beings that made their actionable contribution to the narrative, but in historical worlds no event can be assigned to divine agency and human history is a history of natural agents.²⁴² Yet the majority of us still retain their faith in God, which ever name one chooses to call Him. People tend to believe in divine interception and pray for it. People believe in Divine Providence and God's plan even today. When we had no such profound knowledge upon the laws of nature that exist in our world sickness was a punishment from the gods. Rain was the tears of some goddess falling.²⁴³

Another division Dolezel makes is within the sphere of literature more generally, but his division into fictional and historical worlds does not suffice either. All possible worlds are according to his thoughts fictional, and then there exists the true, historical world, which may exist even in texts if they were produced faithfully and avoiding fictive issues. I do not believe this; creating such a true historical world would demand that the text-producer is God-like and capable of absolute objectiveness instead of a mere human with all his fallibilities. There is no super narrator with such capabilities as to depict the world precisely as it ontologically is, even if we consider that such a world even exists outside the human sphere of experience. The historical, or contemporary for that matter, world can nevertheless be portrayed in many similar ways as the fictional world. Thus David Herman's concept of a story world is more fitting. It enables us to turn actual historical personalities into characters very similar in nature and only alter particular desired characteristics in the process of doing so. The "reality" of characters, fictional or

²⁴² Dolezel (1999) p. 256

²⁴³ See Kuhn (1970) These were the the best attempts to describe the world in the time before scientific paradigms. Likewise the past alchemists were doing their best with paradigms which were scientific but later as knowledge increased, the paradigms became more defined and described the actuality better.

historical is no more than an illusion to us once they are represented to us by the means of narration.

Bruner points out something interesting about the interconnectedness of narrative and history when he talks about people allowing stories to guide their decisions even in those times where a suitable theory is available. He claims that these narratives, “once acted out, “make” events and “make” history. They contribute to the reality of the participants. [...] Can anyone say a priori that history is completely independent of what goes on in the minds of its participants.”²⁴⁴ Narratives have the power to change the world, and this adds to their political nature. It does not actually matter who tells a particular story about the way the world is. No matter how well constructed this narrative is, it does not initiate an immediate change in the world. The stories told to children that the moon is made of cheese do not cause this earth-orbiting lump of rock to turn into Gorgonzola or even Cheddar. The stories change the world in a more subtle manner. Mankind travelled to moon, not to find out if it indeed was made of cheese, but among other reasons to search for signs of life there as predicted (later on in the development of a child’s personality) by science fiction stories. Stories affect the way people see the world they inhabit and by guiding the way they see the world, inflict the way they try to change the world to be like. Stories contribute to the reality of people and the same people initiate to change the reality for the better as they grasp it. The world is changed when a narrative initiates the reaction to change the world.

It can be claimed that a possible or fictional world is not “real.” But then we run into the difficulty of having to define real. If we define the world around us, as we perceive to be, as real that might not suffice either. Rene Descartes argued about having to question the reality of everything except one’s own reality. *Cogito, ergo sum*. Because I question it, my existence has to be real. This is too radical an approach, but nevertheless the world we see around us is at least partially crafted by narratives. What do the majority of us know about the life of Pathans, Kikuyus or some other distant tribe of men? Only what has been conveyed to us by telling, since most of us lack personal experience. Parts of our reality are always created by telling of stories, whether in newspapers, or in some other medium. Lyotard asserts that “realism is the art of making reality, of knowing reality and knowing how to

²⁴⁴ Bruner (1986) p. 42-43

make reality [...] reality will be changed; making, knowing, and know-how will be changed.”²⁴⁵ Lyotard writes about the post-modern fable of the Earth itself, where even the unavoidable destruction of Earth at latest when the sun dies out, is realistic.

The same idea can be nevertheless borrowed and used in the context of political narratives. They are then realist even when they are future-oriented, like prophecies, because of their power to make reality. If Reagan’s vision of America’s strength and greatness is first and foremost a vision, it is also realistic because as a president, he was able to change the world accordingly so that USA got the strength he called for. Chatman argues that a narrative will not admit events that do not belong to it and follow its laws.²⁴⁶ This is one reason why in Reagan’s political storytelling there are almost no failures in his administration’s political goals. Reagan’s optimistic worldview sets such a bias on the story, that the story cannot admit within itself pessimistic elements.

Therefore the “proposed world” that Ricoeur writes about does not remain contained in a merely semantic universe nor is it content to remain on the level of stories either but rather even “everyday reality is metamorphosed by [...] the imaginative variations that literature works on the real.”²⁴⁷ Words and texts and their semantic worlds are only building blocks for the construction of narratives and stories. These in turn construct what I choose to call story worlds, when they are taken to the level of human interaction by telling or narrating them by somebody to somebody else. Story worlds are then essentially mental models which are ultimately created on extra textual, mental level with the aid of stories.

1.2.2. STORYWORLD

Reagan spoke of an America that did not exist in the time of his presidency, or ever before in the history of the USA. In the words of Gary Willis, Reagan’s ideas of America evoke an invented past, a heritage that never existed outside fables and Mark Twain novels.²⁴⁸ One can debate endlessly whether the ideal society in Reagan’s storytelling was based on Dixon of Reagan’s boyhood years, but such an argument is futile. Reagan did not speak of United States of America as it is or was,

²⁴⁵ Lyotard (1997) p. 91

²⁴⁶ Chatman (1978) p. 21-22

²⁴⁷ Ricoeur (1995) p. 43

²⁴⁸ D’Souza (1997) p. 38

but America as it could or should be. His focus, whether he talked of the past, present, or future, is always on what America could be with its potential as he saw it fulfilled to the maximum. Reagan's America never was real, it was a dream and the ones who criticize his vision of America fail to see that it is first and foremost a story world. The narrative aspect of Reagan's policymaking has to be taken into the context to understand what his version of America is. It is fictional, it is based on stories told and retold, and its shape and meaning vary from one telling to another to suit Reagan's purposes.

If Reagan's mythical America itself is a story world, created in the process of storytelling, it is futile to try to attach labels of "true" or "false" to it. It was enough for the world to seem "possible" and believable to fill the needs of Reagan's visionary politics. Truthfulness and falsity are qualities which should not be attached to a narrative. The values it has to adhere to are credibility and plausibility. The same traits apply to the story world the narrative gives birth to. If people choose to believe in it and find it credible, it does not matter if it represents reality at all. While there is a world outside the textually created story world, comparisons and evaluations between these are futile. Evaluating the truth-value of the story world by how well it represents the real world is doomed to fail since once the story enchants us well enough; it has the ability to alter our *Weltanschauung* as I shall later argue that master narratives are wont to. Our idea of what is real can be altered with the telling of a story about it. As Edmund Morris claimed, Reagan had an uncanny Daliesque ability to bend the reality to suit his purposes. "Imagination, not mendacity, was the key to Dutch's mind. He believed in both true and untrue things if they suited his moral purpose – and because he believed in belief."²⁴⁹ Things became true for him when he told them often enough or got himself suitably entangled in the story worlds that had spawned them. The boundaries of "real" world and multiple story worlds were so thin for Reagan, that he kept moving in and out of them continuously, and often was himself not able to locate his position *vis á vis* reality. If it managed to escort his listeners to his story worlds and make them

²⁴⁹ Morris (1999) p. 398. To clarify, "Dutch" was the nickname Reagan carried in his boyhood years. As he explained it, his father had commented on the look of him as a baby that "he looks like a fat Dutchman."

believe in their reality, he himself was at least as confused, which was the real world.²⁵⁰

David Herman defines story worlds as “mental models of did what to and with whom, when, where, why and in what fashion in the world to which recipient relocate –or make a deictic shift- as they work to comprehend a narrative.”²⁵¹ Story worlds can be viewed as “global mental representation enabling interpreters to draw inferences about items and occurrences either implicitly or explicitly included in a narrative.”²⁵² The term story world itself suggests that a narrative has a power to create worlds and have the ability to transport interpreters from the actual moment of narration or the space-time coordinates of the encounter with the text to the different here and now that constitute the deictic centre of the world being told about. According to Herman, to make sense of the narrative the interpreter must relocate into possible worlds more or less distinct from the world he treats as actual.²⁵³ Both readers and authors shift their deictic centre from the real-world situation to an image of themselves at a location within a story world. This fictional world may not contain the same objects and those objects may not have the same sorts of properties as in the real world. As Rabinowitz writes, “every fictional world, like every real world, requires a history, sociology, biology, mathematics, aesthetics, and ethics.”²⁵⁴ It is only the nature and contents of these concepts that shifts between real and fictional worlds. The story world becomes placed at the centre of the conceptual universe and at the same natural laws need not even exist in this universe of story worlds.²⁵⁵

Herman argues that the story world must be logical, according to the internal story logic of the narrative itself. Then the narrator has more than adequate tools to guide the shaping of the story world to his personal liking, or to fit the policy goals. The narrator has only to be logical enough in the construction of the story world he tries to communicate to his story recipients, and provide them with a plenitude of

²⁵⁰ As an example we can use the story of witnessing firsthand the horror of Nazi concentration camps that Reagan told to several prominent Jewish leaders. In real life during the war Reagan never travelled to Germany and was able to witness the horror only on film, but the documentary made such a strong impression on him, that later in life he told the story as if he had been one of the soldiers liberating the victims.

²⁵¹ Herman (2002) p. 9-10

²⁵² Herman (2002) p. 9-10

²⁵³ Herman (2002) p. 14-15

²⁵⁴ Rabinowitz (1987) p. 100-101

²⁵⁵ Herman (2002) . 15

details about the story world. The addition of certain details into the story world makes the story recipients unable to add details of their own which would argue with the details already in place. The inner logic of the story dictates what can be inserted, and including something logically leads to exclusion of everything that is would contradict to it.²⁵⁶ One problem that arises in connection with a politician using stories to cue the recipients to construct story worlds is that, as Herman notes, there does not necessarily exist a “one-to-one correspondence between a story’s textual format and the mental models that its form prompts readers to reconstruct.”²⁵⁷ Any textual format may evoke a variety of mental representations and vice versa. Therefore the political storyteller must be a competent narrator to even come close to succeeding to fill his intentions and aims for storytelling. The role of the storyteller is not to construct the story worlds ready-made for his story recipients, but rather work in a way similar to “guides, who invite readers, listeners, and viewers to create, inhabit, and familiarize themselves”²⁵⁸ with these story worlds.

The earliest theorist whom I have found to write about anything even resembling a story world was Northrop Frye. He notes that “the universe of poetry, however, is a literary universe, and not a separate existential universe.”²⁵⁹ It is unfortunate that Frye stops his line of thought at that point. The universe of poetry is certainly not real and exists only as a multitude of words on paper, but the reader constructs out of them a new universe consisting of several story worlds, each evoked by a different piece of poetry. I have taken this as my starting point to argue for an existence of something I choose to call a universe consisting of multiple story worlds, or a story verse. It is true that a story verse is no more “real” in the existential meaning of the word than the universe of poetry, but it is precisely its *vraisemblance* to the actual, immanent one we inhabit which matters.

It may even be possible to supplant the real, existing universe we all live in, with an imaginary one, namely the story verse, to such a degree that the boundary between the two gets blurred. One can no longer determine which parts of the universe and the world one lives in are concrete, and which belong to the world of stories. To clarify this point, I would like to use an example. If one reads in a

²⁵⁶ Herman (2002) p. 50

²⁵⁷ Herman (2002) p. 50

²⁵⁸ Herman (2002) p. 55

²⁵⁹ Frye (1957) p. 125

newspaper that there is a genocide taking place somewhere in Africa, how can one determine, whether that has actually taken place in the real world or only in the world as is described to him and its characteristics narrated to him by the newspaper and which can therefore be only textual, or in other words, a story world created for him and others like him.

For Chatman it is a logical property of a narrative to “evoke a *world* of potential plot details, many of which go unmentioned but can be supplied.”²⁶⁰ Chatman speaks of story worlds most implicitly when he writes that “narrative evokes a world, and since it is no more than an evocation, we are left free to enrich it with whatever real or fictive experience we acquire.”²⁶¹ I propose that the narrator has a much larger role in this process of “enriching” the story world. Chatman does not actually speak of story worlds as existing narrative constructs, but only argues that plot details (and characters) have a world of their own *in potentia* and these words can be actualized or brought to existence when necessary. “There is virtually infinite continuum of imaginable details [...] which will not ordinarily be expressed, but which *could* be.”²⁶² Such an idea conveys instead of story world a possibility of such a story verse, but which so far remains waiting for someone to bring it into existence. “In the beginning was the word, and the word was with God.” Story verse remains waiting for the narrator or the story recipient to bring it into existence, perhaps only by using a word or two in that process.

In understanding narratives one has to take into account that it is the well-formedness of the narrative what naturalizes narrative events to facts and probabilities in the real world.²⁶³ This is about the blending of the story world with the “real world.” When the story is told well enough, things from within the story and the story world it evokes are in turn transported into “facts” of the real world. Politically the interest and focus of the narrator should be to construct his story worlds so that the transportation from one world to another is not only natural, but involuntary and furthermore non-noticeable. At the same time it is worth noticing, as Chatman does, that “what constitutes “reality” or “likelihood” is a strictly cultural phenomenon [...and] of course the “natural” changes from one society to another,

²⁶⁰ Chatman (1978) p. 29

²⁶¹ Chatman (1978) p. 120

²⁶² Chatman (1978) p. 30

²⁶³ Chatman (1978) p. 49

and from one era to another in the same society.”²⁶⁴ If we find, for example, within Reagan’s narratives things that we just cannot assimilate to fit the “real world,” we must understand that we are living in another culture, another era, and try to change our mindset so as to better understand what mechanisms could have been in use at the time of the actual political storytelling in America. The problem with analysing speeches is, as Chatman writes, that we make inferences “in terms of our ordinary coded knowledge of the world and our expectations about human society *as we know it*. That is why pure speech-report narratives would be particularly difficult to understand across great cultural divides.”²⁶⁵ The story worlds will not get created according to the same rules outside the cultural context where the stories originate.

Jonathan Culler has written on the interesting concept of *vraisemblance*, occasionally using such monstrous words as “*vraisemblablisation*” but he cites Todorov when giving three definitions for *vraisemblance*. Firstly it is “the relation of a particular text to another general and diffuse text which might be called “public opinion.”” Secondly, it is “whatever tradition makes suitable or expected in a particular genre.” Finally *vraisemblance* is the quality of a text which “attempts to make us believe that it conforms to reality and not to its own laws. In other words *vraisemblance* is the mask which conceals the text’s own laws and which we are supposed to take for a relation with reality.”²⁶⁶ *Vraisemblance* can be used by the political narrator as a mechanism, which makes it harder for his story recipients to distinguish between the real world and the story world the politician creates. If this world exists, then following the peculiar logic of the stories told the strangeness can be hidden from the citizenry with *vraisemblance*. This is very close to the concept of “story logic” by David Herman. Story logic is the factor that gives a story world its internal integrity. No matter what the logic is, it has to be in existence. No matter how far removed the story world is from actual reality it has to have *vraisemblance*, to feel real and adhere to some logic. In Herman’s writings the concept of *story logic* has two meanings to him. It refers to both the fact that the stories have logic that “consist of strategies for coding circumstances, participants, states, actions, and events in the story worlds” and that stories constitute logic themselves, and provide a resource for comprehending experience and organizing interaction. The first kind

²⁶⁴ Chatman (1978) p. 49

²⁶⁵ Chatman (1978) p. 176, *Italics mine*.

²⁶⁶ Culler (1975) p. 138-139

of logic sees narrative as a product and the second as a process. Stories have and are logic.²⁶⁷

Ryan has attempted to break the semantic universe of narrative into a realm of facts²⁶⁸ and that of the possible worlds created by “the mental activity of the characters; the potentially actualisable worlds of knowledge, desire, obligations, anticipation, goals and plans, as well as the alternative worlds of pretence, dreams, hallucinations, and embedded fictions.”²⁶⁹ She goes further to argue that the intrinsic tellability makes certain plots produce ever new versions, and is a function of the story’s ability to “deploy a rich field of virtualities.”²⁷⁰ Every story creates virtualities at the same time it gives birth to a story world. One of these virtualities indeed is the American Dream that gets recreated anew with the telling of the story. The world where American Dream was reality for all American’s was the story world Reagan primarily wanted to give birth to,

I would ask you to join with me for a moment in a dream, not a fantasy or day dream but a practical dream.²⁷¹

It was Lubomir Dolezel who initially brought new depth to narratology by claiming that instead of the more traditional views centred on a story as opposed to discourse, the “basic concept of narratology is not “story”, but “narrative world,” defined within a typology of possible worlds.”²⁷² Palmer argues that “story worlds are possible worlds that are constructed by language through a performative force that is granted by cultural convention.”²⁷³ How then can one actually access the story world which is created by a performative utterance? Dolezel further claims that one can access a story world through semiotic channels by “crossing somehow the world boundary between the realms of the actual and the possible” and that the reconstruction of the story world “integrates fictional worlds into the reader’s reality.”²⁷⁴ I differ from Dolezel thinking by claiming that the fictional worlds do not actually invade the reality of the reader, but rather the whole point is to make the

²⁶⁷ Herman (2004) p. 50

²⁶⁸ This realm is “the textual actual world” in Ryan’s terminology

²⁶⁹ Ryan (1999) p. 118

²⁷⁰ Ryan (1999) p. 118

²⁷¹ Speech, “Pacifica Junior Chamber of Commerce Annual Meeting, April 2, 1966” p 216 Folder: 1966 Campaign: RR speeches and statements, Book I (5), Box C30, Research Unit, Ronald Reagan Governor’s papers, Ronald Reagan Library

²⁷² Dolezel (1998). Cit. in Palmer (2006) p. 33.

²⁷³ Palmer (2006) p. 33

²⁷⁴ Dolezel (1998). Cit in Palmer (2006) p. 34

boundary between actual and possible so thin that concepts can cross from one into another without great difficulties, and thus the story recipient/story world constructor is not able to tell where the division between actual and possible lies. It is no Berlin Wall, but rather a transparent foil which does not resist the attempts of the story recipient to cross from one into another. Language is the channel or way to cross this boundary but the story itself has to have enough narrativity so that the storylines are followed through the membrane between worlds.

This involuntary and unconscious crossing between worlds is partially explained by Marie-Laure Ryan's "principle of minimal departure." This refers to the idea that when one has the position of the story recipient, he reconstructs a story world from the text led by the assumption that the story world is as close to the actual world as possible. Unless specifically told different by the text, he assumes that the things not actually told in the story are constructed along the same lines as in his immanent reality. The story has to tell that something differs from one's day-to-day life to create the difference in the story world.²⁷⁵ This means that to build a story world that radically differs from reality; the narrator must explicitly point out the differences and emphasize them. If Reagan did not portray the Soviet Union as a "focus of evil in the modern world" or the "evil empire"²⁷⁶ the recipient of the story would perhaps see the Soviet Union only as a competing superpower. If Reagan did not specify that daring to dream great dreams leads to greatness the story world constructor would not include it in his story world, because it has not happened to him in reality. These are just clumsy examples but enough to point out that the narrator needs to specify and point out those particulars of the story world his intention is to create and he wants included that differ from the "real" world. Wills has compared entering Reagan's story worlds, or, visiting "Reaganland" to visiting Disneyland.²⁷⁷ Things are constructed to represent an embellished reality.

While narrative offers us a way to give meaning to our lives through it, we can expand our "mental horizon beyond the physical, actual world – toward the worlds of dreams, phantasms, fantasy, possibilities, and counter factuality"²⁷⁸ This is the idea of story world formation. We are pulled away from the actual world we

²⁷⁵ Palmer (2006) p. 35 This same idea is expressed in more detail in Rabinowitz (1987) p. 104-105

²⁷⁶ Reagan (8.3.1983) Remarks at the Annual Convention of the National Association of Evangelicals in Orlando, Florida <http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1983/30883b.htm>

²⁷⁷ Wills (2000) p. 459

²⁷⁸ Ryan (2004) p. 3

inhabit into alternate realities by stories. Genette noted that the narrating or the performance itself creates a boundary; “a shifting but sacred frontier between two worlds, the world in which one tells, the world of which one tells.”²⁷⁹ The traditional method of defining narrative in the writings of structuralists is not sufficient for my purposes. The narrativity does not lie in only the structure and grammar of the text itself, but contains extra textual elements as well. Marie-Laure Ryan proposes three criteria, which a text must bring to mind to qualify as narrative;

1. A narrative text must create a world and populate it with characters and objects. [...]
2. The world referred to by the text must undergo changes of state that are caused by nonhabitual physical events: either accidents (“happenings”) or deliberate human actions. These changes create a temporal dimension and place the narrative world in the flux of history.
- 3 The text must allow the reconstruction of an interpretive network of goals, plans, causal relations, and psychological motivations around the narrative events. This implicit network gives coherence and intelligibility to the physical events and turns them into a plot.²⁸⁰

On the basis of this characterization of narrative it is indeed possible to qualify the story Reagan tells as a narrative text. The world-creating ability and tendency is omnipresent in Reagan’s story. The intriguing aspect of this created world is its similarity to the actual world, and the fact that one of the objectives and goals of the entire storytelling process is to convince the story recipients that there is not a created or an artificial story world, but that Reagan’s narration refers to the actual world his recipients occupy. Since the stories are told to influence the actual world and its events through the political procedures and decision-making it would not “do” to appear to create a story world that is separate from the one the politics are a part of. The politician should not appear to be a “day dreamer” who spins tall tales of possible worlds but a down-to-earth leader concerned only with what is actually happening. Therefore Reagan takes a lot of care in depicting his imaginary America as the “real world”. The story worlds and the real world are populated with the same people and same incidents and certain events tend to take place in all the worlds.

Here is the ingenuity of using narrative as communication technique. Reagan picks real-world people and inserts them into his story verse either stripped of some characteristics of imbued with additional traits and qualities. He creates new

²⁷⁹ Genette (1980) p. 236

²⁸⁰ Ryan (2004) p. 8-9 and Ryan (2004b) p. 337. While for Ryan language is indeed the native tongue of narrative she sees it in cognitive terms not as a linguistic object but rather as a mental image and a cognitive construct.

fictional characters that fit into his own storyline, but in the process of narrating he portrays them as real and actual people. This fits well with Uri Margolin's concept of "non-actual individual" which is a non-actual being who exists in a possible world, and who can be ascribed physical, social, and mental properties.²⁸¹ The "unknown soldier" discussed earlier is one example. Reagan strips the soldier of all characteristics and turns him into a symbol that could apply to every young man in America. Gorbachev serves as another example. The person Reagan talks about to Americans is in some ways much less than the actual Gorbachev. The *personae* that inhabit the real world are transformed into the characters living their lives in the story world but the aim of the political narration is to conceal this process.

Well, my fellow citizens, today we come together on historic grounds to write a new chapter in the American Revolution. We represent men and women of different faiths, backgrounds, and political parties from every region of our country – the people live on Main Street, U.S.A., and they're saying, "We love this land and we will not give up our American Dream."²⁸²

The use of terminology like "Main Street, U.S.A." makes it clear that America itself is not only an imagined community but a story world itself as well. Reagan uses words to paint a picture of America worthy of the vision of the painter Norman Rockwell. The vision of America is romantic, everything is essentially good and moral, the heart of America lies in those states in the middle of America's rural landscape and the small towns scattered there. Each of these town has a similar Main Street, each of these towns is similar to others in all aspects, but they are narratively distanced so far from actual life that have become just stereotypes that form the setting or staging of Reagan's America with its unifying American Dream.

You know, I've been accused, I know, of being a believer in Norman Rockwell's America; and that's one charge that, as a small-town boy and a reader of the old Saturday Evening Post, I've always willingly pled guilty to that charge.²⁸³

The years Reagan spent in the small towns of the Midwest did not leave imprinted into his mind a strictly romantic picture. As he claimed in a white house briefing; "You know, those sleepy old towns where generation after generation lived. And the kinds in the Midwest left; there was nothing in those towns – Lord, that's why I

²⁸¹ Palmer (2006) p. 38

²⁸² Reagan (19.7.1982) Remarks at a Rally Supporting the Proposed Constitutional Amendment for a Balanced Federal Budget. s. 939

²⁸³ Reagan (14.3.1985) Remarks and a Question-and-Answer Session During a White House Briefing for Members of the Magazine Publishers Association
<http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1985/31485a.htm>

left!”²⁸⁴ This is in stark contrast with the claim that those years were of “rare Huck Finn-Tom Sawyer idylls”²⁸⁵ as Reagan had depicted them. Reagan was able to create “little worlds” as Pemberton has noted, that existed only in his imagination. But he was able to use scenes from these little worlds to touch the hearts of his listeners and communicate his sunny visions to them.²⁸⁶ One thing that proves just how strong these images are is that the description by Huck Finn of his childhood was not idyllic. Rather than a dream, it was a nightmare. Reagan was with the aid of his imagination and storytelling skills able to narratively transform his own reality and life as well as Huckleberry Finn’s into something that would appeal to millions of Americans. Reagan took stories and narrated them anew into something different than the original version. But, as Wills wrote, with Reagan the perfection of pretence lies in the fact that he is not pretending; he is a sincere claimant to a past that never existed.²⁸⁷

Lubomir Dolezel asserts that “text can be characterized as a set of instructions according to which the fictional world is to be recovered and reassembled.”²⁸⁸ He further claims that fictional worlds or story worlds that claim a status of virtual and unreal worlds are always incomplete since “Finite texts, the only texts that humans are capable of producing, are bound to create incomplete worlds.”²⁸⁹ This is certainly true, because no-one would hope to be able to specify every detail of his fictional world from the blades of grass to the shape of snowflakes, or even describe in detail every character that inhabits the story world. But there is actually no need to do that. Gaps are essential to the creation of a story world, because the construction materials the text provides are insufficient for saturation. It is not possible to create a story world with every minuscule detail described. Questions always remain and so do gaps and omissions. It is through gaps and “inevitable omissions that a story will gain its dynamism. Thus whenever the flow is interrupted [...] the opportunity is given to us to bring into play our own faculty for establishing connections – for filling in gaps left by the text itself.”²⁹⁰ Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan argues that a gap in the narrative is a special point which

²⁸⁴ Reagan. Cited in Noonan (2003) p. 147

²⁸⁵ Reagan (1984) a letter in Kinner-Anderson-Anderson (2003) p. 5

²⁸⁶ Pemberton (1997) p. 5-6

²⁸⁷ Wills (2000) p. 111

²⁸⁸ Dolezel, Cit. in Palmer (2006) p. 12. Palmer (2004) p. 198-199

²⁸⁹ Dolezel, cit Herman (2002) p. 67

²⁹⁰ Iser. Cit. in Rimmon-Kenan (1983) p. 127

enhances interest and curiosity but most importantly “contributes to the reader’s dynamic participation in making the text signify.”²⁹¹ A gap entices the mere reader to become a story recipient with an active role in producing a meaning and significance for the story.

Gaps in the narratives are as important as what has been narrated, albeit harder to study. Kafalenos argues that at best the gaps left in the places where information is deferred or suppressed offer us “windows” through which we can observe how narratives shape the interpretations of the events they represent.²⁹² The narrator of any given story chooses how much information he wishes us to have along with the content of the information provided in the story. During the course of the narration we continuously interpret and reinterpret events from moment to moment, based on the information that has been made available to us by the narrator at each given moment.²⁹³ By deciding where to leave gaps, either momentary, where the information is just suspended, or permanent, when information is denied from the story recipient, the narrator is able to guide the manner in which interpretations are made. In the flow of politics there are things that have to be suspended for a determinate length of time. As an example one can use the time prior to the presidential election where candidates try to leave certain policy matters outside their respective story worlds (whereas the other candidate is more than likely to try to identify such subjects and try to bring them up in his story.) Some things tend to get entirely silenced as well.

The distinction whether a gap is permanent or temporary is dependent on the location of the gap. If it is located within the *sjuzet*, there is a corresponding gap within the *fabula* as well. When the gap is only temporary, and the event is only deferred, there are two gaps within the *sjuzet*; one where the information should have been had it not been deferred, and another where the information is later revealed, but there is no gap in the *fabula*. This occurs because the interpreter of the narrative creates a chronological *fabula* from information obtained from the *sjuzet* and thus the *fabula* can only contain those events that a *sjuzet* explicitly states as having happened, or provides enough information for the interpreter to deduct that is

²⁹¹ Rimmon-Kenan (1983) p. 129

²⁹² Kafalenos (1999) p. 34

²⁹³ Kafalenos (1999) p. 35

has in fact occurred.²⁹⁴ Following the thinking of Kafalenos, we can argue that the communication takes place in the gap which lies between the world of the narrator and that of the story recipient. It is the purpose of political storytelling to first utilize this gap and then fill it by communicating values in a manner which brings unity to both worldviews.

On one hand gapping leaves the story world incomplete, because all gaps cannot be filled. On the other hand, it actually helps to create elaborate story worlds, because the story recipient's participation in the construction process grows bigger. He is forced to make assumptions, draw conclusions and add the fine details. He is no longer a passive recipient but is coerced to participate in the creative process. In a very fitting term Peter Rabinowitz refers to this process as the reader's "license to fill."²⁹⁵ This helps the narrator, since he does not have to provide all the details, and because things are not entirely "spelled out" to the story recipient, his own participation in building the story world adds credibility to it, since it is saturated with the details he has provided. A narrator of political narratives may actually be one of the main beneficiaries from this. The creator of the story world relies on his story recipients to be cued to draw inferences and conclusions about the nature of the world being built. They supply information and insert it to fill the gaps in the narrative and make extra textual deductions. If the creator of the story world, in this case the politician can cue his listeners to draw certain kinds of inferences he can use this incompleteness of the story world to his advantage. The political issues he wants to exclude from his story world to not even get the chance to enter it, if he is capable of manipulation of the way his recipients fill his story world with details. Almost anything can be silenced and left out, if the recipient of the story can be cued into constructing a preferred kind of story world. The evident incompleteness of the story world therefore is rather an asset in political storytelling.

Marie-Laure Ryan claims that "we project upon [fictional] worlds everything we know about reality, and [...] make only the adjustments dictated by the text."²⁹⁶ This relation between what is known earlier and what is told or dictated by the text is precarious. The more gaps there are in the narrative the more the recipient must

²⁹⁴ Kafalenos (1999) p. 36-37. Her idea of the relationship between *sjuzet* and *fabula* is deeper than that originally created by Russian formalists because for her simultaneously *fabula* is a set of events from which a *sjuzet* is made and that *sjuzet* reveals the *fabula* at the same time so that the *fabula* becomes a construct created by the reader from the *sjuzet*.

²⁹⁵ Rabinowitz (1987) p. 148

²⁹⁶ Ryan, cit. Herman (2002) p. 68

saturate the text based upon his own knowledge and the less textual cues there are to guide this process of saturation. Therefore a political narrator must provide enough information to sufficiently enable the readers to make the preferred adjustments to the text in order to somewhat minimize the effect of recipients filling the gaps as they will. Unfortunately the more he elaborates his narration the more the text itself is deprived of the “looseness” that is the main point of narrativizing politics. By storytelling the dreary world of politics is turned into something simpler and more comprehensible, and adding unnecessary informational content into the narrative makes it gradually a more complex representation of the political reality and restricts the recipients free construction process of the story world, as well as diminishing the tellability of the story. Narrative loses some of its narrativity and becomes “just” a description of states. But the text itself helps to saturate the story world it creates with more or less minuscule details.

Mary E. Stuckey noticed that Reagan “only established themes” and when these themes reappeared in a broader context, “his audience of the faithful would hear what they wanted to hear, and would interpret it in a way consistent with their own political leanings.”²⁹⁷ Stuckey does not talk about story worlds with my terminology, but the point remains the same. By his manipulation of the audience with stories, Reagan gave birth to story worlds, and the audience created their story worlds in a manner of their own liking after their political preferences, but these story worlds still continued to work for the benefit of Reagan. Thus, narrativizing the political leadership gives a prophetic politician huge benefits.

When it comes to filling the story world with details intertextuality plays a great role. The narrator needs only to refer to other peoples’ story worlds and the details of those can be transplanted into the story world under construction. This process needs to be handled at least as carefully in relation to the texts chosen. Naturally the story recipients have their own “favourite” texts that are used to fill the details whether the creator intends that or not, but similarly the narrator can “choose” some of texts used by planting cues within his storyline. This is most evident in the use of quotations and in its most subtle forms certain words or expressions are chosen for use, that are known to lead some people to make connections to certain texts. To illustrate my point in connection to Reagan’s

²⁹⁷ Stuckey (1989) p. 60

narratives, examples of the former type are his numerous quotations from other presidents and examples of the latter type are the biblical expressions and phrases used without reference, which only have special meaning to the religious part of the recipients and thus work as exclusive cues. The creator of the story world is indeed not alone in his creation. There was no empty void of either story worlds of texts themselves. He can activate other texts to fill his story world and he gets additional construction workers from his story recipients.

It is far from my intentions to claim that once a story world is “completed” it would remain exactly the same, never changing and unaltered. Far from it, since a story world is remodelled, added to, reshaped, and reconstructed all the time with retellings of the story, or just in the minds of the story recipients as they experience life. Alan Palmer argues that narratives cannot even be understood unless the “story world is understood a complex, ever-changing intermingling of the individual narratives of the various characters in it.”²⁹⁸ Why then the need for separate and multiple story worlds? My answer is because time in politics is always of essence, and in order to change the structure of the story world in fundamental ways, one requires too much time and too many retellings to keep up the plausibility of the story. To distract the recipient from the issue under debate that causes the need to reform the story world on its basic level. It is more convenient to lead him into another story world through logical narrative paths. It is easier to use almost the same cues and storylines to create a new story world, or rather have readymade one for future use taken for service, than trying to exclude something fundamental from one that already exists. To further use the metaphor of a story world being constructed like a building and then furnished with the aid of recipients, one could liken this situation into one where the one of the supporting beams is suddenly taken away from the building. The entire story world might crumble.

Marie-Laure Ryan has come up with an interesting concept of an “embedded narrative” which practically means the individual narrative that consists of a certain character’s various perceptual and conceptual viewpoints, ideological worldviews and ideas of the future. This narrative forms only a part of the whole text and can rather be deducted from the larger text than being a separate subtext.²⁹⁹ Embedding

²⁹⁸ Palmer (2004) p. 147

²⁹⁹ Ryan (1991). The idea of embeddedness can be found in the writings of Alasdair MacIntyre as well. See for example MacIntyre (1984) p. 213, where he discusses how one story can be embedded

or framing a narrative concerns the idea of stories within stories.³⁰⁰ This idea in itself was originally argued by Gerald Prince who claimed that “Any narrative is made up of little narratives.”³⁰¹ The term embedded narrative is meant to convey the idea that the story recipient has a wide range of additional information available to use to make and revise judgements about character’s minds among other things.³⁰² For the story world-creation to be effective, a narrative needs beside reporting the actions of the story world participants also sketch out the acting situations, because virtual and unactualized states, events, and actions increase the tellability of the story and all of these work as “virtual embedded narratives even while they remain unactualized possibilities.”³⁰³ These include “not only dreams, fictions, and fantasies conceived or told by the characters, but any kind of representation concerning past or future states and events; plans, passive projections, desires [...]”³⁰⁴ All these help to deem the story tellable and enable a fuller and richer story world to get constructed, but virtual embedded narratives are secondary to the more common embedded narratives. I claim that the life of Reagan itself is a powerful embedded narrative in every story or narrative he tells. The ideals and ideologies he stands for are omnipresent in every speech or written text, the visions of future that are specifically his creations abound everywhere one looks. But the most important embedded narrative is the American Dream, which is pervasive to every utterance. The myth of America’s past and future is omnipresent. No matter what the actual subject of topic of his speech is, the underlying embedded narrative shines through. Reagan’s utterances on even politically relatively neutral issues always are embedded with the values he himself stands for. What complicates a claim like this is the fact that Reagan’s storytelling does not form a unified whole, but is a network of stories. Nevertheless I argue that these ideas and visions of the future just as well as the glorified past shrouded in myth work as embedded narratives in each story and additionally as an embedded metanarrative in the entire story verse creation process. The American Dream is everywhere, and it influences the metanarrative on

within another or p. 222 where the history and practice of our time is embedded in and made intelligible in a longer history presented in narrative form. Practically, then, Ryan has renamed something already in existence, since Barthes (1974) p. 90 writes about “nested narratives” or, again, one narrative being within another narrative.

³⁰⁰ Ryan (1999) p. 121

³⁰¹ Prince (1992) P. 22 Cited in Ryan (1999) p. 121

³⁰² Palmer (2004) p. 183

³⁰³ Ryan (1991) p.156

³⁰⁴ Ryan (1991) p. 156

the level of single utterances or speeches, on the level of storylines and the stories, and on the level of the entire storytelling, or the metanarrative. It in other words affects the stories used to create the story verse and the directly the story verse itself.

1.2.3. STORYVERSE

So what kind of narratives are these told by Reagan which take tens of thousands of pages and decades to tell? I'm not discussing only a single story, but a web of interconnecting storylines that are told and retold again and refined and recreated in each telling. The story recipient does not wait until the end to understand the text. Although information is provided only gradually, according to Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan the data integration starts at the very beginning, and thus the length of the story is not essential, since the recipient forms hypotheses, reinforces them, modifies them, develops them, and maybe even casts them aside to be replaced by others.³⁰⁵ Multiple story worlds are created and modified to adapt to the changes in temporal, spatial and factual conditions. I could restrict myself to a narrative analysis of a single memorable speech of which there are plenty to choose from, but by doing that I would violate the intricacy of Reagan's narration. The very thing that makes Reagan so interesting to study is his multifaceted and detail-rich story spinning. His story worlds are so numerous, rich dimensionally as well as in detail, that it would not suffice to analyse just a small part of them. Instead I have chosen as my method seeing Reagan's all material as creating one gigantic metanarrative of which I try to dissect elements for my study. In everything Reagan said or wrote there are cues embedded to activate the story recipient to get immersed in one of his story worlds. Therefore I have taken a more holistic approach to the entire concept of a story and try to analyse a collection of stories that I argue make up a coherent whole. Any presidential speech given by Reagan was anchored to many contexts, among them the context of his entire political narration. His was a narrated, enacted and performed presidency.

Lou Cannon was an efficient researcher of Reagan's verbal gaffes in his articles and editorials on Reagan as well as the books that he has written.³⁰⁶ While exposing these gaffes as untruths, misstatements or whatever has a large role in

³⁰⁵ Rimmon-Kenan (1983) p. 121

³⁰⁶ Cannon (2001) and (2003)

enabling us to better understand the mental world of Ronald Reagan they still not most often take anything away from the power of his narratives and are understandable in such a detailed creation of interconnecting narratives. There are faults which are pardonable to even the political poet or narrator. As Horace wrote, “When a poem is most brilliant, I will not take offence at a few blemishes due to carelessness or human nature’s lack of foresight [...] in a long work, sleep may well steal over the writer’s mind.”³⁰⁷ And this narrative work by Reagan was long and huge indeed. It spanned decades in terms of both his life as narrated and also of the time it took him to narrate it. He started his narration to the American public in the 1960’s and reached his coda in the late 1980’s. One single story world is not enough to contain the entire story, and naturally in such a long narration mistakes occur as part of the human condition, but what must be understood, is that when the story has enough narrativity, the mistakes made in the telling do not leave a long standing blemish.

Herman argues that the word “story world” applies to both fictional and non-fictional narratives and it sometimes is rather difficult and pointless to even try to make the distinction between those two in Reagan’s narration. All narratives have world-creating power, and the type of narrative involved is the factor that causes recipients to use different evaluative criteria in their interpretation.³⁰⁸ The political storyteller therefore benefits the most, if he can tell a story that cues the interpreters to view it as non-fictional. If his stories are interpreted in any way as figments of imagination and fictional in nature the narrator is trouble. He loses political credibility. But if he is able to convince that however distanced his narrative is from the real-world events, it is still an interpretation of the actual reality he gains the greatest benefits. Therefore the story must cue the relocation of the interpreter in such a manner that optimally he does not feel or realize his removal from the real world and insertion into the story world. The story world must be such an intricate construction that it imitates the real world to the smallest possible detail except for those that serve the politician’s purpose by being added to or removed from the story world.

Works of fiction encode stand-alone story worlds which cannot be falsified by virtue of their relation to other story worlds. One story can build upon another so

³⁰⁷ Horace (1940) p. 72

³⁰⁸ Herman (2002) p. 16

that this “successor-world” is preceded by the “protoworld” in time, and may feature different participants and fill in gaps of the protoworld, but both are not in contradiction to each other on the level of basic rules and organisational level. Since every story has the ability to create a world of its own one ought to talk of an entire “story verse” where different story worlds are loosely connected to each other. For one story to merely fill the gaps of another and only polemicize or complement it is not sufficient for political storytelling. Since the purpose of Machiavellian concept of politics is to use ones *virtus* at the right moment to entice *Fortuna*, every moment becomes a moment of *kairos-time*, exceptional from normal chronological time. One has to sense the most beneficial moment to act and employ the opportunity given him. As Reagan humorously put this,

The problem of recognizing opportunities -- it reminds me of a story about Moses. He had led the children of Israel out of Egypt. He got to the Red Sea. God parted the waters. Moses looked around and said, “Oh, Lord, just as I was going in for a swim.”³⁰⁹

A politician at such a virtuous moment must be able to switch from one story to another and perhaps even denounce everything told earlier. If he switches to a completely different story, his plausibility evaporates unless he is able to remove his story recipient into a very similar story world as the one he has used earlier. This new story world must lack those ingredients or building blocks that have become the point of the whole political controversy that initiated the need to switch from one story world to another. It is my argument that a credible political storyteller must have access to multiple story worlds that are relatively similar, but built in a manner that leaves certain story components missing from each story world. Then the issue of political debate can be silenced or excluded completely from the narration, while the story world itself seems still similar or even identical to one, where those issues still exist and would have to have been answered to. These story worlds lie parallel to each other and exist simultaneously in such a manner that multiple storylines serve as actual routes into them. Story recipients optimally can be cued to exit one via these routes and enter another without noticing the shift. For an average story, no matter how intricate it is, just one story world suffices. J.R.R. Tolkien built one single story world for his Lord of the Rings trilogy and added to it in his other works. Same applies to many other tale spinners, but in the rapidly changing world

³⁰⁹ Reagan (16.11.1987) Remarks at the Annual Meeting of the American Council of Life Insurance <http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1987/111687a.htm>

of politics the success may depend upon having multiple story worlds to use as safe havens. Naturally the manipulation and upkeep of these multiple story worlds is no meagre task. In this study if I refer to multiple story worlds being used I shall use the self-coined expression “story verse” to refer to the plurality of possible worlds created.

I naturally realize that there is not a lot new and different in my term story verse, from “fictional world” , “tale world”, “story realm” or “imaginary world” or any other terms used to describe the basically same thing. It is just my intention (and other writers’ as well) to with a different terminology try to emphasize the importance of some characteristics of this textually created world. Young, for example, separates a story realm as a region of narrative discourse within the realm of conversation, and tale world as the realm of the events the story is about.³¹⁰ Marie-Laure Ryan seems to talk of something similar to my conception in her principle to “seek the diversification of possible worlds in the narrative universe.”³¹¹ My idea of a story verse adds to the discussion, however, multiple simultaneous narrative worlds that create multiple universes, with their different natural laws.

It must be emphasized that the existence of multiple and indeterminate story worlds is nothing new in itself. As Margolin notes, many post-modern novels “portray worlds that are ontologically multiple or indeterminate but often the multiplicity is presented as an irreducible fact, not as competing hypotheticals.”³¹² Here lies the distinction. The post-modern novel as well as narrative theory portrays the multiple and indeterminate nature of the world as a fact that cannot be avoided. In the realm of politics the idea of a story verse includes the idea that these multiple worlds are in every possible sense presented as singular, and furthermore simple enough in their structures to comprehend. The political importance of such narratives lies in the fact that it “hides” the existence of multiple worlds from the story recipients, and uses their indeterminate boundaries as means for transporting the story recipients between story worlds at will. As Katherine Young claims, the boundaries of either the tale world, or the realm the story is about, and the realm of narrative discourse, or story realm, remain *pervious*.³¹³ Story worlds are often unbounded, unless specially built in such a manner, and the lack of boundaries helps

³¹⁰ Young (1999), p198, Young (2004) p.76

³¹¹ Ryan (1991), p 156

³¹² Margolin (1999) p. 149

³¹³ Young (1999) p. 198-199. Italics mine.

the often involuntary and unnoticed transportation of the story recipients from one world to another within the story verse. It can be said that the boundaries of story worlds are semi-pervasive membranes. States, events, and actions are not able to pass or infiltrate from one world to another without directed to do so, but the membrane offers no resistance for the story recipients crossing.

Todorov had something similar in mind when he wrote that “the work of fiction effects the transition – whose omnipresence conceals its importance and its singularity – from a series of sentences to an imaginary universe.”³¹⁴ The notion of a story verse is clearly present and the choice of words (universe instead of a world) a larger and more complex construction than Herman seems to refer to. The text or a story starts a “labour of *construction* –which occurs in the reader’s mind but is in no way individual, since such constructions are analogous in various readers – [by which] we reach that universe where certain characters live, comparable to the persons we know “in life.””³¹⁵ The text and the actual process of narrating guide the story recipients in the construction and this is what accounts to some of the analogousness. Alan Palmer echoes Ryan in claiming that for a story world to be evoked, a universe must be brought to life and convey to the story recipient the sense that at the centre of this universe there “resides an actual or real world, a realm of factual states or events.”³¹⁶ This is not what I mean by story verse, since essentially a universe is just a collection of “worlds” that exist simultaneously but separately from each other. A universe is basically multiple worlds which have no overlapping and perhaps the word “pluriverse”, several universes existing together simultaneously in different planes of reality and with such fundamental differences among the individual story worlds that they could simply not coexist, describes what I wish to point out.

If order for the need or even the occasion to create a story verse to arise the story must be unconventional as well. Even the most intricate single story does not merit the creation of more than a singular story world. The creation of an entire story verse requires multiple stories. Just as the story worlds were parallel and partially interconnected by their nature are the stories told. If a metanarrative is defined as something above singular stories, then we could say that a story verse is

³¹⁴ Todorov (1981) p. 27

³¹⁵ Todorov (1981) p. 27

³¹⁶ Palmer (2004) p. 188

something the metanarrative creates. A collection of storylines must exist and form a web of stories which are connected to each other at many junctures, where another storyline can be picked up. Every moment of choosing in Reagan's narration can be considered a nexus, where the story potentially can take a new direction of a different storyline, and thus move fluently from one story world to another within the story verse. Barthes writes about "the knots of the story"³¹⁷ These knots are usually points where the discourse would be able "to think of something else," and thus abandon the telling of the whole story, or at least that particular storyline followed thus far. Even in texts that are not political in origin, these knots are situated at the peaks of crises and not at their outcomes. The knot works as a closure or even an end of a particular storyline, and provides a new direction for the narrative. "The knot closes, terminates, concludes the action in progress."³¹⁸

Since one storyline leads a listener into the realm of the story, the story world I propose to use the expression "story web" to refer to the walk-ways between story worlds. In other words, there are numerous storylines used in Reagan's political storytelling and the task of each one is to ensnare the story recipient to enter the story world. Since these storylines are interconnected and overlapping, there is a big chance that the story recipient will start to follow another storyline even without noticing it. While each and every storyline leads into the story verse, within it the numerous storylines create a story web, which acts as the conduit within the story verse from one story world to another. It would be tempting to describe the story web along the lines of a web spun by a spider, but this would be oversimplifying the matter. When enough stories are told which criss-cross each other, the resulting story web is more or less as a Gordian knot or a ball an old lady has created by tying together pieces of string she has found. Within a spider web-like structure it might be possible for a talented narrator to actually guide the process in which the story recipient wanders deeper and deeper into the story verse. This unfortunately is not true, since the story recipient may at each place where the storylines cross each other, take a more or less random turn or choose not to do so, all according to his or her personal preferences. All that the narrator can control is to try to tell all his stories so, that the maximal number of storylines lead to the same "closure" of the story, which in the case of Reagan can be the global freedom

³¹⁷ Barthes (1974) p. 52

³¹⁸ Barthes (1974) p. 52

ultimately enjoyed by every human being. If the aim, goal, or closure of the story is narrated as grand enough, so that it is in the interests of every story recipient to see it actualized, even storylines which emanate from totally opposite standpoints may blend together and exist (without even noticing it) in harmony within the story world. To make an exaggerated example, if the ultimate freedom can be reached when the totalitarian enemy of the Soviet Union is no longer preventing its birth, both starting points of “peace through strength” and *détente* with willingness to be flexible in negotiation table can lose their initial origins as their respective storylines proceed deeper into the story web and could actually even join at some point.

Marie-Laure Ryan’s interest in new narratives created with the help of computer and virtual reality technology offers us new ways of envisioning traditional narratives as well. One of these is the concept she chooses to call “morphing.” In computer graphics this is a visual effect where a picture is turned into another with the help of numerous intermediary frames in between that gradually alter one picture and transforms it in such a progressive manner that one realized only retrospectively, that the original form has been replaced with another. This excludes instantaneous changes which are as a theme as old as myths and narratives themselves. Naturally to speak of narrative morphing presupposes a certain degree of metaphorical displacement, as the object of morphing has to be transposed from the visual to verbal domain.³¹⁹ Nevertheless, the concept of morphing is useful in understanding political narratives, especially in the realm of enemy images. Black can be whitewashed credibly only by progressive minute transformations which enable the narrator, in this case Reagan, to make the ideological shift from calling the Soviet Union the “evil empire” to something one can reason with and share similar goals. In many other instances the ability to avoid an instantaneous transformation allows the political narrator much more leeway as well. Other strategies must naturally be used when the flow of politics does not simply allow time for any gradual change, but morphing makes the transformation more plausible for the story recipients. While morphing allows on one plane the story to gradually, and without the story recipient even noticing, to change into another kind of story, on a plane of story worlds, which can be seen as higher level constructions as compared to the stories themselves, another process of morphing

³¹⁹ Ryan (1999) p. 131

occurs. One story world starts to morph into another and this brings the multiple story worlds that combine together to form a story verse into play. Morphing allows story worlds to blend as well.

When it comes to the different levels of narratology, Dolezel sees them as that of the “deep structure”, the semantic structure and the discourse structure. The first is exemplified by the works of Algirdas Julien Greimas, the second by Roland Barthes, Tzvetan Todorov or Claude Bremond and the third by Gerard Genette.³²⁰ To some extent this division is outdated. Another division into levels is provided by David Lodge. If the study of narratives is described as a three-level structure as Lodge does, we can see problems arising. Lodge describes these three levels on inquiry as that of narratology and narrative grammar, that of the poetics of fictions, and that of the rhetorical analysis of fiction. The first can be described as the search for narrative *langue* and is centred on how the structure of the *fabula* is realized in the *sjuzet*. The second level aims at describing and classifying techniques of fictional representation, for example the relations between the narrated and the narrative. The third level studies the discourse-level features of narratives and tries to show how the linguistic mediation of the story determines its effects and meaning.³²¹ For my purposes it does not do to get entwined within the bounds of any of these levels. My purpose is to research the political aspect of the use of narratives and thus to gain understanding of the use of stories in political processes. Thus I must jump from each of these artificial levels to another and to try and combine theories that concern only one of these levels at a time, since my interest does not focus on narrative itself but its political usages. I do not claim to develop any new way of interpretation, but merely to try to compose a model that would be jointly formal and functional, so that both the text itself and the context of the stories would be analysed. There exists a complex interplay between narrative form and the context of narrative interpretation and this interplay could be characterized, quoting David Herman as “the way stories are designed and the processing strategies promoted by their design.”³²²

Bruner sees language to construct of levels and the levels above sound are morphemes, lexemes, sentences, speech acts and discourse. Each level has its own

³²⁰ Dolezel (1999) p. 247

³²¹ Herman (1999) p. 6-7

³²² Herman (1999) p. 8

form of order but is controlled by the level directly above it and to study one level, one cannot isolate it from the level above.³²³ If we specify the meaning of language for a moment and define it as a vessel of storytelling, we can alter the abovementioned levels. Thus, after sentences could be storyline, story, and story verse. It is crucial to understand that a complicated narrative that emerges from long and active process of storytelling cannot effectively be studied without taking into view the story world, or in some cases the story verse “above” the story. It must be remembered that neither the story world, nor a story verse, is in all cases created by the particular story being told alone. Intertextuality and the life experiences of the story recipients play a large part in this construction as well. Thus, a story verse actually controls the stories told about it or being added to it. Bruner claims that all stories of literary merit are about events in the “real world,” but they render that world newly strange, rescue it from obviousness, and fill it with gaps that incite the reader to become a writer of a virtual text about the text they have read.³²⁴ I differ from Bruner’s argument, but only slightly. It is my claim that a truly great story assures the reader that it deals with the “real” world, while it actually incites the reader to construct along with the virtual text a virtual world as well, or in other words cues the reader to recreate his “real” world anew. It is in this process of recreation that the worldview shifts away from the “real” and towards a story world. The more subtly the story manages this so that the reader will not even notice the switching of worlds, the greater the story is. Actually there have to be many different stories told, each one at least partially existing in potential, or being embedded in the other stories, before a story verse can emerge and a story verse would thus be the highest level or internal structure or organization within narratives.

While each and every story establishes an individual story world the concept of a story verse should not be cast aside from political narration as a very important tool of leadership. For the analysis of traditional literary narratives it is not that important, since any author needs to use a singular story world when he portrays the same characters in different stories.³²⁵ As an example we can use Sir Arthur Conan

³²³ Bruner (1986) p. 21

³²⁴ Bruner (1986) p. 24

³²⁵ There naturally is an exception to this and almost every other rule. Stephen King has throughout his literary career used multiple storyworlds and has displaced his characters from a storyworld of

Doyle. When he grew irritated with his own creation, the famous detective Sherlock Holmes he wrote a “final” story where he fell into a waterfall in combat with his mortal enemy professor Moriarty. Doyle’s audience, however, yearned for more Sherlock Holmes stories and he had to “resurrect” his character. This could not have happened by using an alternative story world where Holmes did not have the penultimate battle. The plausibility of the story logic would have shattered and the readers would have been confused and disappointed. Doyle had to find a method of using the same continuous storyline and depicting a miraculous escape from the jaws of death for Sherlock Holmes. In political narration one of the goals of the entire storytelling is to confuse the audience and distort the story logic, when it is deemed necessary to do so for political purposes.

Only by creating multiple story worlds, or a story verse, is the political narrator able to escape the restrictions imposed by the story logic within a single story world. When he creates, or rather cues his audiences to create, multiple story worlds can he manipulate his audience by transporting them from one story world into another and once the narration is complex enough, even do it without the story recipients noticing a thing. The concept of a story verse can act in politics as a way of providing an illusion of unity when there is actually no such thing. The citizens as story recipients create their own story worlds based on the stories told by the political narrator and while they would be proved fundamentally different under closer scrutiny, they manage to provide a sense of consensus. In the next chapter I will take a closer look into how this can actually happen in the case of civil religion. People construct their own story worlds based on such concepts as freedom, democracy, and the American Way of Life and if the political narrator in a leadership position is able to manipulate his stories well enough to allow the construction of a story verse, different story worlds among individual citizens and the subgroups they form appear to project a sense of unity and common purpose and goals while there is no such thing. Thus a certain vagueness of political concepts, also communicated in storytelling, is a beneficial resource. After all, to gain political leadership and more importantly to hold on to it in the next election is one of the primary goals of any politician, and this often requires, or at least is greatly assisted by, the misleading and confusing of the citizenry. A story verse allows a politician

one novel into a completely different story in another novel. This, again, is best exemplified in his “Dark Tower” series.

to reach for a more universal support based on the illusion that the multiple story worlds his story recipients have created is one unifying concept, such as the American Dream of Way of Life.

The creation of a story verse is a demanding task, since besides requiring skills of narration, the actual drafting of multiple story worlds is bound to take a long time and thus the time-span the political narrator spends in the spotlight of politics has to be relatively longish. Nevertheless, I argue that for those politicians in whose leadership narratives play an important role do this process consciously and intentionally. Just as in the case of civil religion, as I will later show, no-one claims to actually practice it. Every politician claims that the way he portrays the world to his electorate is “realist.” But by emphasizing the importance of one thing and leaving other things neglected in this story and doing the opposite in another story he is able to focus the attention of the citizenry on, or divert it from, certain issues. When the story worlds that create the story verse are each very close to the “real” world the deitic shift is easy to initiate. By focusing on specific issues and downplaying others the political narrator is able to manipulate the way people see their reality by supplanting them into one story world at a time and in response to the demands of the situation by moving them to others through the pervasive membranes of the worlds. So, it is the intention of the politician to build a story verse and make it as elaborate and consisting of as many story worlds as possible. It is a tool for politics, a mechanism which blurs the storied and the experienced and allows the politician to manipulate the *Weltanschauung* of his people.

1.3. STEPPING OUTSIDE THE STORY

The meaning of a sentence, one might say, is not a form or an essence, present at the moment of its production and lying behind it as a truth to be recovered, but the *series of developments to which it gives rise, as determined by past and future relations between words.*³²⁶

-Frederic Jameson

1.3.1 AUTHOR, NARRATOR, STORYTELLER – AND REAGAN

You know, some of you I’m afraid have been exposed to me before and you’re going to discover, if you have, that I am a sort of “Johnny One-Note.” I continue more or less hammering away at the same subject. The music is

³²⁶ Culler (1975) p. 132. Italics mine.

always the same, now and then a little re-wording of the lyrics, but it still comes out sounding the same.³²⁷

-Ronald Wilson Reagan

Now it is time to take a look at the aspects of narrative which are, so to say, external to the story itself. While actants and characters inhabit the story world, authors, narrators and especially narratees or story recipients tend to remain outside the story and often the story world as well. We have already discussed how Reagan entered his story worlds as a character thus blurring the dividing line between narrator and character and in this section we shall see that his story recipients occasionally got entangled with the storylines as well and were turned into characters. In other words, Reagan, as the narrator, and citizens, as story recipients, were in constant flux between the “real” world and the worlds that combine to create the story verse. We shall now discuss the roles of these extra textual actants involved in the story to better understand how they could be transported into the story as well. I have argued that the creation of a story verse takes place on the interphase between the internal aspects of the story and the story recipient. Now I must confess that even these aspects, like Reagan as a narrator, that should remain external to the story itself do not always stick to the rules. In this section I will show how Reagan, besides blurring the distinction between the “real” world and the story worlds contained in his story verse, blurs also the boundaries between the internal and external elements of the story. The author or the narrator can be story participants as well. This blurring of roles is an essential and particularly interesting aspect of Reagan’s political narration. I will deal with the problem of the actual authorship of Reagan’s stories and argue that in political narration the narratorship is more important than the origin of the words that combine into a story by a performative act of the prophetic politician.

The idea of a singular “author” has lately been questioned in narrative theory. There is no Author with a capital “A” as such versions of authors have been convention-bound and subject to change. As Ginsburg and Rimmon-Kenan argue

Different (literary) texts, different generic formulations, under different historical conditions, have been created-produced-written and received-consumed-read with different versions of authors in mind. Such versions range from a posited sole source of meaning, an originator of truth, to an

³²⁷ Speech (“Losing freedom by installment”) Rotary Club of Long Beach , 6/6/62. Box 43 Subseries E, Reagan, Ronald: Pre-presidential papers, Series I Speeches and writings, Ronald Reagan Library

anonymous, effaced transmitter of tradition, from the objective reporter to the political *engage*.³²⁸

Reagan wanted to avoid seeming to be this “political *engage*” but it was and is the basic narrator position of a political prophet. He needs to sound in his narration like a completely objective messenger, but nevertheless outside the tight bounds of the narrative he needs to be precisely the “sole source of meaning,” that is, the master narrator of the topic he elaborates. He must sound like a neutral voice and within the narrative discourse hide the political intentions that colour everything told.

The narrator, author, and even the implied author have to be separated from each other. While the “hand mark” of the author can be seen influencing the text, the boundaries of the text must be transgressed. Author produces the meaning of the text and narrator is a part of a model designed to account for textual operations within literary narratives.³²⁹ In cases such as Reagan’s speeches, where the actual authors (the speechmakers, especially during the presidency) tried their best to imitate the style of the narrator, who also assumed the role of the implied author in the eyes of the story recipients, the distinctions become even more blurred, since the voice of the actual author is purposefully being drowned below that of the narrator. “It’s typical, isn’t it? I just quoted a great writer, but as an actor, I get the bow.”³³⁰

Todorov emphasizes the different stances the subject of the speech act, or in other words, the narrator, can take. The narrative voice can be troublesome. The narrator can be omnipresent in the story intervening constantly, or much more discreet. However, since the narrative itself enables making the narrator a figure within the fictive universe or story world, this is a totally distinct stance for the narrator to assume. The distinction does not lie in the narrator’s use of the word “I” but in the actual level of intervention within the fictive universe. Todorov uses the word “narrator” with regard only to an explicit representation of the “implied author” in the general case.³³¹ Reagan often participates in his own story verse, but just as often he hides behind the narrative, being only the teller with no part in the events portrayed. When Reagan chooses to be part of his storytelling and chooses to play a role thus portraying himself as both the hero and the narrator and thus

³²⁸ Ginsburg-Rimmon-Kenan (1999) p. 72

³²⁹ Ginsburg-Rimmon-Kenan (1999) p. 75

³³⁰ Reagan (1.3.1985) Remarks at the Annual Dinner of the Conservative Political Action Conference <http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1985/30185f.htm>

³³¹ Todorov (1981) p. 38-39

becomes what Todorov calls “narrator-character,”³³² he does immerse himself into the story verse and automatically allows the recipients to start constructing a new identity for him in accordance with the story logic. Reagan is no longer an actual person. Once he starts implanting himself as a hero or another character in his narration, his identity becomes narratively constructed and thus negotiable. Reagan becomes a narrator-character and this combination of at the same time helping the reader to create a story world while participating in it, is strange at the first glimpse. But this is common in the genre of fiction in first-person narration, where the character acts as a narrator telling his own story. After all, everything Reagan tells about himself, he tells about America and the other way around. He is a participant in his mythical America and indeed the America he depicts takes shape only in relation to him. All the political stories Reagan told were essentially stories about his own “American Life” to follow the title of his post-presidential autobiography.³³³

Reagan took a lot of care to portray himself to the recipient as a reliable narrator. This can be defined as an author “whose rendering of the story and commentary on it the reader is supposed to take as an authoritative account of the fictional truth.”³³⁴ An unreliable narrator is one, who arouses suspicions in his story recipients as to the “truth” of what is being told. Rimmon-Kenan distinguishes as the main sources of unreliability “the narrator’s limited knowledge, his personal involvement, and his problematic value-scheme.”³³⁵ All of these sources are evident and present in Reagan’s narration and sometimes do considerable damage to his reliability, despite his efforts to appear reliable. His knowledge on some subjects is less than satisfactory and in these his blunders cause considerable damage to his authoritarian narrator/speaker position. The personal involvement concerns naturally every political narrator, but the value-scheme is not necessarily as drastic as in Reagan’s prophetic narration. Nevertheless, the challenge to appear as reliable narrator is one that every political storyteller has to face if for no other reason, at least because of his involvement in the topics narrated. A politician wants to inflict a change, he tells his stories for a purpose and yet the narration should sound neutral to appear reliable. Reagan tried to create himself as a stock figure of truth who can

³³² Todorov (1981) p. 40

³³³ Which was also partially ghostwritten.

³³⁴ Rimmon-Kenan (1983) p. 100

³³⁵ Rimmon-Kenan (1983) p. 100

be trusted and whose authority should be acknowledged both as an authoritative narrator and also by using himself as a reliable and trustworthy character in the stories where he inserted himself into some role.

The narrator can be either reliable or unreliable depending upon whether he “speaks for or acts in accord with the norms of the work”³³⁶ or not. Furthermore according to Wayne C. Booth the narrator may be unreliable about either facts or values.³³⁷ There are many ways in which the narrator can show his unreliability. Phelan and Martin have identified six different types of unreliability: misreporting, misreading, misevaluating (or misregarding), underreporting, underreading, and under regarding. Misreporting is unreliability considering facts and events and is usually a consequence of narrator’s insufficient knowledge or mistaken values. It almost always occurs with misreading or misevaluating. These two can occur also by themselves, and misreading is about unreliability on the matters of knowledge and perception, while misevaluation is about ethics and evaluation. Underreporting, under reading, and under regarding take place on the same axes of binary concepts so, that underreporting occurs when the narrator tells less than he knows, under reading when the narrator’s lack of knowledge yields an insufficient interpretation on the events described and under regarding when the narrator’s ethical judgements moves along the right lines but falls short of its aim.³³⁸ An excerpt from Reagan’s speech to the nation trying to explain the Iran-Contra affair serves to illustrate this point. “A few months ago I told the American people I did not trade arms for hostages. My heart and my best intentions still tell me that's true, but the facts and the evidence tell me it is not.”³³⁹ After something like this, it is a monstrous challenge for the narrator to regain reliability.³⁴⁰

³³⁶ Booth (1961) p. 158

³³⁷ Booth (1961), Phelan-Martin (1999) p. 90-91

³³⁸ Phelan-Martin (1999) p. 95-96

³³⁹ Reagan (4.3.1987) Address to the Nation on the Iran Arms and Contra Aid Controversy <http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1987/030487h.htm>

³⁴⁰ Indeed there are numerous references in Reagan’s personal diaries that point out to the fact that Reagan knew a lot more about the affair than he publicly admitted to. As an example might suffice “We sit quietly by & never reveal how we got them [hostages] back. Reagan (2007) p. 381. Diary entry for 7.1.1986. In hearings concerning the matter Reagan’s memory as related to the incident was vague to the extreme while he could easily have consulted his diary for confirmations of dates and actions taken. So, perhaps Reagan was not that reliable as a narrator as the American public presumed. Reagan claims to have consulted his diaries from 1985 prior to a meeting with the Tower commission and claims that “It sure is helping my memory.” Reagan (2007) Diary Entry for 22.1.1987. Thus it is intriguing that he still remained almost useless in giving testimony.

Leaks to the media are often considered to have been a plague of the Reagan administration. But they were more than a problem; rather they were a “way of life, and [...] a way of governing. Leaks constituted policy; they were the authentic voice of the government.”³⁴¹ The “leaks” to the press were not all leaks but calculated political stories told by alternative means. Alexander M. Haig Jr., Reagan’s first Secretary of State, suggests that this was because Reagan’s closest aides were consummate professionals in public relations. He even calls them “wizards.”³⁴² Whatever was not suitable to be told by the amicable, clear-spoken, and honest-seeming president himself, could be communicated to the public via this alternative channel, if it had been evaluated to be important for either the actual machinations of politics, or to render the entire metanarrative of the administration more plausible. Edwin Meese, in the beginning the councillor to the president, is yet another who disdains the leaks for the effects they had on matter of policy. Leaks were not a part of the way business had been conducted during the governorship, but in Washington “almost a routine way of doing business [...] habitually used as weapons in the political arena.”³⁴³ Leaks were a way to tell the types of stories deemed politically necessary which still could not be seamlessly fitted into the Reagan metanarrative. By “leaking” information to the press the Reagan administration was able to keep Reagan distanced as a narrator and avoided making him seem unreliable, or otherwise tarnish him as a narrator.

Occasionally there were multiple narrators, but that did not necessarily constitute coherence into the entire metanarrative. One of the big problems of the Reagan administration was the lack of a coherent foreign policy, especially during the first years. Haig wrote in his memoirs about the need for a superpower to speak of its intentions in one voice in order not to baffle its allies, mislead its adversaries, and itself get confused in the policy-maze of its own making. “Press briefings and thoughtless answers to tricky questions are not – cannot be – policy.”³⁴⁴ Haig is at the same time correct and erroneous. The traditional way of political leadership abides to the rules Haig endorses. If, however, the policy is coordinated narratively and the political leadership is narrative in its nature, the situation is somewhat different. There is no need for one single voice as one single narrator. The story

³⁴¹ Haig (1984) p. 17

³⁴² Haig (1984) p. 17

³⁴³ Meese (1992) p. 105

³⁴⁴ Haig (1984) p. 13

must remain constant and it does not matter who tells it to the story recipients. There arises occasionally the need to “baffle” and “mislead” in politics and narrative leadership is able to provide a mechanism for that. Certain benefits can be gleaned if politics becomes, in the words of Haig, “a maze of conflicting policies.”³⁴⁵ Narrative leadership in politics depends not on the coherency of the politics themselves, but the maze of stories told about them. The notion of story logic steps into play and surpasses the possible illogicalities of the actual political deeds.

There is a difference in narrative terminology between “narrator” and “implied author”. Gerald Prince defines the latter as “the implicit image of an author in the text, taken to be standing behind the scenes and to be responsible for its design and for the values and cultural norms it adheres to.”³⁴⁶ Reagan certainly acts as the narrator since it is him, who does the actual telling of the story. He is not the author of the whole story, but still he wants to portray himself so, and he was responsible for the values and norms within his speeches. Despite the fact that he wrote thousands of pre-presidential speeches and took an active interest in the editing and rewriting his presidential speeches and occasionally wrote them himself he was assisted by numerous speechwriters, who authored the stories he told. Reagan made many additions and omissions to the speeches himself, and his earlier pre-presidential speeches provided inspiration and guidance of his intentions for the actual authors. How can I then study the stories and story worlds of Reagan, if he himself was not the author of the stories? There are numerous answers to this problem. The first is to consider Reagan as the implied author. It is sometimes hard to even make the distinction between the agency that organizes and selects events as the implied author, and the voice that recounts the same.³⁴⁷ The speeches were written for him by people who knew what he would like to communicate in his speeches. Reagan is the implied author in every speech he makes, because they tell stories that adhere to his values and his worldview. No matter who originally wrote the script, it is Reagan that is being implied to as an author.

Larry Speakes asserts that Reagan often wrote speeches when travelling aboard Air Force One and claims that he worked a lot on his major speeches only leaving the less important to the speechwriters, subject to his editing. This statement

³⁴⁵ Haig (1984) p. 13

³⁴⁶ Prince (1987) p. 42

³⁴⁷ Palmer (2006) p. 17

is an exaggeration, but it cannot be denied that he wrote his first Inaugural Address on a plane in shorthand on yellow legal pad.³⁴⁸ Peggy Noonan was perhaps the most famous of Reagan's speechwriters and after leaving the White House, she was called back to work on Reagan's farewell speech. Even she has become interested in Reagan as a writer only in retrospect. During her time in the White House she did not know the skills of Reagan in that area and Noonan describes it as shameful experience to later have read the texts Reagan had written in his own hand.³⁴⁹ Noonan claims that Reagan was a great writer, which is evident in the fact that he had made his entire political career based on his original speeches, but had not become a writer *par excellence* because he had "turned his talent of writing into a talent for political communication. He had turned his art to the service of his beliefs."³⁵⁰ Tony Dolan, another speechwriter who wrote the famous "Evil Empire" speech of 1983 agrees that the speeches consisted of Reagan's ideas, only expressed by him and other writers. In the words of yet another speechwriter Peter Robinson who used Reagan's public issues from the 1970's onwards while researching forthcoming speeches, "He didn't steal from us, we stole from him."³⁵¹ One must neither think that the speechwriters had completely free hands on their work. Besides the fact that the speech drafts were relatively widely circulated among the top level of the administration for approval, Reagan himself provided guidance to the speechwriters on several occasions in person as well. This guidance ranged from very concrete "shorter sentences & single syllable words whenever they can be used"³⁵² or "putting facts & figures in speeches"³⁵³ to discussing "outline on planning major speeches for coming year"³⁵⁴

Another idea that supports my claim that the actual authorship does not matter is what Roland Barthes wrote about the death of the author that goes along with the birth of the text. According to Barthes the author loses his meaning and the text and the narrator of the text become the central issues. The text is dedicated in the eyes and the ears of the audiences to the person who does the actual narration. Barthes notes that in primitive communities no single person is held accountable for

³⁴⁸ Speakes-Pack (1988) p. 117

³⁴⁹ Here she refers to the book Reagan in His Own Hand by Anderson-Anderson-Skinner

³⁵⁰ Noonan (2001) p. 39

³⁵¹ Robinson, Peter. Cited in D'Souza (1997) p. 250

³⁵² Reagan (2007) p. 152, diary entry for 3.5.1983

³⁵³ Reagan (2007) p. 354, diary entry for 18.9.1985

³⁵⁴ Reagan (2007) p. 565, diary entry for 5.1.1989

a story except the intermediary person between the author and the recipient, which often was a shaman or a bard, who can be considered to have been narrators. For Barthes the voice loses its origin, the writer steps into his own grave and the text begins.³⁵⁵ The modern text is produced without a writer in the traditional sense of a writer nurturing the text like a father nurtures a son. Now, he is born simultaneously with his text. Writing becomes a performative act which continuously creates new meanings and systematically evaporates old ones. A text is created of multiple writings from many cultures and this multitude is concentrated anew in one focal point, which is the reader and not the author as conventionally it has been thought. The unity of the text is not in its origins but in its ending, the unspecified reader. And the birth of this reader has to be preceded by the death of the author.³⁵⁶ Author, in other words, is not essential to Barthes, but only the narrator as the conduit of the text and the text itself but only when it is rebuilt and manifested in the reader.

The text is not a line of words releasing a single theological meaning (the “message” of the Author-God) but a multi-dimensional space in which a variety writings, none of them original, blend and clash. The text is a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centres of culture.³⁵⁷

This is a strong claim for intertextuality and naturally any writing or narrative cannot escape the influence of other texts. Nevertheless, the limits and scope of intertextuality vary depending on the knowledge of the story recipients. It is more than often possible to claim authorship for any expression or even an entire narrative, if their origin lies in a lesser known text. In a political narrative the intertextuality works both for the benefit and the loss of the narrating politician. Some wonderful anecdote or expression, which truly moves people can be separated from its original context and embedded anew in such a way that the great majority of recipients will not recognize its origin. Only a minority, whether educated, interested in the original text, well-read, or politically active, can spot the “stolen” words. On the other hand, some deeper meaning, which may move this minority,

³⁵⁵ Barthes (1993) p. 111-112 It is interesting to note however that Barthes links the death of the author to only those texts which do not attempt to influence the reality directly but a conscious choice has been made to tell the story symbolically and without functionality. Ibid. 111. This is not as exclusive towards political narratives as one might surmise on the basis of one reading since political narratives DO try to influence the reality BUT try to do it in a symbolic manner. After all, what use would a story have as a political tool if it didn't try to alter the reality.

³⁵⁶ Barthes (1993) p. 114-117

³⁵⁷ Barthes (1977) p. 146

remains hidden from the large majority of story recipients.³⁵⁸ I argue that a politician needs to be very careful in choosing his quotations so that some people are affected by the intertextual relations of his message, and for some others the lack of sufficient knowledge of linked texts will neither trivialize the message nor make it undecipherable. A careful balance must be kept within the narration to “touch” the intellectuals as well as the common people.

Reagan did not always manage to balance on such a fine line. One could even claim that many of his most memorable speeches, especially those given in defiance of Communism, mostly touched the non-intellectuals and even aimed at setting passions aflame mostly among them.

Yes, let us pray for the salvation of all of those who live in that totalitarian darkness -- pray they will discover the joy of knowing God. But until they do, let us be aware that while they preach the supremacy of the state, declare its omnipotence over individual man, and predict its eventual domination of all peoples on the Earth, they are the focus of evil in the modern world.³⁵⁹

I chose this quotation not only to exhibit Reagan as his most passion-exciting and anti-intellectual best but to discuss further the difficulties between authorship and narratorship. This very expression of “focus of evil” is yet another example of words or even storylines Reagan borrowed from somebody else. He had initially wanted to use this type of story in his Westminster address of 1982, but at that time refrained from doing so due others’ opinions, but the text is included in the drafts of the speech.³⁶⁰ The former communist who had turned on the party and become a conservative icon, Whittaker Chambers, whom Reagan admired and quoted on numerous other occasions, is the original user of the term in his 1952 book, *Witness*: “I see in communism the focus of concentrated evil in our time.”³⁶¹ While Tony Dolan wrote this speech for Reagan, some of the finishing touches are Reagan’s own. Originally the draft of the speech talked of historians seeing communism as a focus of evil,³⁶² but Reagan’s ideology shines through in the fact that he moved the argument from retrospective vision to present tense, and chose to stand among those

³⁵⁸ Peter Rabinowitz chooses to use the term “assumptions” from the part of the author considering the scope of knowledge of his audience. He claims that the success of stories partially rely on the assumptions upon the readers, whether they are “actual,” “hypothetical” or “authorial” audiences the author has to aim his text for. An author has to consider WHO is reading. Rabinowitz (1987) p. 20-22

³⁵⁹ Reagan (8.3.1983) Remarks at the Annual Convention of the National Association of Evangelicals in Orlando, Florida <http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1983/30883b.htm>

³⁶⁰ Reeves (2005) p. 110, 140, 503. The drafts can be found at the Ronald Reagan Presidential Library.

³⁶¹ Chambers (1952) p 8.

³⁶² D’Souza (1997) p. 251

who held that view of communism. Dolan had tried already earlier to include the part about evil empire into Reagan's speeches, but the State Department had always omitted them until finally Reagan himself demanded it to stay in the speech.³⁶³ The speech was edited by Reagan in such a profound manner that he can be seen as a co-author. Reagan deleted fifteen entire paragraphs and added fourteen of his own in addition to cutting dozens of sentences and hundreds of words to be replaced by words of his preference and roughly thirty complete lines of text changes.³⁶⁴ It was these editions which made the text as offensive against the Soviet Union as it turned out to be, and these very editions serve to remind readers of Reagan that he was no "talking head echoing other's words." The message became personalized. One of Reagan's intellectual and literary favourites, Alexander Solzhenitsyn had talked to AFL-CIO in 1975 and told them that the Soviet Union was "the concentration of World Evil."³⁶⁵ One other person who claims partial authorship is the chief of French Intelligence, Alexandre de Maranches who warned Reagan in December of 1980 about *l'empire du mal*, using the phrase over and over again.³⁶⁶ Again, while the words of Solzhenitsyn and Chambers have drowned in the multiple voices of history, Reagan's use of these words lives. The authors of the texts have "died" in the Barthesian sense of the birth of the text itself and the importance of its narrator and the story itself remains.

The evil empire speech is certainly nothing new or particular in Reagan's storytelling. In 1981 for example he had characterized the Soviet Union to U.S. Military Academy as an "evil force that would extinguish the light we've been tending for 6000 years"³⁶⁷, and answered a reporter's question on communism by stating it to be "not a normal way of living for human beings."³⁶⁸ What is really intriguing is the fact that while Reagan himself buried the myth of the evil empire when he began co-operation with the Soviet Union under Gorbachev, the myth

³⁶³ D'Souza (1997) p. 135 Famous presidential historian Henry Steele Commager was quoted saying: "It was the worst presidential speech in American history. I've read them all. No other presidential speech has ever so flagrantly allied the government with religion. cit in Reeves (2005) p. 141

³⁶⁴ Kengor (2004) p. 246-247. The copy of the speech where the editing by Reagan is visible can be found the the Ronald Reagan Presidential Library

³⁶⁵ Morris (1999) p. 472

³⁶⁶ Morris (1999) p. 472

³⁶⁷ It is worth noting that in this quotation Reagan simultaneously offers proof of his beliefs in favour of creationism against Darwin's theory of evolution. It is common in creationist circles to claim that the world was created 6000 years ago.

³⁶⁸ Reagan (16.6.1981) The President's News Conference
<http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1981/61681b.htm>

resurfaced again. George W. Bush resurrected the myth, only within a new context and under a different label. What else is the “Axis of Evil,” but continuation of the Reaganesque storyline? Bush picked up the discarded mythical evil enemy and used the myth in his own story for his own purposes.

Reagan’s speeches were his tools of leadership in many senses. He brought his old speeches to the speechwriters in the White House in order to enable them to write speeches along the same lines, in the same manner, and in the same style.³⁶⁹ Tony Dolan claimed that Reagan mobilized public opinion to make the government work as he wished through his speeches, and that “Ronald Reagan knows how important his speeches are. Not only do they give a statement of purpose for the government, it is through his speeches that managers understand where they are going.”³⁷⁰ The most important people influenced by the newly authored stories Reagan narrated were the people working in his administration, since as Wallison claims, the speeches provided them with a sense of direction, which was ultimately reflected in the actions of the cabinet members.³⁷¹ Noonan has an interesting point when she argues that presidential speeches are important because they are the one of the great constants of political history. Besides being a way for the public to measure public men, they have at the same time been a way how “we tell each other who we are.” Ironically professional politicians are often bored by speeches, but “a great speech from a leader to the people eases our isolation, breaks down the walls, includes people.”³⁷² A speech is a statement of policy and thus important, since the policy is words, and words are expressed in the speech. At the same time presidential speech writers were influenced strongly by Reagan’s earlier speeches, and the speeches authored by them influenced other speechwriters anew. It is a common misconception that Reagan was merely a talking head echoing the words crafted by speechwriters. Probably no other US President has had such enormous experience as a public speaker as Ronald Reagan, and all his radio addresses and GE speech notes along with his gubernatorial speeches were able to provide guidance for the White House speechwriters.

Paradoxically the most important speech Reagan ever gave was in the years before governorship or presidency. It was the speech he gave in support of Barry

³⁶⁹ Erickson (1985) p. 8

³⁷⁰ Wallison (2003) p. 29

³⁷¹ Wallison (2003) p. 30

³⁷² Noonan (2003) p. 68-69

Goldwater's presidential campaign in 1964, which was called "A Time for Choosing," with more than a hint of megalomania. In that speech he made the case for modern conservatism, and the fact that private donors paid for its nationwide broadcasting launched Reagan's political career. It was referred to by all of those who worked for him as "The Speech"³⁷³ The expression itself is proof enough of the reverential status of the speech and it became in the years to come a sacred story in itself, and also to some degree an object of faith for Reaganesque civil religion. The speech became a dogma to follow, so to say, and Reagan himself quoted it occasionally when it suited his purposes. It is also noteworthy, that in wording, essence, and spirit it is the blueprint of almost every speech Reagan ever made. All the ideas central to his politics were spelled out to great public in this particular speech. The importance of The Speech cannot be emphasized enough for Reagan's politics, but at the same time a full rendition of any of its multiple versions here would be useless. It was the skeleton of the speech, always to be edited and perfected, and as such it had multiple shapes, but these shapes loom behind all of Reagan's public speeches. It was the one great speech Reagan spent his entire lifetime improving and recreating. The original speech was about one hour long, and Stu Spencer among others was involved in trying to get Reagan to cut the speech into twenty minutes. Reagan himself understood the importance of brevity and tightness in speechmaking, and so the editing out was not the main problem, but the adding back in. He was constantly field-testing new jokes, parables, and facts with his audiences using "the Speech" as the medium. When the response was good, new material got added into the speech along with some of the old and familiar lines Reagan just could not let go.³⁷⁴ Reagan was always looking for new embellishments. "As a veteran of the mashed potato circuit – my name for the after dinner speaking – I'm always on the lookout for interesting anecdotes."³⁷⁵

³⁷³ Noonan (2001) p. 87. One early version of this speech with the identical title but slightly different content can be found in Speech ("A Time For Choosing") 71st Annual Convention of the United States Savings and Loan League, San Francisco, CA, 11/7/63. Box 44 Subseries E, Reagan, Ronald: Pre-presidential papers, Series I Speeches and writings, Ronald Reagan Library. The name in brackets for some reason was on the original version but is not used in the archives. The most famous version, the Goldwater address, is archived under Speech, A Time for Choosing, 1964. Box 44 Subseries E, Reagan, Ronald: Pre-presidential papers, Series I Speeches and writings, Ronald Reagan Library. Even researchers have used the same expression, see for example Willis (2000)

³⁷⁴ Deaver (2003) p. 60

³⁷⁵ Radio address, Folder Speeches and Writings – Radio Broadcast, Taping date – 1978, July 15 "Stanley Yankus" Typescript 3/4, Box 24, Reagan, Ronald: Pre-presidential papers, Series I Speeches and writings, Ronald Reagan Library

Reagan was often during the second term of his presidency called a “lame duck,” and this intensified during the long silences in his narratives and intermittent periods of narration connected to the Iran-Contra scandal. While Reagan detested this expression, based on his diary entries we can see that in the context of the authorship of his speeches, there was a certain ring of truth in this. There are numerous references to the actual writing of the speeches throughout the first term of the presidency, but as the second term begins, there are only three references connected to speeches, and in these Reagan is involved merely in the editing of the pre-crafted speeches.³⁷⁶ Naturally these diary entries cannot be considered to be a comprehensive description upon the work Reagan did on his speeches, since some occasions when he worked on them were naturally left out. An example is the statement after the Reykjavik summit with Gorbachev, that he drafted on the plane himself, but they still seem to hint that Reagan’s interest on authorship was on the wane during the second term.³⁷⁷ It was also to some degree in the pre-presidential times when Reagan used the help of speechwriters. A good example is the “New Business Speech” which was drafted by William F. Gavin, but which received truly heavy editing and rewriting by Reagan himself.³⁷⁸ Bill Gavin under orders from Peter Hannaford drafted similar speeches for Reagan. The common denominator in these speeches was that a lot of research into statistics had to be collected. Still, it was Reagan who edited and gave the final shape to even these speeches.³⁷⁹ Reagan was first and foremost a narrator and the authorship was not something that he considered important. He was more than willing to argue that his authorship was

³⁷⁶ On actual speechwriting see Reagan (2007), p. 33, 50, 67, 176, 181, 191, 212, 216, 218. Diary entries for 25.7.1981, 18.11.1981, 6.2.1982, 5..9.1983, 21.9.1983, 27.11.1983, 16.1.1984, 28.1.1984, 22.9.1984 Some of these occasions are for important speeches like after the invasion of Grenada, or an address to the UN, State of the Union address, or on the tragedy of KAL-007 but some are on more mundane matters and for more mundane audiences. On the editing of his speeches see Reagan(2007) p. 139, 570, 685, 686. Only the first of these belongs to the first term and the last two are connected with dealing with Peggy Noonan who sent a draft Reagan did not like and upon hearing it, got upset.

³⁷⁷ I have been using the first version of Reagan’s diaries edited by Douglas Brinkley, and thus I cannot assert that there would not have been more mentions, since Brinkley edited the content somewhat.

³⁷⁸ The articles used in the research, original draft, Reagan’s editing and the final product can be found at the Reagan Library Folder Hannaford/CA HQ – R. Reagan Speeches – 1/1977, New Business Speech (Gavin) (1/2) and (2/2), Box 21, Ronald Reagan 1980 Campaign Papers, Series I, Ronald Reagan Library. In the same box can be found other examples as well and they attest to the fact that the editing Reagan performed on the speeches drafted for him was extensive, practically a re-write

³⁷⁹ For additional examples, see *ibid.* What Garry Willis said about Alexander Campbell, the founder of Reagan’s denomination fits Reagan just as well. “The Disciples not only preached well, they proofread carefully.” Wallis (2000) p. 26

meaningless. “I communicated great things, and they didn't spring full bloom from my brow, they came from the heart of a great nation”³⁸⁰ It was America itself that fuelled Reagan’s narration.

Nearly every major politician uses ghost-writers and this is largely considered to be a necessary expedient in campaigning and governing. Voters do not respond to their president only as an individual, but as an institution as well. Ronald Reagan the individual is not separated from Ronald Reagan the political symbol when citizenry responds to him in his presidential capacity. Thus it makes no difference who wrote the words of President Reagan since the object of this study, as the object of the votes of millions of Americans in the 1980’s is not Ronald Reagan as a man, but as “the Great Communicator“ who spoke for the entire nation besides himself.³⁸¹ It was the voice of this larger than life persona that resonated in the American psyche, and sometimes this storyteller grew into a bigger institution that the man who articulated the words for it.

Barthes writes about a new type of a text producer, who has been brought into existence by the growing importance of political and social factors in human sciences. This new type of author positions himself between a party active and a writer, or, to suit my argument better, a politician and an artist. From the party member he gets an idealistic vision of a dedicated person, and from the writer the notion that writing is in itself a form of action.³⁸² Reagan produced his texts in this manner. The mere process of writing and the additional speaking to audiences is politicized action, and aims at communicating his idealism. There must be an attempt on behalf of the politician, who chooses to lead the nation with narratives, to blur the distinction between a politician and an artist, in this case an author of the stories told. To effectively use narratives as his tools of leadership, the politician has to become more an artist than a politician. Even the text producer Barthes wrote about is not enough; the politician must be a poet or a narrator more than anything else, but with a little addition of prophetic qualities. The politician is a prophet who needs rejuvenate the electorate with poetry, or, as Reagan said,

The American electorate seeks from its national leadership this sense of shared values, this reaffirmation of traditional American beliefs. They do not

³⁸⁰ Reagan (11.1.1989) Farewell Address to the Nation
<http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1989/011189i.htm>

³⁸¹ Erickson (1985) p. 9

³⁸² Barthes (1993) p. 25

want a President who's a broker of parochial concerns; they want a definition of national purpose, a vision of the future. And I believe that we conservatives have provided that vision during the past few years.³⁸³

1.3.2. THE QUESTION OF ORIGINALITY

Horace notes that originality is difficult to achieve if one tries to treat familiar themes in a distinct manner. However, the writer can use subjects already handled when he takes care not to “linger in the cheap and easy round” and render them verbatim in a literal translation, or let the necessity of imitation cramp one’s distinct style.³⁸⁴ There are two options which the writer can choose from. He can either follow the traditions, or himself invent a logical plot, but it is difficult to pose common problems in a unique manner. Therefore it is more secure to develop a theme from Iliad into a play, than to bring on stage subjects which have never been presented before.³⁸⁵ Indeed, for at least 2000 years the most common method of creating a narrative was expanding on inherited, previous narratives. Many of Shakespeare’s plays, as well the apocryphal writings about the life of Jesus, are good examples of this process. Stories may either leave us with unanswered questions about the future lives of the characters, or a character in a certain story, or his actions leave a need for clarification. In the case of Reagan his life and presidency left so many questions unanswered that on a yearly basis a multitude of “apocryphal” writings, such as the one you are now reading, come to existence.

When discussing the lack of originality in Reagan’s stories, since he is not the original author of most of the stories he uses, it is worthwhile to quote Holstein and Gubrium who argue that “the stories are continuously shaped and reshaped as participants variously borrow from, keep separate, combine, individually formulate, or even suppress stories or construct differences and sameness.”³⁸⁶ There is indeed not much of anything that could be labelled as original in Reagan’s speeches and storytelling. Whatever a topic of the speech is, some other speaker, most notably another president, has already taken it as an object of his own speech and spoken of it. Therefore the object has already been articulated, disputed, elucidated and

³⁸³ Reagan (3.10.1983) Remarks at a Dinner Marking the 10th Anniversary of the Heritage Foundation <http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1983/100383h.htm>

³⁸⁴ Horace (1940) p. 65

³⁸⁵ Horace (1992) lines 119-130 “*Aut famm sequere aut sibi convenientia finge scriptor.*” and “*difficile est proprie communia dicere, toque recitus Iliacum Carmen deducis in actus quam si proferres ignota indictaque primus.*”

³⁸⁶ Holstein-Gubrium (2000) p. 117

evaluated in various ways. In Bakhtin's words "various viewpoints, world views and trends cross, converge, and diverge in it."³⁸⁷ The subject of the speech becomes the arena in which Reagan's opinions meet those of others and thus the speech cannot be broken off from the links preceding it in the chain of utterance.³⁸⁸ All Reagan does is that he narrates the subjects of his speeches in his own particular manner and way.

"Now, some of you may be thinking, "Well, he hasn't said a thing that's new." I guess that's true. Some values shouldn't change."³⁸⁹ Reagan himself is among the people who agree that there is not much new in his message. By saying this aloud he pre-empties the criticism that might be directed against him. Reagan's justification for not being original lies, as ever, in his deep-felt conviction that there really are core values which stay unchanged throughout the years. It has to be noted, however, that the use of quotes and words of others take nothing away from the originality of Reagan's message, and neither does the fact that occasionally he uses even complete stories that have been already told by others. "I never thought of myself as a great man, just a man committed to great ideas."³⁹⁰ It is the ideas that lie behind the stories Reagan elaborately narrates, which basically provide his message with its greatness. The situation is similar in essence to Milton's "Paradise Regained", which, as Frye declares, derives its greatness from the theme itself which Milton passes on to the reader. The story itself does not have its origins in Milton, and while the rhetorical flourish he adds to it enhances the story told, it is by no means fundamentally his own.³⁹¹ The poet is besides being a licensed liar also a licensed thief. Reagan provides his listeners and readers with a skilful narration, but the idea of American Dream he discusses, is the fact that turns his stories from yarns into important foundational myths for a large part of Americans. Reagan only renders the old story into a new version and basically only gives it his personal treatment. As Pope writes: "True wit is nature to advantage dressed; What oft was thought, but ne'er so well expressed; Something, whose truth convinced at sight we find, That gives us back the image of our mind."³⁹² Reagan's strength as a narrator

³⁸⁷ Bakhtin (1986) p. 93

³⁸⁸ Bakhtin (1986) p. 93-94

³⁸⁹ Reagan (22.1.1983) Radio Address to the Nation on Domestic Social Issues
<http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1983/12283a.htm>

³⁹⁰ Reagan (1993) in Noonan (2001) p. 317.

³⁹¹ Frye (1957) p. 96

³⁹² Pope (1903) p. 12

did not so much lie in trying to invent totally new culturally dominant narratives, but using existing schemata to his best advantage and altering the old myths. In 1984 Assistant White House Chief of Staff Richard Darman wrote a memorandum for the presidential campaign where he skilfully characterized the essence of Reaganesque politics.

Paint RR as the personification of all that is right with or heroized by America. Leave Mondale in a position where an attack on Reagan is tantamount to an attack on America's idealized image of itself – where a vote against Reagan is in some subliminal sense, a vote against mythic “AMERICA”³⁹³

Reagan was turned to be the equivalent of all that people loved in themselves or their country, whether these characteristics were real or imagined. Reagan became a myth and blended with the mythic America in the process.

An interesting characteristic of the American political oratorical tradition, which has always held a prominent place in their context, is their ahistoricity. Boorstin writes that “as the nation struggled into self-consciousness, the orator – the man speaking to or for or with his community acquired a mythical role.” At the same time he calls these orations “levers of American history” and “formulae of purpose” and “signposts of a national destiny.”³⁹⁴ Many of these great and eloquent orations are a part of the political tradition and are studied in schools and popularly memorized. At the same time many of the most famous and widely quoted texts are apocryphal. Some were grossly revised and improved, some even complete fabrications by posthumous ghost-writers, and never even delivered at all on their supposed occasion. This is especially true in the case of the ringing words of the times of the American Revolution which Reagan was so fond of quoting.³⁹⁵ So, not all words quoted had ever been uttered on the occasion they were supposed to have been. This does not take any value away from them in the strictly political sense, but understanding this characteristic of the Americans to improve their past by improving the words and stories used, further enables one to understand the fascination of contemporary Americans on political speechmaking. This willingness to alter the history to inflict a change in the future tells us that there is indeed a tradition of prophetic politics in the American political life.

³⁹³ Darman (1984). Cited in Erickson (1985) p. 100

³⁹⁴ Boorstin (1965) p. 308

³⁹⁵ Boorstin (1965) p. 308-310. See also Raphael (2004) who discusses this subject more thoroughly.

While it is true that “the words of the language belong to nobody” we hear or read those words in particular individual utterances and works, and in those cases the words have beside the typical, also a more or less clearly reflected individual expression determined by the context of the utterance. A word never exists for the speaker as a neutral word of language that belongs to nobody. It is either a word which belongs to somebody else and is filled with echoes of the other’s utterance, or from the perspective of the speaker, my word which is imbued with my expression, since I use it in a particular situation.³⁹⁶ This is often apparent in Reagan’s speeches. He uses the words of the previous presidents to convey their embedded meanings and gives new meanings to neutral words by assuming them as his own by using them repeatedly in a particular context. A single word can in Reagan’s narration appear in many senses. He constantly alters the meanings of neutral and other’s words and claims them his own by attaching unconventional meanings to them. “Basically today’s conservative is actually the radical of the revolutionary period.”³⁹⁷ This brings to fore the concept of intertextuality, which is essentially the relation of a particular text to other texts. As Julia Kristeva writes, “every text takes shape as a mosaic of citations, every text is the absorption and transformation of other texts.”³⁹⁸ Every text is then connected to numerous other texts, but which ones? There is no answer, since it always depends on the story recipient. His knowledge of other texts sets the limits to which texts can participate in the play of intertextuality. One could err by claiming that the better read the story recipient is, the easier it is for the political narrator to exploit intertextuality. To a certain degree this is true, but at the same the more limited the “internal library” of the story recipient is, the easier it is for the narrator to quote, borrow, and directly steal from other texts and bask in their glory. But how does this free flow of ideas from one text to another take place?

Todorov credits Bakhtin for the invention of the first intertextual theory.³⁹⁹ When any speaker takes the possession of a word, the word itself is not neutral and free from aspirations and valuation of others. “The word arrives in his context from

³⁹⁶ Bakhtin (1986) p. 88

³⁹⁷ Speech, “Elk Grove, May 14, 1966” p. 257 Folder: 1966 Campaign: RR speeches and statements, Book II (1), Box C30, Research Unit, Ronald Reagan Governor’s papers, Ronald Reagan Library

³⁹⁸ Kristeva, Cited in Culler (1975) p. 139

³⁹⁹ Todorov (1981) p. 23

another context which is saturated with other people's interpretations."⁴⁰⁰ Every speaker is himself a respondent to some degree. Nobody is the first speaker who "disturbs the eternal silence of the universe," but presupposes besides the existence of his language system also the existence of preceding utterances of both himself and others and enters into a relationship. This relationship may be building on the earlier utterances, disagreeing with them, or simply presuming that they are already known to the listener. Thus any utterance is linked to a complex chain or even a web of other utterances. Others' utterances and storylines can be repeated with varying means of interpretation.⁴⁰¹ The text is unique in that it reflects all the texts within the bounds of a given sphere, and thus all ideas are interconnected.⁴⁰² As Barthes writes "nothing exists outside the text, there is never a *whole* of the text."⁴⁰³ The text is plurivocal; a text is indeed a network woven out of other texts and other voices.⁴⁰⁴ Therefore Reagan is certainly connected to the utterances of previous presidents among others, and besides the dialogic relationship among his texts and previous texts, this is clearly to be seen in the way he uses others' utterances to strengthen his own argumentation and persuasion. The utterances he picks out of the chain he tends to agree with, and the ones he is contradicted against are not vocalized, but the connection is still there. This web of utterances could be elaborated on and besides utterances even entire stories and speech genres can be seen and depicted as the collective memory or a collection of sacred stories.

Q: Do you enjoy being President more than being a movie actor?

The President: Yeah, because here I get to write the script, too.⁴⁰⁵

During his entire career Reagan agreed to play the role and stick to the script whether cast as a cowboy or a political speaker. Likewise he always had an interest in rewriting and reformulating the scripts to the desperation first of producers and then his closest allies in the White House. He wanted to be a part of scriptwriting in the movies as well as during his presidency when he had capable speechwriters. As discussed earlier, he spent a considerable amount of time rewriting, editing, adding to, and omitting from his speeches and choosing more suitable expressions and

⁴⁰⁰ Bakhtin cit. Todorov (1981) p. 24

⁴⁰¹ Bakhtin (1986) p. 69, 91

⁴⁰² Bakhtin (1986) p. 105

⁴⁰³ Barthes (1974) p. 6. Italics in the original

⁴⁰⁴ Barthes (1974) p. 21

⁴⁰⁵ Reagan (14.5.1982) Remarks and a Question-and-Answer Session at a Fundraising Reception for Senator John Heinz in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. s. 641

terminology.⁴⁰⁶ But in this quoted answer to a reporter's question Reagan reveals something fundamental in nature. He sees politics as acting, or in other words, performing a narrative by staging it in the form of an enacted play. As he said, "You'd be surprised how much being a good actor pays off."⁴⁰⁷ His presidency is just another role for him to enact and perform. Even his political personality is a performed identity, and the status of the president allows him the one freedom he has always craved for; the chance to write the script when he so chooses to do. According to Reagan "Politics is like show business. You have a hell of an opening, you coast for a while, you have a hell of a closing."⁴⁰⁸ But then again, even early on in his political career Reagan understood that the label of "actor" was something of a setback and commented,

I had a feeling that my career theatrically was suffering because Hollywood was not looking at me like an actor [...] Now, to turn around and find that suddenly – all of a sudden now that I want to be something else besides an actor, everybody is saying that I'm an actor. I'll tell you, I'll probably be the only fellow who will get posthumously an Oscar.⁴⁰⁹

Mary Stuckey notes that politics has increasingly become a "word game" in which political events are to a large degree products of the language used to describe them. At such a moment the role of the president becomes more important, as he is the focal point of national government and the one voice who speaks for the entire government. Thus it is his interpretation of the events that often becomes the definitive interpretation.⁴¹⁰ In the world of politics there can for the general public only rarely be direct observations of events, and even in those cases language shapes the meaning of what has been seen. For Edelman it is "*language* about political events rather than the events themselves that everyone experiences; that the unintended consequences of actions and language are often more important than the

⁴⁰⁶ This tendency is referred to in most of the books written about him. See f.ex Morris (1989), Cannon (2001), Noonan (2001) or even his diary notes Reagan (2007)

⁴⁰⁷ Reagan (30.4.1984) Remarks and a Question-and-Answer Session With Students at Fudan University in Shanghai, China <http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1984/43084d.htm>

⁴⁰⁸ Reagan, cited in Hayward (2001) p. 660. Interestingly enough this quote also points out that in Reagan's mind acting or show business in general is different from telling stories, because in show business and politics Reagan lays the importance on openings and closings while in his storytelling the focus was always in moving the story smoothly along.

⁴⁰⁹ Answer, "Questions and Answers, Orange County, March 30, 1986." P. 187, Folder: 1966 Campaign: RR speeches and statements, Book I (5), Box C30, Research Unit, Ronald Reagan Governor's papers, Ronald Reagan Library

⁴¹⁰ Stuckey (1990) p. 2

intended ones.”⁴¹¹ This is at the same time a great resource for the prophetic politician to use and a great peril. It is true that as citizens we do not get to the events, states, and actions of the political world in their pure, unmediated version, but almost unfailingly through language-mediated storytelling. The events themselves are not as significant as what is told to us about them, and this allows the prophetic politician to manipulate the states, events, and actions to his own benefit. At the same time he must be aware of the “unintended consequences of language” and always be the first literary critic of his own stories to minimize the risk of telling stories that could be interpreted in a politically harmful manner.

When the United States of America looks for a president, it is surprising to notice how much emphasis is put upon his skills as a performer and rhetorician. Stephen Hayward complains that Gerald Ford’s greatest inadequacy as a president was that “he was not equal to the supreme political demand of the television age – he was not a great communicator.”⁴¹² The president has to be the “chief articulator of collective aspirations, or he is not much. He is articulate, or he is inadequate.”⁴¹³ The ability to spin words is seen as crucial to the institution of the presidency. Deaver argued that he or anyone else had nothing to do with Reagan’s abilities in communicating his political message. He claims that “Reagan ranks with FDR and JFK as the only three presidents of the twentieth century who could move the country with what they had to say. After all, Reagan was a performer. Aside from his voice, the confidence and timing are both there, honed by thousands of speeches and scripts.”⁴¹⁴ Reagan’s rhetoric and storytelling certainly were influential in America even to such a degree that Hayward chose to name his book that deals with years 1960-1980 of the American political history “The Age of Reagan.” His influence led, according to Hayward, to the fall of the old liberal order and a resurrection of Republicanism. Reagan smashed the monopoly of liberalism and “prepared the ground for political debate on which American politics is still conducted today.”⁴¹⁵ Naturally the “Age of Reagan” was not evident or foreseeable

⁴¹¹ Edelman (1977) p. 142

⁴¹² Hayward (2001) p. 399

⁴¹³ Hayward (2001) p. 399

⁴¹⁴ Deaver (2003) p. 176

⁴¹⁵ Hayward (2001) p. 716. Interestingly there is another book, with the same words “The Age of Reagan” in its title. This book by Sean Wilentz sets another timeline for what he considers to be the age of Reagan since for him it is the years 1974-2008. While Reagan himself had long since the end of this timeperiod passed away from politics and had even deceased, this tells one story of the influence Reagan had even in contemporary US politics. See Wilentz (2008)

at the end of the 1980's but perhaps the Age of Reagan may prove as durable as the Age of Roosevelt was with the post-New-Deal era.

1.3.3. THE NARRATED REAGAN - A LIFESTORY

A man is always a teller of stories, he lives surrounded by his own stories and those of other people, he sees everything that happens to him in terms of these stories and he tries to live his life as if he were recounting it.⁴¹⁶

-Jean-Paul Sartre

This part is dedicated to the discussion of a concept of life story. As Reagan narrated much of his own story to his audiences it is necessary to discuss the relation of the life lived in contrast to the life told. Narrative has an enormous influence in the way we plan and sequence our lives and completely dominates the aspect of how we can communicate our experiences to another person. This part is in support of my earlier claim that Reagan narrated a new persona for himself and I will discuss some parts of his life while trying to make evident the dichotomy between his experiences and how he narrated them aloud. Nothing we tell of our lives, whether to another person or to the confidentiality of a diary is objective knowledge. The parts we tell and how we tell them are just as important as the parts we choose to exclude. The political aspect of Reagan's storytelling is always there even in the stories he tells about himself, since his life is tightly connected to the fulfilment of the American Dream.

When we try to understand events or actions of others, we always place the particular incident or episode we try to decipher in the context of a set of narrative histories both of the individuals concerned, and of the settings they act in. Alasdair MacIntyre argued that we all "live out narratives in our lives and because we understand our own lives in terms of the narratives that we live out that the form of narrative is appropriate for understanding the actions of others. Stories are lived before they are told – except in the case of fiction."⁴¹⁷ Narrative is one of the mechanisms available to us for the interpretation of our lives. We resort to narrative as a form in order to create a coherent unity of our chaotic lives, and try to give it a deeper meaning in the process.

⁴¹⁶ Sartre (1964)

⁴¹⁷ MacIntyre (1984) p. 212

Our lives are stories even before we try to tell others about them in the sense that we try to plot them in advance. We plan our actions beforehand so that the ending or closure of the “story” will be what we have determined in advance as our goal. We have to explain our actions to others as well as ourselves to justify the things we have done or are about to do. The experience is then turned into a narrative both before it occurs and afterwards when it is communicated to someone. We write and narrate our life stories, but as Reagan himself has argued, “You can’t always dictate the stage of life upon which you will perform.”⁴¹⁸ Reagan was only partially responsible for his life story during the presidency because, as he often jokingly complained, someone else made his timetables and there is ample evidence that he stuck to those timetables meticulously. We are never more (and often a lot less) than the co-authors of our own narratives. Only in our fantasies and daydreams are we able to live exactly the story we wish we could live. In life, we are always under certain constraints. MacIntyre argues that all of us “enter upon a stage which we did not design and we find ourselves part of an action that was not of our making. Each of us being a main character in his or own drama plays subordinate parts in the dramas of others, and each drama constrains the others.”⁴¹⁹ In narrative politics there arises a need to manipulate one’s own narrative along with the narratives of others. This is arguably difficult during the ascendancy to an elevated political position such as the presidency, but after that it becomes relatively simple. The speaker or narrator position itself imposes certain authority upon others and their narratives.

It has to be said, nevertheless, that with his political power and prestige the president is able to distance the “stage” he was born to, and create new stages on which he performs. Naturally even the president of the USA is subordinate in the citizens’ personal life narratives which spin around their axes of identity. Nevertheless in political matters, when the life stories follow the storylines set by the politics of the nation, the presidential narrator is able to seize the narrative and carry it along in such a way, that the narratives of individual citizens are swept away in its tidal wave. The president can, and often does, design the political actions to be taken and at the same time assumes the role of the master narrator in political narratives. He is able to not only set the stage, but direct the political play as well.

⁴¹⁸ Reagan. *cit.* Cannon (2000), s.33

⁴¹⁹ MacIntyre (1984) p. 213

Holstein and Gubrium write that “personal stories are not complete before their telling but are assembled in relation to interpretive needs. [They are] put together in the context of particular times and places; these circumstances influence how the self might be storied by presenting local relevancies.”⁴²⁰ Therefore all life stories and anecdotes are created anew for each situation where they are to be used. If they are used in political speeches, merely the context of the use makes them political stories as well. If Reagan tells as the U.S. President an anecdote of his youth that is concerned with the deprivations during the Great Depression, that anecdote can be seen as a critique of the policies that lead to the depression. If he tells a similar anecdote at a less formal occasion, it can merely be a piece of entertainment told in order to get a few laughs. The coherence of a personal story is not only a matter of how logical it is internally. “A life or self described and heard as coherently relating who or what we are on one occasion may not come off in the same way on a different occasion.”⁴²¹

Most of the speeches Reagan gave were “autobiographical narratives” in the sense Jerome Bruner meant when he described them as “the stories we tell about our lives.”⁴²² Because of his essentially constructivist approach Bruner sees these autobiographical narratives not actually as a record of what has happened to the narrator, but rather as a “continuing interpretation and reinterpretation of our experience.”⁴²³ This can be deducted with even a cursory reading of Reagan’s autobiographies. Stories are told and retold in such a manner that the way things “actually happened” is lost in the process of recreating it with the help of the narrative. Not all the things Reagan describes have actually take place in such a form Reagan depicts, or have even happened at all. The intentions of the self-narrator are shown in the way he wants to portray himself. Perspectivalism steps into play even in such situations where for some reason the self-narrator wants to hold onto objectivism. Just because he is the “hero” at the centre of his own narrative, he sees himself in a certain manner perhaps in a more positive light than an outsider would. Because the narrator and the central figure in the narrative is the same person, the narrative becomes reflexive. This reflexivity poses serious

⁴²⁰ Holstein-Gubrium (2000) p. 106

⁴²¹ Holstain-Gubrium (2000) p. 107

⁴²² Bruner (2006) p. 99

⁴²³ Bruner (2006) p. 100

problems to the verification of the narrative and makes it indeterminate, that is, “the very telling of the story distorts what we have in mind to tell.”⁴²⁴

If we take Reagan’s autobiography “Where’s the rest of me?”⁴²⁵ as an example, we can immediately see that the story itself has been severely distorted by what the teller wanted to communicate. The story is just too good to be true. There are no really hard times. All anecdotes have happy endings and the climb from Dixon to Hollywood happens without any interruptions of discord. One of the conservative grand old ladies in America, Claire Booth Luce, supposedly once said that all biography is alibiography. This simplified maxim has more than a grain of truth to it, especially in the case of politician’s life stories. Auto biographers are just as fallible as other people. They may attempt to show themselves in a better light, forget willingly or unwillingly some things and leave them out of their stories, and fail to understand the importance of some other things, while at the same time they emphasize less important matters. One can follow the terminology set by Wallace Martin, who claims that autobiography is something that “someone describes the personal significance of past experiences from the perspective of the present.”⁴²⁶ Reagan told a lot of anecdotes from his Hollywood days. These narratives are not comprehensive accounts of events, but perspectives on events. Since they are personal, they are also highly perspectival and not accurate or objective. Central to narrative perspective is the *moral stance* assumed by the teller. This stance is communicated in the narrative along with the particular worldview it refers to and is encoded within it. As Ochs and Capps interpret it, a personal narrative, when it recounts a violation and takes a moral stance towards it, “is akin to prayer in that both imbue experience with moral direction.”⁴²⁷ Personal narratives have also been used to prove a moral point of view, or as a means to build a larger framework of

⁴²⁴ Bruner (2006) p. 101

⁴²⁵ Reagan essentially began the writing process himself but for once in his life got stuck and the publisher brought in Richard C. Hubler to help him finish the story. Hubler was a Hollywood writer who had written everything from screenplays to “as-told-to” books like this autobiography. The first person voice in the book sounds authentically Reagan, but Hubler’s influence on the final form of the book remains unclear. (Cannon 2003, p. 10-11) In the process of editing Hubler cut out a lot of the political message Reagan had inserted into his memoir and tried to keep it closer to the form of biography than a political manifesto. It is actually surprising that a man of such a talent with written words was unable to independently produce an autobiography. His second autobiography “*An American Life*” was a ghostwritten book at the behest of his wife, Nancy. See Morris (1999) p. 92

⁴²⁶ Martin (1987) p. 75

⁴²⁷ Ochs-Capps (2001) p. 46

moral philosophy that determines how one ought to live.⁴²⁸ There supposedly is a difference to memoir, which is a record of events of public interest, a reminiscence, which is a record of personal relationships and memories without emphasis of the self, and the diary or journal in which the record of events is practically immediate and not altered by later reflection.⁴²⁹ I do not place a lot of emphasis on each of these definitions for my purposes. What concerns me most is the fact that the person himself is telling about states, actions, and events involved in his own life in his own words. Whether one or none of these different genres is “truthful” is of no importance, rather they are all descriptions written by the persona experiencing things. There is a slight possibility that the “inner Reagan” might reveal intentionally or unintentionally something different about his thoughts.

The problem of verification is only one of the problems in the study of autobiographical narratives which are rendered unstable by many other factors as well. Bruner argues that “this very instability makes life stories highly susceptible to cultural, interpersonal and linguistic influences. [...] religious instruction and other interventions in a life may often have such profound effects in changing a person’s life narrative.”⁴³⁰ The narrator himself is not actually the only shaper of his life and neither of his life story. The autobiographical narrative is to a large degree influenced by the context in which the person lives. His religious affiliation or cultural connections may be raised almost to a “co-author” status or at least an “editor” of the life story. In Reagan’s case his boyhood conversion into a Disciple may have shaped his life story profoundly. He was “born again” and partially as a result dated the daughter of the local minister and even went to college in Eureka, a small community college run by the Disciples of Christ. Another such event of religious intervention was Reagan’s survival from the 1981 assassination attempt after which he claimed to have realized that “Whatever happens now I owe my life to God and will try to serve him in every way I can”⁴³¹

Reagan’s experience as a sports broadcaster before his career in Hollywood or politics was undoubtedly one factor that contributed towards his mastery of

⁴²⁸ Ochs-Capps (2001) p. 45-46

⁴²⁹ Martin (1987) p. 75

⁴³⁰ Bruner (2006) p. 101-102

⁴³¹ Reagan (2007) p. 12. Diary entry for 30.3.1981. The actual date of the entry and its validity as an autobiographical piece of evidence can be put to question since the date specified was the date of shooting and after that there is a thirteen-day gap in entries which continue only after Reagan has been sent to convalesce at the White House.

narration later in life. Marie-Laure Ryan has called radio broadcasts a “factory of plot” which is constructed around three dimensions; the chronicle of what is happening, the mimesis of telling how the events look, and allowing the listener to picture the events and the emplotment of how things are connected to make sense of the events.⁴³² There is evidence of the personal importance of this for Reagan in two of his favourite stories, the job audition for radio WOC⁴³³ when he had to “broadcast” an imaginary football game, or the story he tells when the wire went dead for several minutes during a baseball game and he had to invent consecutive fouls to keep the audience listening rather than admit that in the studio he had no idea what was going on the play.⁴³⁴ Another intriguing idea one may get from this story is that, as Reagan explained, he did not want to lose his audience and to avoid that, he relapsed instantly into a story which was pure invention instead of sports casting. The implications of a politician’s willingness to make such a choice without a moment’s thought are interesting. But broadcasting games from telegraph notes was a common practice at that time, and all the listeners knew he was only pretending to see the game.⁴³⁵ Often the imagined and narrated game was just better than the real one, and Reagan did not want to interrupt the flow of his narration and stop creating the story world for his audience. As the most prominent Reagan biographer, Lou Cannon has claimed, “Reagan was a storyteller who made the facts fit the story rather than building the story on facts.”⁴³⁶

There were other times during the multiple careers of Ronald Reagan when he chose to narrate purely fictive things in order to avoid something unpleasant. Naturally the chronicle part of the narration is the most central to a sports broadcaster, but the real challenge lies in the emplotment of the broadcast by constructing characters, attributing functions to single events, and finding an interpretive theme that would link the events into a meaningful sequence.⁴³⁷ Reagan was, by all accounts, successful as a sports broadcaster and the use of radio as his

⁴³² Ryan (1993) p. 138-150, Czarniawska (2004) p. 23

⁴³³ Incredibly enough the abbreviation for the name of the radio station comes from World of Chiropracy. Along with Wyman, another character that leaves a gap in Reagan’s storyworlds is B.J. Palmer, the man who owned the radio station. Garry Wills argues that he is omitted because for Reagan he was “an unpleasant part of his life he would rather dismiss.” Wills (2000) p. 123. Reagan is VERY adept in leaving excluding unpleasant things from his lifestory.

⁴³⁴ One version of this often occurring anecdote can be found in Reagan (1981) p. 78-79

⁴³⁵ Wills (2000) p. 142

⁴³⁶ Cannon (2003) p. 105

⁴³⁷ Ryan (1993) p. 141

medium enabled him even in later life make people “see what he sees.” This in turn helps a prophetic politician to communicate his visions of a glorious future to come, because creating an image into the story recipients’ minds works more effectively than mere strings of descriptive sentences. These years were excellent training for Reagan’s future as the Great Communicator, and his skills in producing vivid story worlds long predated his use of index cards or teleprompter.⁴³⁸ As a rhetorician and a narrator Reagan acknowledged one shortcoming himself, reading prepared material. Years after his start in sports broadcasting he wrote of still being no good at the first reading of a script. According to Cannon he overcame this problem by memorizing the opening passage and repeating it out aloud before delivering it, and so everything he read after that would sound spontaneous. The natural-sounding delivery he used in his political speeches came then from practice.⁴³⁹

Another important time of learning to be a narrator and a speechmaker was the years Reagan spent as the spokesman for General Electric. The General Electric years worked as a workshop for Reagan’s political narration to fully develop. Reagan was the public face of GE for many Americans and indirectly partially responsible for selling images and the concept of technological progress.⁴⁴⁰ Even later in life one characteristic of his storytelling was the ability to sell his views like any more conventional product could be sold by a skilled salesman. It was also during these years of 1954 to 1962 that his vision or idea of America began to turn towards practical matters of political ideology and policy. The content of his speeches switched from Hollywood titbits to political matters advocating freedom. As Kengor notes, during these years his speeches began to get dominated by the theme of freedom, which in turn became inseparable with God as a given right.⁴⁴¹ As Reagan himself described those years,

I know statistics are boring but reducing eight years of tours in which I reached all the 135 plants and personally met the 250,000 employees, down to numbers, it turns out something like this: two of the eight years were spent travelling, and with speeches sometimes running at fourteen a day, I was on my feet in front of a “mike” for about 250,000 minutes [...] I knew I had to avoid a set routine or a canned speech which, although it would have been easier, could have ruined the whole wonderful reaction we were getting. I

⁴³⁸ Pemberton (1997) p. 15

⁴³⁹ Cannon (2003) p. 38/39

⁴⁴⁰ According to a General Electric slogan at that time progress was their main product. And surely the gospel of progress and scientific invention became part of the message in Reagan’s storytelling even during the presidency

⁴⁴¹ Kengor (2004) p. 102

was sure that one group exchanged note with the others about what took place in these twenty-minute sessions, and it wouldn't do to have them discover I had one twenty-minute pitch which was turned on and off like a record. Besides, at fourteen times a day I'd get pretty sick of it myself. The answer was a brief greeting and explanation of why I was there, which of necessity had to be fairly pat, but then I freewheeled my way into a question-and-answer session and that really made for variety.⁴⁴²

During his first years of speechmaking Reagan talked about the joys of giving and the blessings of democracy along with answering questions from all walks of life, but later on his conservatism grew along with the tone of his speeches getting more anti-governmental.⁴⁴³ While his anti-communism was evident from his years as the president of the Screen Actors Guild (SAG) onwards, the anti-governmentalism was along with his own experiences at least partially a by-product of the feedback he received from his audience. The members of his audiences told him their own experiences, and some of these ended up in Reagan's speeches and the amount of feedback grew. There was less and less Hollywood in his speeches, and more and more about government. This same thought was expressed by Reagan himself in his 1965 autobiography,

As the years went on my speeches underwent a kind of revolution, reflecting not only my changing philosophy but also the swiftly rising tide of collectivism that threatens to inundate what remains of our free economy. [...] the Hollywood portion of the talk shortened and disappeared. The warning words of what could happen changed to concrete examples of what has already happened, and I learned very early to document those examples. Bureaucracy does not take kindly to being assailed and isn't above using a few low blows and a knee to the groin when it fights back. Knowing this, I have become extreme cautious in dealing with government agencies.⁴⁴⁴

It would be inaccurate to label Reagan a pure populist and this is most evident during his pre-presidential years in his conversion from a democrat to a republican, which he made in the most unfavourable time imaginable when liberalism was in the air.⁴⁴⁵ Even during his presidency Reagan did not follow the favourable winds along the public opinion, but instead chose to try to shape the public opinion so that he could "point out the best way for the country to achieve its ideals"⁴⁴⁶ Since

⁴⁴² Reagan (1981) p. 293- 294

⁴⁴³ Noonan (2001) p. 83

⁴⁴⁴ Reagan (1985) p. 303

⁴⁴⁵ Noonan (2001) p. 84-85

⁴⁴⁶ D'Souza (1997) p. 31

Reagan's own ideology was so carved in stone, he attempted to change the opinions of the public instead of his own.

During his GE years he seemed to shy away from "canned speeches." He wanted to make a different speech to his every audience. Different audiences required different wording and different topics, and Reagan began to notice that he had to choose his words with care. Ad-libbing became the best approach, but in the case of such an experienced actor, even adlibbing draws on well-practiced words and gestures.⁴⁴⁷ He assumed the same style he liked to use during his presidency when giving informal speeches. A short introduction or a statement, and a lot of room for questions became the standard script for his GE speeches and carried on into the presidency.⁴⁴⁸ Naturally his campaign speeches during his both presidential campaigns were in essence built around a certain frame, rhythm, and flow. Every now and then he told a different joke, or spoke of his principal points in different order, but the framework of most of his campaign speeches remained constant, and thus speeches were close to identical. The idea of ad-libbing drawing on certain well practised words might go a long way to explaining why even in his later years, as biographer Edmund Morris has noted, Reagan seemed to be like a tape-recorder, which would turn on and produce a certain anecdote given the right stimulus, which could be a certain word that connected things in Reagan's mind.⁴⁴⁹

But it is not only important what Reagan actually said. In autobiographical narratives gaps, or omissions, are crucially important. Most of the political literature criticism or narrative study derives from a reading of the text or narrative in a context that the author did not intend. This technique often highlights those elements of the text that both the author and the intended audience took for granted, and thus are not elaborated to a detail. These elements may reveal something new about the ideology embedded in the text or narrative. Either these were unconscious, or kept silent for political reasons.⁴⁵⁰ This type of authorial reading is valuable, but it is because it points at those features the author/narrator did not himself wish to be seen. It does not bring out the authorial intentions embedded within the narrative, but rather the subconscious features, which are not a part of the narrator's politics

⁴⁴⁷ Erickson (1985) p. 19

⁴⁴⁸ In the aftermath of the Iran-Contra affair this aspect of Reagan's narration diminished. While the entire affair was not only embarrassing, but politically significant, the Reagan administration did not enable the members of the press to ask many questions from the President,

⁴⁴⁹ Morris (1999)

⁴⁵⁰ Rabinowitz (1987) p. 70

but are political, because they may shed light on the author's political thoughts on a deeper level. The silenced parts may give the story recipient background information to better understand the politics involved in and surrounding the narrative, but they do not tell us what kind of change the political narrator wanted to inflict in the status quo of things, and this is important when studying political leadership in the context of prophetic politics. As I will discuss in depth mythical narratives in political narration later on, I will say here only that very often the mythical aspects of the political narrative are located precisely in these gaps. The myths America lives by are most often not articulated, because such concepts as the Chosen Nation or Manifest Destiny are taken for granted. They are seen as "common wisdom," which can be understood in this context as myths.

Reagan's story often omits many crucial components of a complete narrative. When there is no need to talk about certain characters for political purposes, they are often set aside from the narrative content. The same procedure applies to events as well. Some events in the real world are excluded completely in Reagan's story and leave narrative gaps. The mere fact that they are not brought up in the storytelling makes them nonexistent in the story world. Conversely some events are given additional meanings and get elaborated. Thus even relatively minor happenings can be turned into significant events. This manipulation of the things chosen to be told about, and the manner in which they are narrated, allows Reagan to control the events to his own advantage. The story world excludes some things, adds others, and alters the meanings of many more, and if the story's inner logic holds and makes the story credible, the recipient is drawn to seeing the story world as the real world and does not even notice his relocation into an alternate, narrated world. One simple example of an important thing that was excluded almost entirely from Reagan's story world was AIDS. The disease was diagnosed early on in the Reagan presidency and had killed thousands of Americans, including a personal friend Rock Hudson, by the year 1987 when Reagan first discussed it in his public speech.⁴⁵¹ After having had to recognize the problem of AIDS, Reagan set up research committees and proclaimed AIDS awareness months and acted on combating the disease, but to acknowledge it as a problem in his fairytale America was a long time coming. Nevertheless, the first mention privately was in his diary

⁴⁵¹ Reagan (1.4.1987) Remarks at a Luncheon for Members of the College of Physicians in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania <http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1987/040187e.htm>

when commenting on the rumours what Rock Hudson was being treated for almost two years earlier.⁴⁵² Another thing Reagan kept practically completely outside the realm of his story verse was the homeless and even the actual term appears very seldom in his story.⁴⁵³

When it comes to gaps in the life story of Ronald Reagan, the easiest to find is the almost total exclusion of Jane Wyman, his first wife. In fact the first reference to her in “Where’s the rest of me” when they are divorced. “It was an interesting time in my life [...] By the time it was over, I had become the president of the Screen Actors guild – and I had lost my wife.”⁴⁵⁴ There are only three occasions in the entire autobiography of over 350 pages where Jane Wyman is mentioned, once in an afterthought that while Reagan was feverish in one hospital, his “then-wife” Jane Wyman had a miscarriage in another.⁴⁵⁵ In the third instance the “whole” of two pages are devoted to the subject and mainly tell about the feelings of Reagan on divorce.⁴⁵⁶ It would be interesting to find out why Reagan chose to silence the whole subject almost totally. There are few references from Wyman from the time of the divorce explaining that Reagan had become a bore and was generally too interested in politics and too little in being a husband, but since then she has chosen to remain silent when it comes to her marriage to Reagan.⁴⁵⁷ The gap in the narrative left by Reagan does not get filled by her counter narrative either.

But if the life story were to omit nothing, it would be tedious to hear or read, and the entire story of one’s life would be drastically less than the sum of its parts. Omitting things from the telling is based on the evaluation of the reportability of states, actions, and events and if the narrator is skilled, he probably omits the things he deems less important or interesting to his potential audience. But on the other hand, as Bruner argues, “a rousing tale of life is not necessarily a “right” account.”⁴⁵⁸ The Freudian view of psychology emphasizes the importance of things that have happened in the early childhood of a person to his mental development. At

⁴⁵² Reagan (2007) p. 345. Diary entry for 24.7.1985

⁴⁵³ Reeves (2005) p. 211-212. 271. It is noteworthy that Reagan refrained from using the word even in his statement on the death of Rock Hudson.

⁴⁵⁴ Reagan (1981) p. 201. As a matter of fact there is one earlier casual reference to the idea of being married, when Reagan speaks of getting out of the war time service and wanting “in common with the several million other veterans [...] to rest up awhile, make love to my wife and come up refreshed to a better job in an ideal world.” Reagan (1981) p.159

⁴⁵⁵ Reagan (1981) p.222

⁴⁵⁶ Reagan (1981) p. 229-230

⁴⁵⁷ See for example Cannon (2001), Morris (1999)

⁴⁵⁸ Bruner (2006) p. 101

the same time, the younger the child is, the less will he be able to remember and recount of these early experiences which supposedly play a large part in the construction of his personality. At least these necessary and unavoidable omissions shape the life story. Bruner claims that “life as led is inseparable from a life that is told – or more bluntly, a life is not “how it was” but how it is interpreted and reinterpreted, told and retold.”⁴⁵⁹

Reagan tells a lot of anecdotes about his personal past and these same stories pop up in his speeches as well as his autobiographies as similar to the most minuscule detail. As Ochs and Capps have noted, “Each telling reverberates across past, present, and unrealized time, yielding a more or less integrated logic of personal experience.”⁴⁶⁰ Reagan unified his past and present in his narrations. In the process some things that have been unrealized become part of his personal reality and history, although they never have taken place in actuality. The difference between literary and historical narratives when compared to personal narratives is that retrospectively the story is relatively easy to emplot. When one tries to tell his own life story he is forced to integrate the materials at hand and the self is in the middle of its story and has to revise the plot constantly without knowing how the story actually is going to end.⁴⁶¹ As Reagan noted, “In a single lifetime, my own, we have gone from horse and buggy to sending astronauts to the Moon.”⁴⁶² Since things outside the narration have changed, there was a need to change the narrative as well. But, the essential superstructure of the mythical America as God’s chosen country remained a part of the story. Reagan’s storytelling was to a large degree about his own life, but even more it emphasized the past, present, and future of America. One could say that he was narrating the life of his nation – the American life.

1.3.4. READER, STORYRECIPIENT, NARRATEE AND AUDIENCE

Non satis est pulchra esse poemata: dulcia sunt et quocumque volent
 animum auditoris agunto⁴⁶³
 -Horace

⁴⁵⁹ Bruner (2006) p. 114

⁴⁶⁰ Ochs-Capps (2001) p. 201

⁴⁶¹ Polkinghorne (1988) p. 69

⁴⁶² Reagan (1.11.1984) Remarks at a Reagan-Bush Rally in Boston, Massachusetts
<http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1984/110184d.htm>

⁴⁶³ Horace, lines 99-100

Now we have been able to determine Reagan's position both within the stories he told and as the teller of those stories and emphasized the importance of the actual process of narrating as compared to the actual authorship. Reagan earned the nickname of the "Great Communicator" and this is the aspect we will burrow into in this subchapter. Narrating a story is just not enough for a politician. He has to communicate his message to somebody. Now we will deal with the receiving end of the narrative. I shall argue that the story recipients, or the audience, are a crucial part in making sense of the stories they are told and deciphering the political message contained within. I shall show that while this ultimate meaning of a story is not solely in the hands of Reagan or any narrator, he has at his disposal tools to guide the interpretative processes of the audience. Even more importantly, the audience, especially when it consists of Americans, is turned into a part of the story as well. The audience not only populates the story verse with characters, actants and circumstances with imagination, but through the role Reagan gives them in his storytelling, actually themselves become these story world participants. Thus, essentially the same blurring of roles as took place with Reagan as both the narrator and a character applies to his audience as well.

It is not enough that a story gets told. Every narrator expects and craves an audience. For a politician it might be his or her constituency, or the entire citizenry, but for a normal person just someone to listen to what is being recited and to show interest. There has to be a listener or a reader. Chatman argues that only the implied author and implied reader are immanent to a narrative and that the narrator and narratee are optional. These are the figures contained within the narrative text. While the real author and the real reader are indispensable to a narrative, they remain outside the narrative transaction as such.⁴⁶⁴

When reading a story the reader acts like Janus, the two-faced god. He is at the same time looking backward along the path of the narrative and forward as well. With every new bit of information he is trying to restructure the past, and simultaneously look forward in anticipation of things to come. Causality is so far built into our mode of thought that we start to anticipate the future outcomes of actions, states, and events in the present. The mere fact that at the present things are of a certain type leads us to active reconstruction of the past in order to rearrange it

⁴⁶⁴ Chatman (1978) p. 151

so, that our present seems causally possible. The theme of the story is ultimately produced in glancing backwards and reassembling the past. Events are read forward so that the end results from the beginning and meanings are read backward so that the knowing the end will enable us to identify its beginning.⁴⁶⁵ At the time of telling this is a big resource for the prophetic politician, since in his message there is clear teleology and the ultimate goal. If the policies are not successful, our clear hindsight does no longer matter, since the purposes why the story originally told got fulfilled or passed out of existence. Reading meanings backward enables us in the case of a successful politician like Reagan to bestow him with such admirable qualities that he, or rather the story about him, could act as motivator for both of the candidates of the 2008 election, as different from each other as John McCain and Barack Obama are.

Narrative theory has borrowed many of its building blocks from the speech act theory, and thus some of the ideas apply to narratives as well, especially if speeches of politicians are put under the scrutiny of the tools of narrative analysis. The essence of political speechmaking can be read from these words of Roman Jakobson:

The *addresser* sends a *message* to the *addressee*. To be operative the message requires *context* referred to, sizable by the addressee, and either verbal or capable of being verbalized; a *code* fully, or at least partially, common to the addresser and addressee; and, finally, a *contact*, a physical channel and psychological connection between the addresser and the addressee, enabling both of them to enter and stay in communication.⁴⁶⁶

In the case of speeches and other narrations of politicians it is beneficial to replace “addresser and addressee” with “narrator and narratee” or “audience” which consists of multiple narratees. Jakobson’s idea itself does still hold true. The political message is still sent, but in a form of a story, and this requires the above specified connection to exist in order for communication to exist.

Reagan wanted to involve his audiences in his narration. He did not want to have the lights dimmed when he spoke in stark contrast to many politicians, who preferred a dark setting and a spotlight to focus on them. Reagan wanted the audience to have an ownership in the event, and for them to make a mutual commitment. Reagan wanted to see their eyes and gauge the effect of his words.

⁴⁶⁵ Martin (1987) p. 127

⁴⁶⁶ Jakobson. Cited in Culler (1975) p. 56

Mike Deaver claims that each speech was a “new adventure” for Reagan.⁴⁶⁷ Deaver is often credited for creating the settings of Reagan’s speech events in such a manner that would show the best of Reagan. Deaver in turn gives credit to Reagan. It was he who wanted his audience to be within “striking distance.” Since he wanted eye contact, he instructed Deaver to situate the first row no more than eight feet from the lectern.⁴⁶⁸ Reagan demanded contact with the audience partially because this enabled him to alter the course of telling, if the audience response for some reason required it. But in this process the audience always became more active in shaping the eventual outcome of narrating.

When talking about the audiences Reagan communicated his stories to, it is useful to clarify the concepts of narratee and narrative audience. Narratee was a term invented by Gerald Prince, who claims that the author addresses actual readers (receivers), the implied author the implied reader (addressee) and the narrator the narratee (enunciate). The narratee “constitutes a relay between the narrator and the reader, he helps establish the narrative framework, he serves to characterize the narrator, he emphasizes certain themes, he contributes to the development of the plot.”⁴⁶⁹ For Rabinowitz a narrative audience is “the imaginary audience for which the narrator is writing”⁴⁷⁰ and an ideal narrative audience is the one “for which the narrator wishes he were writing.”⁴⁷¹ One of the aims of political storytelling is to avoid the situation where the story recipients identify themselves as readers addressed by the implied author, that is, to recognize that they are being told a story. In this situation citizenry as story recipients become what Rabinowitz calls the “authorial audience.” They should not be allowed to reach an implicit understanding that the story told is fiction. The authorial audience recognizes that it has become participants in a make-believe story. As members of the narrative audience “we read [or listen] as if the story were true, in the sense that we grant existence to the characters and events.”⁴⁷²

Political texts are always directed for a more than a “general” audience. A politician does not tell his narratives in the vain hope that someone, somewhere, somehow might read his story like a person stashing his attempts at poetry in a desk

⁴⁶⁷ Deaver (2003) p. 53-54

⁴⁶⁸ Deaver (2003) p. 56

⁴⁶⁹ Prince cit. in Phelan (1996) p. 139

⁴⁷⁰ Rabinowitz (1976) p. 127

⁴⁷¹ Rabinowitz (1976) p. 134

⁴⁷² Martin (1987) p. 159

drawer might do. He always produces texts not only for the actual audience present at the moment of the narration, (either live or via television or radio) but numerous “authorial audiences” as well. These audiences are more or less hypothetical and can be reached even by other tellings about the narrative, such as newspaper stories about the speech of the President. It is ultimately the authorial audience the politician needs to embrace and his authorial intentions are tied to this audience. He not only tries to create a change in the way of thinking of those actually present but for those other citizens potentially listening/reading. The number of different potential authorial audiences can be finite, but this does not in any way guarantee that the “author would exert total control over the act of writing any more than the readers have control over the act of interpretation.”⁴⁷³ While any author, including politicians, can theoretically say or write what he wills and the readers interpret it according to their fancy, the crucial need for *communicating* the ideas limits the range of choices. The telling needs to be constructed in a manner that keeps the authorial audience in mind, so that the story recipient too shares its characteristics to experience the text in a more or less similar manner as the narrator wishes or hopes.⁴⁷⁴

When the listener perceives and understands the meaning of speech, he immediately takes an active and responsive attitude toward it by agreeing or disagreeing, augmenting and applying it, and since understanding is imbued with response the listener becomes a speaker.⁴⁷⁵ This applies as well to me as those citizens that were the first story recipients of Reagan. The response of Reagan’s contemporaries formed a part of the political discourse, and my response is this study. There is always the actual addressee for every utterance, and it is his responsive understanding, the author of the speech seeks. The actual audiences of recipients to Reagan’s stories are naturally there but the author always more or less consciously presupposes a higher “*superaddressee*” with an absolutely just responsive understanding. This superaddressee can assume various ideological expressions and Bakhtin uses examples like God, the people, science or the court of

⁴⁷³ Rabinowitz (1987) p. 23

⁴⁷⁴ Rabinowitz (1987) p. 22-25 He also notes, that the assumed contract between the writer and the reader does often not lead to readers interpreting texts in the way writer wants even if the readers wish to do so. (Ibid. p. 43, 53,56) Intentionality is ever present in political narratives, but this does not guarantee the intentions of the politician as narrator and those of the citizen as narrate coincide in any manner. Texts and their interpretations are unpredictable.

⁴⁷⁵ Bakhtin (1986) p. 68

history, which all can stand above all the participants.⁴⁷⁶ Reagan's superaddressee is on occasion practically each of these mentioned here. God and the people are the ones, who essentially justify his political storytelling as well as future historians, who look back at his era. Therefore the final addressee, who eventually composes the meaning of the story told, is not even by the author's intentions the on hand and present direct addressee, but one more distanced from the actual speechmaking either in time or location or both.

Riessman notes that story has a certain form because it is told to certain people. Had the audience or the combination of story recipients been different, might the story in each case have been different as well.⁴⁷⁷ Since stories are told at particular times to particular people in order to affect them in a particular manner, they are given new forms and contents so as to rise to every occasion. Here is one limitation of Reagan's narration. He is often not able to transform his story enough to meet the preferences of various audiences. The stories told to the American public should be differently composed as those, say, to the Japanese Diet.⁴⁷⁸ One of the less illustrious sides of Reagan as a narrator was to some degree his disability to speak convincingly to foreign audiences. The narrator may wish to make his story accessible to any potential story recipient, but some conception of the audience is important, when he is producing the narrative. Since the narrator cannot be sure his numerous assumed story recipients see eye to eye with him; "He therefore tries to define an audience. By assuming what it is that all men ought to be able to understand and agree upon, he creates a kind of humanity."⁴⁷⁹

The frame of reference for Reagan was America, and it was precisely to the entire America that he addressed his speeches, no matter what was the size and composition of the actual audience seated in front of him. We can claim that the authorial audience Reagan wanted to address was the "heroic America" he envisioned, but naturally the actual audience was not all that mythical. Reagan's speeches were in his eyes directed to future generations as well. "I'm convinced that historians will look back on this as the time that we started down a new and far

⁴⁷⁶ Bakhtin (1986) p. 126

⁴⁷⁷ Riessman (1993) p. 11

⁴⁷⁸ Reagan (11.11.1983) Address Before the Japanese Diet in Tokyo
<http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1983/111183a.htm>

⁴⁷⁹ Bellow, cited in Martin (1987) p. 158

better road for America.”⁴⁸⁰ Americans in the future were part of the audience Reagan imagined as well, and will according to him look back to his era, and judge intentions and achievements. The politicking was made by the oral communication of Reagan’s vision, but the written aspect of the narrative was used to convince the future story recipients.

Reagan was, as noted, at his best, when addressing main-stream Americans. As he put it, “there’s an awful lot of rhetoric that is delivered for home consumption.”⁴⁸¹ It is just because of his own personal certainty in the superiority of his prophetic message of a golden future where freedom and the American dream will become reality for all people on the earth, that he was blind to the existence of dissenters. He went to define all people of the Western Hemisphere as American, while this undoubtedly was not a source of pleasure for many people from South America. “The peoples of this hemisphere are one. In this profound sense, we are all Americans.”⁴⁸² Reagan tended to automatically assume that each and every member of his audiences saw the world in the same manner he did. This might have been the source of European view of him as a trigger-happy cowboy armed with nuclear six-shooters. For Reagan, everything he spoke of was fundamentally true, and he was not open to other pluralistic views. In the American context the praise for America went down well but with foreigners and dissenters Reagan had a communication gap.

Mary Stuckey argues that Reagan viewed his audience as a symbol and created agreement either with them or upon their values. Reagan picked one characteristic of the audience and used it to show that the audience in fact was emblematic of the entire nation. Reagan wanted the audience to feel themselves as close and important to him. This was most apparent in his stump speeches where he made the audience feel that they are a special and unique part of the America Reagan loved and was proud of. The audience was given a vital role in all of Reagan’s plans for America, since without them he could not “bring America back.” Reagan’s storytelling and his use of the concept of “values” united the narrator and

⁴⁸⁰ Reagan (14.12.1983) Remarks and a Question-and-Answer Session With Editors of Gannett Newspapers on Domestic and Foreign Policy Issues
<http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1983/121483e.htm>

⁴⁸¹ Reagan (31.5.1983) Interview With American and Foreign Journalists at the Williamsburg Economic Summit Conference in Virginia
<http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1983/53183a.htm>

⁴⁸² Reagan (1984) Remarks on the Caribbean Basin Initiative to the Permanent Council of the Organization of American States. (24.2.1982) s. 210

his story recipients by showing that they essentially share the same values. It did not matter whether Reagan spoke to a small congregation of Elks, or possible voters on a campaign trail. He created the impression that the audience was important to him because of some intrinsic value, and this was often based on those traditional American values Reagan was so fond of speaking about.⁴⁸³

What is it that unites Americans of all faiths, creeds, races, political persuasions and ethnic backgrounds. What is the common denominator of Americanism? I believe it is a simple, single four-letter word. The word is hope. We who call ourselves Americans hope to see a better, more peaceful world tomorrow, and we expect to make steady, measurable progress toward the fulfilment of this dream. Now, it is not merely hope that defines an American. It is the habit of practical success in seeing our dreams fulfilled. It is this unique combination of aspiration and accomplishment, dream and deed that truly sets the American apart.⁴⁸⁴

Jari Rantapelkonen argues that audiences in our times are more diverse than ever before. Even if the narrator focuses on ideal audience of the actual audience present at the time of the narration. In our information age public speaking blurs the distinction of audiences, and already during the Reagan era his major speeches were broadcasted practically on a global scale. Thus a speech to the British Parliament was an excellent opportunity to spread the message about fighting Communism globally. This type of situation is to some degree under the control of the narrator, but even a speech of proportionally smaller influencing potential can present challenges to tell stories in a way which does not allow misinterpreted perceptions in the global information system that might harmfully affect the relationships between USA and other states.⁴⁸⁵

Barthes writes: “On the stage of the text, no footlights: there is not behind the text, someone active (the writer) and out front someone passive (the reader); there is not a subject and an object.”⁴⁸⁶ The interaction between the writer or author and the reader is where the ultimate meaning of the text is born. Despite the intentions of the author, the meaning that gets finalized for the text cannot be predicted due to the participation of the story recipient in the process of interpretation. At his most radical Barthes wants to turn the writer-reader-situation completely around by claiming “we see that writing is not the communication of a

⁴⁸³ Stuckey (1990) p. 32-33

⁴⁸⁴ Draft, Folder Hannaford/CA HQ – R. Reagan Speeches – 5/21/1979, Speech Draft. Box 25, Ronald Reagan 1980 Campaign Papers, Series I, Ronald Reagan Library.

⁴⁸⁵ See Rantapelkonen (2006) p. 252

⁴⁸⁶ Barthes (1990) p. 16

message which starts from the author and proceeds to the reader; it is specifically the voice of reading itself: *in the text, only the reader speaks.*"⁴⁸⁷

This is an approach too radical to use for political narratives. In fact such a statement could deny the entire use of political storytelling. This rather seems to be the approach a literary critic could take in viewing a text. The reader is central in the interpretation of every text, but to give him full credit for the message in the text is going too far. If this were true for political narratives, which often are structurally relatively simple constructs, there would never have been "the Communist Manifesto" among other political pamphlets or texts. If only the reader created meanings, there would be no need to create politically charged texts, but rather to politically work upon the mindset of the citizen through some other media. If this was true, one could argue (to exaggerate and somewhat twist and elaborate Fredric Jameson's idea of political unconscious⁴⁸⁸) that a *zoon politikon*, a very politically motivated citizen, would read even a telephone directory in a manner that would impose political meanings on it. Thus there would be no difference in between reading "*Das Kapital*" or the phonebook, since the political implications of the text would come solely from the reader, and not be even partially guided by the highly political process of writing a text to achieve political goals.

It is difficult to address what the meaning of the text producer or narrator is on the whole, but in the realm of presidential speeches educated guesses can be made. I put a lot of emphasis on the perspective Reagan had and thus write about what he wanted to cause with his stories. As ultimately the meaning and effect of those narrations was produced, when the story recipient engaged the text to interpret and internalize it, the actual outcomes could have been a lot different than what Reagan intended. The intention of his storytelling concerning the Contras and Sandinistas was clear, but it was one occasion when he was not able to recruit the people to accept his interpretation of the reality and inhabit the story world he drafted. Nevertheless, story worlds are created and combined into a story verse for a purpose and just like in life itself, we can never be sure, whether the purpose gets fulfilled. This is because the political narrator can only initiate the building of the story worlds and attempt to guide what details the story recipients enrich it with. They can accept the story world and follow the cue set by the narrator or they may

⁴⁸⁷ Barthes (1974) p. 151

⁴⁸⁸ Jameson (1983)

but a drastically different story world or even choose not to be part of the particular story world at all. But in any case, neither the narrator, nor the story recipient is the one who gives a final meaning to a story or the shape of the story world it evokes. This happens in interaction between the two, but it is the intentions of the narrator, which are politically just as important as the eventual outcomes.

Phelan and Martin emphasize the idea of positioning oneself with regard to the ethics of reading. This position combines both acting from and being placed in an ethical location and the ethical position derives from the dynamic interaction of four ethical situations: (1) that of the characters within the story world; (2) that of the narrator in relation to the telling; (3) that of the implied author in relation to the authorial audience, and (4) that of the flesh-and –blood reader in relation to the set of values, beliefs and locations the narrative invites him to occupy.⁴⁸⁹ In their own words;

While the ethical dimension of reading engages our values and judgements, it is deeply intertwined with cognition, emotion and desire; our understanding influences our sense of which values the text is calling forth, the activation of those values influences our judgements, our judgements influence our feelings, and our feelings our desires. And the other way around.⁴⁹⁰

To talk in terms of a reader like Rimmon-Kenan or use the reader/listener after Roland Barthes or even narratee after Gerald Prince,⁴⁹¹ is not sufficient to accommodate all forms of narrative representation and in this particular case omits the visual part of Reagan's narration, which was part of his performance. Visual aspects of the narration are lacking also in my research data, which is written instead of spoken or performed, but nevertheless the term "story recipient" coined by David Herman is the most appropriate to use of the different audiences and or individuals who were the target of Reagan's narration.⁴⁹²

The importance of audience has to be taken into account when discussing any narration and in the particular case of prophetic politics it becomes an even more profound aspect of the entire story-based political leadership. It is the audience that chooses whether to accept the message the story carries. It is the audience that ultimately makes the decision whether to accept and participate in the construction of the story verse the politician tries to narrate into existence. The prophetic

⁴⁸⁹ Phelan-Martin (1999) p. 100

⁴⁹⁰ Phelan-Martin (1999) p. 100

⁴⁹¹ Prince (1982) p. 7, Rimmon-Kenan (1983)

⁴⁹² Herman (2002) p. 1

politician, in order to be regarded as such, can only gain the role of the prophet if the audience chooses to view him in that light. When creating the American Way of Life and giving birth to his mythical concept of America, Reagan was dependent of his audience and whether they would choose to participate in it and accept this imagined community. But the audience, composed of individual story recipients, is a mass and as such has no personality; it has no common will or sense of its own. It is also dependent on someone to tell it what to “think” and to have someone to lead it. The political narrator can only exist and succeed in co-operation with his audience and while the audience provides him with justification, he can attempt to create a unity of his audience and turn it into an entity with a common purpose. He has to be responsive to the need and wishes of his audience and the power he wields over them is purely seductive. He can entice and seduce his audience but not coerce it.

Reagan was intensely focused on his audience and its reactions. He was able to perform narrative editing on his narration based upon the changing mood of the audience or its reactions to what was being said but even in retrospect the feedback of the audience was important. He wrote very often in his diaries how his speeches had been received or how many people had called the White House switchboard to express support or what his new approval ratings were after important speeches.⁴⁹³ As an actor should, Reagan read all the “reviews” of his political performances and considered them important. He never lost sight of the fact that for a political narrator the audience and his ability to capture and hold the interest of the audience are crucial. Reagan as a man fascinated with stories chose to write about audiences that,

The basis of the dramatic form of entertainment is the emotional catharsis experienced by the audience. Our lives have lost a certain amount of excitement since we quit having to knock over a mastodon for the family lunch or keep a sabre-toothed tiger from having us for lunch. We’ve kept a little stardust in our mundane lives by identifying with make-believe characters in make-believe adventures in the house of illusion – the theatre. The house lights dim, the curtains part, and for a few hours all women are again beautiful and beloved, all men brave and noble of character. We laugh, cry, know anger, grief, and triumph – then go home at peace with our corner of the world.⁴⁹⁴

⁴⁹³ Reagan (2009) p. 571 Diary entry for 25.1.1988 “The 7th & best of the St. of the U. [State of the Union] I’ve never had such reception with even the Dem’s clapping. I was interrupted 37 times by applause. The speech ran 43 min’s because of it.” For other examples see among others p. 50, 99, 128, 164, 185, 216.

⁴⁹⁴ Reagan (1985) p. 334

2. RELIGION IN AMERICA

Together, let us take up the challenge to reawaken America's religious and moral heart, recognizing that a deep and abiding faith in God is the rock upon which this great Nation was founded.⁴⁹⁵

-Ronald Wilson Reagan

2.1. POLITICS AND RELIGION

It is possible for a poet to write fine poetry, and yet lead his society to Hell. The poet is essentially a seducer; woe to his people.⁴⁹⁶

-Mohammad Allama Iqbal

In this chapter I shall lead you into the realm of politics and religion in United States of America, and thus pave the way for further analysis of the stories Reagan told. My focus shall be on the ways he connected religious beliefs and myths together and created culturally dominant stories of what it meant to be American in the world. This chapter outlines for you the symbiotic relationship of politics and religion, and discusses more in depth how they sometimes combine into a political religion, namely civil religion, and the specific version of it that Reagan narrated.

I try to point out that politics and religion are connected in a more profound manner than we usually realize, and then ease you into the discussion of the alleged division of church and state in the context of the United States of America. I shall show that this division exists only on the surface level of official institutional ties, but that the connection is always there on the level of language, and provides resources for the prophetic politician. I shall delve deeper into the matter and point out certain characteristics of faith in specifically American context and tie them with the political purposes behind the façade. I shall shortly describe how the American society sanctifies some political figures as a short excursus into the prophetic politics, and return to the role Protestantism has played in shaping American religiosity. I argue that many of the myths of Christian Nation and other aspects of the American self-image are shaped by Protestant faith. In the end I take a closer look at the Disciples of Christ which was Reagan's denomination and discuss his religious and other beliefs as shapers of his policies.

⁴⁹⁵ Reagan (6.5.1982) Remarks at a White House Ceremony in Observance of National Day of Prayer. s. 575

⁴⁹⁶ Iqbal (1992) p. 84-85

It is my intention that this chapter will shed some light of the characteristics of religiosity involved in American policy and the factors that have shaped this relationship. The primary object of this chapter is to initiate and justify one of my major claims, which is that politics is always connected to religiosity, and while this might not happen on the level of the “state church” it happens by a function of religion justifying policies on a more subtle level of common beliefs, morality, and ethos.

Nearly all the great social institutions were born in religion. For the principal features of collective life to have begun as none other than various features of religious life, it is evident that religious life must necessarily have been the eminent form and, as it were, the epitome of collective life. *If religion gave birth to all that is essential in society, that is so because the idea of society is the soul of religion.*⁴⁹⁷

Emile Durkheim wanted to use simple societies for his research of the forms of religious life and argued that they serve as basis for deductions for more complex societies. William James had a totally opposite idea since for him the most fruitful objects of research are the people who have advanced the furthest in their religious life.⁴⁹⁸ According to Durkheim religion is a social thing and “religious representations [...] express collective realities; rites are ways of acting that are born only in the midst of assembled groups and whose purpose is to evoke, maintain or recreate certain mental states of those groups.”⁴⁹⁹

Such a definition makes religion not only social but a highly political thing as well. Religion is an expression of a collective. It is ultimately the thing that draws individuals together and creates unity among them, and even more importantly, (pilkku) through its rites and modes for action enables the unity to remain coherent. It is not only identity politics or the creation of civil religion that can be achieved through religion, but almost any political purpose can be advanced with skilful use of religion by expressing the crisis of the collective reality.

It is by no means my purpose to argue that only by thumping the Bible any politician could get his policies accepted, but in a more subtle way of storytelling which evokes religiosity in the citizenry. I am neither talking about one single religion as such, but evoking the general religiosity, the need of human condition to believe in something, and seek for meaning for their lives from something higher.

⁴⁹⁷ Durkheim (1995) p. 421. Italics mine.

⁴⁹⁸ James (1981) p. 12

⁴⁹⁹ Durkheim (1995) p. 9

This can be God, country, state or almost anything as long as the belief in a higher being exists and preferably the object of belief can be depicted to be ethereal. Once something is physically there, once it can be touched and felt, there is no need for belief. Thus, the object of belief must be created so that it is not physically concrete in terms of its existence. In order to advance politics with the aid of belief the object should be the nation itself as an imagined community and not only the state which has tangible manifestations.

Our human condition seems to require a need to believe and this legitimizes religion as such, but the more earthly world of politics needs to be legitimate as well. This is an important factor, when one is pondering the relationship of religion and politics. Religion itself does not need to look for support and legitimation from the world of politics or profane in general. Religion, when it is born, has to be able to legitimate itself as a new apprehension of the divine, but it relies only on itself to get this legitimation. Politics belong to the realm of the profane and often contains morally disputable acts. Thus, it needs a legitimating source of strength, and most powerfully this can be acquired from the symbolism of the sacred.⁵⁰⁰ Even in the antiquity the “God-kings” existed and their sovereignty over the people was established in connection to divinity. Nowadays democracy, ideals of human rights and freedoms have altered our religious beliefs so that seldom the divine origins of any ruler are universally acknowledged. The legitimation of the rule has to be obtained in a more subtle manner. Even in the words of Reagan,

Only in an intellectual climate which distinguishes between the city of God and the city of man and which explicitly affirms the independence of God's realm and forbids any infringement by the state on its prerogatives, only in such a climate could the idea of individual human rights take root, grow, and eventually flourish. We see this climate in all democracies and in our own political tradition. The founders of our republic rooted their democratic commitment in the belief that all men are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights. And so, they created a system of government whose avowed purpose was and is the protection of those God-given rights.⁵⁰¹

The idea of human freedom, which was given birth during the Enlightenment and has since evolved, might provide one connection since from a religious viewpoint it was in the political world, that the Creator left to man to exercise his intelligence

⁵⁰⁰ Kelly (1984) p. 28

⁵⁰¹ Reagan (16.4.1985) Remarks at a Conference on Religious Liberty
<http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1985/41685d.htm>

and faculties. Freedom, on the other hand, “sees in religion the companion of its struggles and its triumphs, the cradle of its infancy, the divine source of its rights. It considers religion as the safeguard of mores; and mores as the guarantee of laws and the pledge of its own duration.”⁵⁰² Freedom, or politics that emphasize it, and religion are not antagonists. Rather there is an alliance between them and both can easily adopt ideas from the other into their respective spheres of influences. While the Jeffersonian “wall of separation” may to some degree be a political reality, the human intellect is yet able to pass by or overcome such artificially created borders and divisions, and the interaction between the systems may yet be rampant. Politics and religion remain intertwined at a deeper level than the connection which seemed to be severed with the wall of separation. In the best of all cases, both are able to benefit from each other. Religion can just as easily be employed to caress and nurture the idea of freedom in a democracy as be exploited in a theocratic society. As Reagan saw it, “democracy is just a political reading of the Bible.”⁵⁰³

Durkheim divides religious phenomena into two separate basic categories; beliefs and rites. Beliefs are states of opinion and rites particular modes of action.⁵⁰⁴ What is common to all religious beliefs is the tendency to classify the real or ideal things into two opposite genera; the sacred and the profane. “The division of the world into two domains, one containing all that is sacred and the other all that is profane - such is the distinctive trait of religious thought.”⁵⁰⁵ Indeed, “there is religion as soon as sacred is distinguished from the profane.”⁵⁰⁶ But it has to be noted that there is nothing that is sacred or profane inherently. Jonathan Z. Smith calls them “relational categories, mobile boundaries which shift according to the map being employed. There is nothing sacred in itself, only things sacred in relation.”⁵⁰⁷ In other words, to have something sacred, we have to make it or rather designate it sacred and things excluded or set in opposition to the sacred are profane. But the categories are a product of human activity.

The objects of our faith are often abstractions despite the fact that they are imbued with such a strong notion of reality that this reality gives a direction to our

⁵⁰² de Tocqueville (2000) p. 43-44

⁵⁰³ Reagan (4.7.1984) Remarks at a Spirit of America Festival in Decatur, Alabama
<http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1984/70484e.htm>

⁵⁰⁴ Durkheim (1995) p. 34

⁵⁰⁵ Durkheim (1995) p. 34

⁵⁰⁶ Durkheim (1995) p. 185

⁵⁰⁷ Smith (1982) p. 55

lives as a whole, even though the objects are not concrete at all. These abstractions do exist, but only in their own world.⁵⁰⁸ To borrow the expression of Augustine of Hippo, the world they inhabit is the *civitas Dei*. While the two domains are considered entirely separate with nothing in common, a thing can nevertheless pass from one of these worlds into the other. When this occurs, the duality of the two realms shows clearly since the thing, in order to pass from one into another, has to undergo a true metamorphosis.⁵⁰⁹ It is the depth and scope of the metamorphosis that varies from case to case. Some change or alteration has to nevertheless take place. The profane has to be “sanctified” or the sacred turned into more earthly version of itself to pass from one world into another. Turning the worlds of the sacred and profane alike into story worlds will allow a thing to move from one world to another more fluently. Any artificial separation of religion and politics, no matter how official it is, can withstand the unification if only it is done by narrating into existence such story worlds based on these concepts which can create an illusion that things belong to both worlds. Mika Aaltola argues that “politico-religious practices can be used in a way that creates other modes of existence besides the concretely real one.”⁵¹⁰ They assist in the creation on cultural meanings and when these practices take the form of storytelling, such as preaching, they give birth to story worlds as the other modes of existence.

While we tend not to allow the profane to infiltrate the sacred realm, the sacred world is inclined by its very nature to spread into the profane world. “While repelling the profane world, the sacred world tends at the same time to flow into the profane world whenever the latter world comes near it. That is why they must be kept at a distance from each other and why, in some sense, a void must be opened between them.”⁵¹¹ Durkheim sees the sacred as “contagious” and this principle allows for all rites of consecration, whether of people or things.⁵¹² In that sense the Jeffersonian wall of separation is a natural product of our inherent wish to separate the two and not allow them to blend. Aaltola writes about the intrusion of sacred into the profane with the name *hierophany* and sees it as a practice where political

⁵⁰⁸ James (1981) p. 48-49

⁵⁰⁹ Durkheim (1995) p. 36-37

⁵¹⁰ Aaltola (2007) p. 15 It has to be noted that in the footnotes referring to Mika Aaltola’s “Sowing the Seeds of Sacred” the page numbers may not correspond to the book, since I have been using a manuscript I received from the author.

⁵¹¹ Durkheim (1995) p. 322

⁵¹² Durkheim (1995) p. 323

leaders act as interpreters of extraordinary or sacred meanings.⁵¹³ It could thus be seen as what Reagan constantly does as he narrates something sacred into the most mundane aspects of the society. On the other hand, according to Kelly the Durkheimian notion of the contagiousness of the sacred does not work in the American context directly, because supposedly there is no drift of politics into religion, or religion into politics, because of an intervening area of morality.⁵¹⁴ I partially agree with him, at least in the notion that morality lies in-between politics and religion, but I claim morality can be used to make the border between politics and religion more permeable. Morality exists in both spheres of life and acts as the vessel which transports ideas between the two worlds. Morality is a passageway between the story worlds. It helps to make the boundaries of the story worlds more permeable, since it overlaps both of them. Politics is, after all, a theory and praxis of the “good life” and likewise religion gives to believers guidelines how to live morally well. While the morality of religion is not the same as the morality of politics, it is relatively easy to shift doctrines of faith into political concept of morality.

According to Kelly politics is the principal and ultimate control system in the realm of the profane, just as religion is in the sacred. While there is no need for the sacred to be considered as a part of the profane realm, it often is able to play a role in it as well.⁵¹⁵ This can happen through the Durkheimian notion of the “deification of the society,” where politics might offer another form of eschatological hope of salvation just like religion does, but in a more earthly form. It can happen following the Schmittian concept, where the members of the political leadership try to portray themselves as using God granted powers as His earthly representatives. Even once the ancient cosmogonic politics are excluded, we know many political forms which claimed not only to regulate, but to embody the sacred. These reach all the way from Constantianian Empire to the Third Reich.⁵¹⁶

The basis of political theology lies in the argument of Carl Schmitt, who claims that all significant concepts of the state are secularized concepts of religion, because of both their systematic structure and their historical development through

⁵¹³ Aaltola (2007) p. 71-72

⁵¹⁴ Kelly (1984) P. 249

⁵¹⁵ Kelly (1984) p. 18-19

⁵¹⁶ Kelly (1984) p. 18-19

which they were transferred from theology to the theory of the state.⁵¹⁷ The omnipotent God was replaced with the omnipotent sovereign, the state. Thus, the study of politics is able to gain a lot from the insights provided by the study of religion. We live in an age characterized by the myth about “the Death of God” of which Nietzsche wrote. This causes theology to become factually atheology. Hans Blumenberg wrote how the modern man is deprived of the metaphysical guarantees God offered for the world and how he constructs for himself a “counter world” of rationality and manipulability. We can treat this as yet another story world, albeit one that “unfinished”, full of ambiguousness and uncertainty.⁵¹⁸ It is this unfinishedness of the story world which forces man to “take part in its (hoped for but never realized) completion.”⁵¹⁹ This provides politics with a drive to strive onwards and a teleological goal. Later on I shall further discuss the importance of not being able to “finish” the world and the fact that the teleological goal of politics is depicted to be ever closer but yet is necessary to remain out of reach. Here, the importance is on the uncertainty itself.

The benefit of combining religion and politics is in being able to give the impression that the presence of divine providence evaporates ambiguousness and uncertainty. As an attempt to imbue politics with a sense of purpose and meaning again in response to this absence of God myth in the Western world, there continues to be a huge impact of religion in politics. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the United States of America. For Reagan, God certainly was not dead or absent,

A few years ago, it was fashionable in the media and the universities to say that America had no more heroes. Heroism was a thing of the past, we were told, as old and dry as a fossil in Death Valley. Fashions often run together, and this one galloped side by side with the death-of-God vogue. I seem to remember that the argument was that if God was dead nothing anyone could do was important enough to be called heroic. Well, I've never believed that either God or American heroism was dead. This land of freedom was built, and is still being built, by men and women who, without chroniclers, without heralds, have brought a warrior's courage to the challenges of everyday life. America is a land of heroes.⁵²⁰

The dangerous world no longer guided by divine providence gives birth to a balancing counterforce; there arises a simultaneous religious feeling, which only enhances the need for prophetic voices and tropes in political leadership. Reagan

⁵¹⁷ Schmitt (2005) p. 36

⁵¹⁸ Blumenberg, cited in Campbell (1998) p. 46

⁵¹⁹ Campbell (1998) p. 47

⁵²⁰ Reagan (13.11.1987) Remarks at the Presentation Ceremony for the Young American Medals for Bravery and Service <http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1987/111387b.htm>

rode the crest of this religious feeling. There is an open space and a practical demand for prophets. They may or may not choose to act as the messengers of the deceased deity, but nevertheless they exploit the same need to believe which is a part of the human condition. A need emerges to bring God back into both the public and private spheres of our existence. Modern politics is in a certain way deeply religious, but the mechanisms of this religiosity have been quite badly neglected in studies. The relationship between politics and religion could not be more important. But the dilemma is how to bring them together for deeper study, since both have such an influence on each other that one could perhaps speak of contamination. As a result either one can no longer be “pure.”

Durkheim claimed religion to be “first and foremost a system of ideas by means of which individuals imagine the society of which they are members and the obscure, yet intimate relations they have with it.”⁵²¹ God is merely an intangible representation of the ideals of society, and when the faithful strive to strengthen their ties to the God, they at the same time strengthen their ties to the society.⁵²² This is not very far from the Schmittian notion of the relationship between God and the society. God and society, which for Schmitt essentially meant the state, blend into each other. Durkheim writes about “society” and Americans as people create the society and state is something removed from the people that could be defined as the machinery of governance. Perhaps Durkheim’s ideas are even closer than Schmitt’s to the policies of Reagan, who was very anti-governmental and emphasized the importance of the American people as the prime mover of both politics and social life. Schmitt wrote about the state, which is embodied in the government, but Reagan abhorred the big governmental structure and saw it as something that obscures the will of the people. For him, people were closer to God than the state was or could be. State was in fact an apparatus that distorted the relationship between the practically divine will of the people and God’s will imposed on them. But the relationship of religion and politics is more complicated and multifaceted, and thus cannot be simplified to mere political rules of exercising divine judgement.

J. Milton Yinger has created a threefold descriptive typology of the relationships of politics and religion. In his first classification both are mutually

⁵²¹ Durkheim (1995) p. 227

⁵²² Durkheim (1995) p. 227

reinforcing and beliefs and practices of religion help to socialize individuals to common norms. In the second classification are societies, where differentiation and social change are important. Here the relationship is disturbed, characteristically by the secular rulers, who use religion for their purposes, and using it as a means of political coercion inadvertently tilts the society to lean toward the secular. Thirdly and finally there is the sharp cleavage between religion and politics.⁵²³ If we try to apply this to the American context we do not get any actual benefit. This is at least partially due to the fact that the modern American society is such a large and complicated construction. Yinger's first classification, for example, is typical to primitive and stable societies, but in our contemporary society we can see interpretations of all the three types. Which type is dominant at any given time depends upon many factors including the political status quo of the time and the direction the politics will take, and perhaps most importantly the culture of that time. Both politics and religion are profoundly interconnected with culture and both manifest themselves within the boundaries set by the culture.

One could follow De Tocqueville, who wrote that "Next to each religion is a political opinion that is joined to it by affinity. Allow the human mind to follow its tendency and it will regulate political society and the divine city in a uniform manner; [...] to *harmonize* the earth with Heaven."⁵²⁴ All versions of religious belief are backed by some political way of thought and vice versa. Even atheism is a religion; the object of belief is that God does not exist, but since there is no proof either way, atheism becomes a system of religious belief, and is in close interaction with Communist political thought where the focal point is not in a deity, but man himself. In a same manner in the Weberian interpretation Protestantism and Capitalism go hand in hand.⁵²⁵ No matter how one positions oneself in respect to religion and how hard one tries to separate the realms of the sacred and the profane, there will still be some overlapping. If there is nothing else, at least the democratic need to strive to create an ever more perfect society leads automatically to the process of perfecting the profane realm after an image of the sacred realm.

⁵²³ Kelly (1984) p. 22-23

⁵²⁴ de Tocqueville (2000) p. 275

⁵²⁵ Weber (1987) Reagan seems to agree since he once argued that "And capitalism works best and creates the greatest wealth and human progress for all when it follows the teachings of scripture: Give and you will be given unto . . . search and you will find . . . cast your bread upon the waters and it will return to you manifold. In the Parable of the Talents, the man who invests and multiplies his money is praised" Reagan (14.5.1983) Radio Address to the Nation on Small Business <http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1983/51483a.htm>

Christianity offers us the utopia of an ideal society in the form of *civitas Dei*, and it is this originally religious vision, that we try to reach in the profane political process. Taoism with its disregard for politics, or Hinduism with its ideas of rebirth, imposes a different way to govern than Christianity or other monotheistic religions. But any religion has its impact on politics, because each political preference is closer to some particular religious belief at least on the level of mores and ethics, if not in practical action.

Despite their differences, there are unifying factors in the worlds of politics and religion. Edelman argues that “so far as political beliefs are concerned, the most potent categorizations almost certainly are visions of the future.”⁵²⁶ Politics and Christian religion are in a manner eschatological so that their goals lie in the future, in the glorious times to come. Both give guidelines of how to live in the present and be a “good” Christian/citizen, but the rewards of the “correct” behaviour today do not actualize immediately, but only in the near or distant future. “Good” behaviour reaps rewards, but they are always tied to an eschatological vision of the future. Religion works as something seemingly “non-political” that offers the political leadership means to curb individual autonomy. More specifically, those means can be summarized as “an afterlife that would reward faith and loyalty and punish heresy, a vision of a future utopia or of a past fall from grace.”⁵²⁷ An additional benefit is that the eschatological use of politics does not actually have to provide anything instantaneously. We might not need bread today, if there would indeed be a sovereign who will let us eat cake tomorrow. It is just that the benefits of the future need to be so extraordinary that the wants and needs of today can be suspended to obtain them.

I've come here today to talk about where our country has been for the past few years and where it's going. And I want to talk to you about our vision of the future and the kind of America that we now have a dazzling opportunity to create.⁵²⁸

Future has to hold promise of great things, if not salvation. We cannot discount the role of millennialism or at least the millennial hope as a religious, but at the same time highly political form of eschatology. As I will later argue, millennial hope is not always beneficial for politics, if it focuses on the coming Kingdom of Christ, but

⁵²⁶ Edelman (1977) p. 25

⁵²⁷ Edelman (1977) p. 152

⁵²⁸ Reagan (28.3.1985) Remarks to the Students and Faculty at St. John's University in New York, New York <http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1985/32885b.htm>

it can take the more earthly and profane shape of a future utopian society, if certain political ideology is followed or merely manifest itself as unlimited economical growth. Reinhold Niebuhr asserts that there is a millennial hope in play within every vital religion. Whenever religion allows itself to get concerned with any of the social and societal problems, “it always gives birth to some kind of millennial hope, from the perspective of which the present social realities are convicted of inadequacy, and courage is maintained to continue in the effort to redeem society of injustice.”⁵²⁹ The millennial hope needs to be secularized somewhat to include only a perfect society without divine rule. Religion does not even have to be involved in social matters, since there is something religious in the eschatological promises of political change. After all, what is Communism, despite its atheism, if not another eschatology, where the proletariat heaven will be actualized on earth once the revolution has occurred?

While the promise of second coming and life everlasting is mostly a promise to individuals, “who can deny its relevance for nations and empires, for civilizations and cultures also, even though these collective forms of life do not have the exact integrity of the individual soul nor do they have as direct an access to divine judgement and grace.”⁵³⁰ In these words of Reinhold Niebuhr the crucial word is “direct.” A nation cannot be promised a life everlasting in heaven, but what is important, is that the nation can act as a vessel and create the impression that it will lead its citizenry into salvation. The society or state can “promise” salvation for its citizenry. An individual’s hope of salvation can be very important for a nation as well, but only as a political tool to fulfil the nation’s much more profane interests. A cynic might be in unison with Hegel and claim that the “life everlasting” of a nation lies in the fulfilment of its national interests.

De Tocqueville made many perceptive points and he often discussed the future of the United States of America. Many things he wrote seem to ring true even today, but this is not to say that he would in any way have been prophetic and infallible. Indeed, when he fails in his predictions, he does so completely. For example he predicted that democratic people and societies “will not readily believe in divine missions, that they will willingly laugh at new prophets, and that they will want to find the principal arbiter of their beliefs within the limits of humanity, not

⁵²⁹ Niebuhr, cited in Kelly (1984) p. 158

⁵³⁰ Niebuhr (1986)

beyond it.”⁵³¹ He placed too much emphasis on the progressive side of democracy as if it would enlighten people to a level above their old beliefs. As we can retrospectively see, USA is still today seeking justification and legitimation for its actions from Manifest Destiny, Divine Providence and other similar myths, that have their origins in religious interpretations of God’s will. One very fitting slogan for American religious politics could be found from the fitting phrase of Augustine of Hippo: *Dilige et quod vis fac* – Love [God] and do what you will. There is certain pragmatism inherent in this line of thought that could be taken as justification for all of U.S. foreign policy decisions. Anything can be done as long as one loves God. Another reason why everything America does in the world is good and righteous lies in the concept of the “redeemer nation” as Ernest Lee Tuweson described it.⁵³² It is a pattern of “selfless crusading to redeem others [...] it may not be legal, or right, or even sensible, but the zealous imperative to redeem is all-pervasive.”⁵³³ America is a force for good, albeit occasionally it, like God, moves in mysterious ways.

2.1.1. THE CHURCH AND THE STATE

Government is not supposed to wage war against God and religion, not in the United States of America.⁵³⁴
- Ronald Wilson Reagan

This section will take a look into the separation of the church and the state in the American context. While the separation is a fact I shall actually argue that connections have been made and continue to be forged. One of these connections can even be found in the way of political leadership I have chosen to call prophetic politics. Prophetic politics does not need to abide by the rules of any particular religion but creates connections between the political and religious realm thus bridging the gap created artificially between them by manipulating the need of the people to have something to believe in.

⁵³¹ de Tocqueville (2000) p. 408

⁵³² Tuweson (1968)

⁵³³ Jewett – Lawrence (1977) p. 15

⁵³⁴ Reagan (13.10.1983) Remarks and a Question-and-Answer Session With Women Leaders of Christian Religious Organizations
<http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1983/101383d.htm>

Very often in our western political and secular thought we want to rationalize politics, depict it as logical and fact-based, and keep it totally separated from religion or mythical beliefs. Reagan, however, commented on the relationship:

I believe that politics and religion are related, because I do not believe you can function in politics without some sense of morality. It is through our religious beliefs that our moral tradition in the West is descended. While a legislator or a President may not bring to his politics the specific tenets of his particular faith, each of us brings a code of morals to bear on our judgments. There is much talk in my country now of religion interfering with politics. Actually, it is the other way around. Politics [...] has moved across the barrier between church and state and has invaded the arena of religious beliefs. Most of Western civilization is based on principles derived from the Judeo-Christian ethic. The wall of separation between church and state in America was erected by our forefathers to protect religion from the state, not the other way around.⁵³⁵

The tendency Americans adopted from the very beginning of their existence as a nation was to turn away from and totally reject Christendom as it had long since been established in the European context with the dominance of the Catholic Church. While the early Puritans had more than fair share of feuds over religious views and religion was an inseparable element of the social and political life, they set the foundations of the American worldview as the “New Israel,” since they indeed had escaped the “Egypt” of the Christendom with its oppression of their radical religious beliefs. In fact, during the course of years the Americans managed to create a version of Christianity that de Tocqueville describes as “democratic and republican: this singularly favours the establishment of a republic and of democracy in affairs. From the beginning politics and religion were in accord, and they have not ceased to be so since.”⁵³⁶ This notion of de Tocqueville does not really stand the test of time, because since his days a disaccord has emerged. And it does not look as if this divide is likely to be bridged in the near or even distant future on the level of actions and concrete deeds.

On the mental level it is true that Christianity is a democratic religion with a special soft spot for democracy and its institutions. When sacred and secular as concepts were separated on a theoretical level, the existence of the separation of church and state became a practical and palpable manifestation of this principle. Mead does not see that church, in the sense what it meant in the concept of

⁵³⁵ Reagan (3.11.1984) Written Responses to Questions Submitted by France Soir Magazine
<http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1984/110384a.htm>

⁵³⁶ de Tocqueville (2000) p. 275

Christendom, ever even existed in the United States of America. The American “church” for him is rather an abstract concept or a figure of speech.⁵³⁷ Thus, there should actually be no need to protect democracy from the dominance of religion or religion for exploitation for political purposes.

But things are different and more complicated in practice than in theory. The division of church and state in America has been and will continue to be a much debated subject. The reason why such a wall was erected in the first place often remains outside the debates that rage upon the subject today. Reagan argued that there is

a fundamental difference between separation of church and state and denying the spiritual heritage of this country [...] We have gone so far that it almost seems a rule, originally designed to guard against violation of the constitution, has become an aggressive campaign against religion itself.⁵³⁸

The Constitution and its First Amendment were an attempt to proclaim an end to Christendom in establishing the United States of America according to new rules. It has to be understood that most of the earliest settlers fled from religious persecution overseas, and wanted to escape the state sponsored religions, which had labelled their beliefs heresy. In early Rome the emperor had been both the head of state and the chief priest, but the policies of Constantine in 313 created a separate sphere for the Christian Church and ever since the powers political and spiritual have lived an existence full of conflicts. It has been even argued that Constantine’s conversion marked the true beginning of the corruption of the church, since it was no longer concerned only with the souls of the men, but the rises and falls of empires as well. The Christendom thus would be very un-Christian in its nature.⁵³⁹ Always before the American Revolution the western world under Christendom had lived in a situation, where the official state religion was that of the sovereign and even the Reformation with its wars over the relationship between religion and state, did not put an end to this. The treaty of the peace of Westphalia claimed that each region would have its own religion, that of its ruler. And the rulers used religion to their own ends.⁵⁴⁰

⁵³⁷ Mead (1975) p. 32

⁵³⁸ Radio address, Folder Speeches and Writings – Radio Broadcast, Taping date – 1977, Apr 13 “Education and Religion” Edited Typescript 2/4, Box 9, Reagan, Ronald: Pre-presidential papers, Series I Speeches and writings, Ronald Reagan Library

⁵³⁹ Meacham (2006) p. 54

⁵⁴⁰ Feldman (2005) p. 10

In Christendom, earlier practically synonymous with Europe or the Western world, it has always been the tradition to have the two powers, the state and the church in existence as two separate actors. Sometimes they have existed in harmony, sometimes in conflict, but always as two separate actors. Jesus himself set the precedent by ordering his followers to render unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's and to God the things which are God's. In a sense the Americans did not so much separate the two actors, since it had already happened, but they created a deeper cleavage between them ensuring that they could not be joined.⁵⁴¹ The power of the church and that of the state have always been contestants to some degree, and occasionally the church has been able to control the political life, while at other times the state has been able to control religion. The American colonies were able to break this cycle of conflict by refusing to establish any "official" church or religion, but giving each individual the option to choose his or her own beliefs. The separation of the spheres of the sacred and secular seemed to be solved by just opting out the debate and the Constitution defined the American government as having no powers at all in religious matters. The establishment of religion had always involved a government preference, and it was exactly this idea the 18th century Americans wanted to avoid. There would be no legalization of any particular form of Christianity and the resulting Christendom would thus not be created on the soil of the New World.⁵⁴² The framers of the American Constitution saw and exploited the chance to move away from the old, existing principle of *cuius region, eius religio*. Since the people were sovereign, the state could not establish a religion over the sovereign people belonging to many different faiths without violating their sovereignty. This gave rise to the plurality of denominations and certain competition among them as well since people were able to choose the particular denomination which suited their ideas best. But, despite the separation on a constitutional level, ties to the church can be made in various ways.

To us, in a troubled world, the Holy See and your [The Pope] pastorate represent one of the world's greatest moral and spiritual forces. We admire your active efforts to foster peace and promote justice, freedom and compassion in a world that is still stalked by the forces of evil. As a people and as a government, we seek to pursue the same goals of peace, freedom,

⁵⁴¹ It can be argued that the separation of the church and the state is a part of Christianity itself. This can be contrasted with Islam where traditionally there has been no such division between the spiritual and temporal powers which exist as one. See. Lewis (2004) p. 2-3

⁵⁴² Curry (2001) p. 8-16

and humanity along political and economic lines that the Church pursues in its spiritual role. So, we deeply value your counsel and support and express our solidarity with you.⁵⁴³

Reagan's narration tries to create a connection to the Holy See. America is portrayed as the political side of the spiritual Vatican. Peace, freedom, and humanity are pursued by the church by spiritual means, and America works towards the same goals by the means of politics and economy. The counsel of the Church is appreciated by America and America claims solidarity with the Holy See. This is important to note, because the power of the Vatican works primarily through directing the religious beliefs to influence politics indirectly. By claiming that America represents the same values as Vatican, but pursues them politically, Reagan brings forth the image of America acting as the political arm of God in this manner as well.⁵⁴⁴ Reagan was by no means beyond trying to tie politics and religion together in fundamental ways despite the wall of separation. On the level of narration Reagan's approach to all churches was the same familiarity behind unified and shared values, but in one sense Catholicism and Judaism were different. Both had themselves a political arm, Judaism had the state of Israel and the Catholic church the Vatican. Interaction with both of these was active. Edwin Meese wrote that the Reagan administration even shared intelligence data with the Vatican and Reagan conferred directly with the Pope, while others in the administration worked closely with the Catholic Church officials.⁵⁴⁵ In the case of Israel the political connection was even more clearly spelled out. "We are pledged and, I believe, morally bound in a commitment to the preservation of the state of Israel, that it must continue to exist."⁵⁴⁶ Reagan went even so far as to argue that if "Israel is ever forced to walk out of the UN, the United States and Israel will walk out together."⁵⁴⁷ Reagan was in his speechmaking always amenable to the representatives of any church but with Vatican and Israel combined them into his policies as well.

⁵⁴³ Reagan (7.6.1982) Remarks Following a meeting With Pope John Paul II in Vatican City. s. 737

⁵⁴⁴ It needs to be clearly stated that that this idea of unified goals was a product of Reagan's narration and not descriptive of how the Vatican and the United States of America actually stood in relation to each other. One can plausibly argue that for Pope John Paul II America was the worst example of consumerism world-wide. And for him consumerism was directly after communism the direst threat to mankind.

⁵⁴⁵ Meese (1992) p. 170

⁵⁴⁶ Reagan (14.5.1982) Remarks and a Question-and-Answer Session at a Fundraising Reception for Senator John Heinz in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. s. 642

⁵⁴⁷ Reagan (13.3.1984) United Jewish Appeal s. 309

In the time of John Winthrop, whom Reagan was so fond of quoting, it was seen that church and state were “two twinnings,” linked together in such a manner that a person had to be a visible saint in the church to be a full citizen of the state.⁵⁴⁸ This was explained by the high, almost unattainable standards the Puritans set for themselves. To be part of the religious community was to be a citizen as well. Mead argues that religion for the Puritans was not only a concern between man and God, but of the society as well. The personal experience of conversion initiated the convert into a social and a political responsibility.⁵⁴⁹ It was only after the independence, when the separation came into effect. The expression “wall of separation” between the church and the state was originally mentioned by Thomas Jefferson in a written reply in 1802, but was popularized into the national vocabulary by the Justice Black of the Supreme Court (1937-1971) who managed to make the metaphor enshrined as the pre-eminent image of relations between politics and religion in America.⁵⁵⁰ Jefferson and Madison were strictly in favour of the separation, but Benjamin Franklin took a more liberal stand on this matter. According to him, if the religion was good, it could support itself. If religion could not support itself and God chose not to come to aid, it would be a bad sign if the members called on government for help.⁵⁵¹ The wall of separation is primarily metaphorical, but as such it still remains a logical concept within the American culture, which seems to stress the importance of boundaries and frontiers. “We've always prided ourselves on the pioneer spirit that built America. Well, that spirit is a key to our future as well as our past. Once again, we're on a frontier.”⁵⁵² There is always a new frontier ahead, whether one talks about settling the west or conquering the space as was the case in the Reagan era. The idea of pushing the boundaries of freedom deeper into the totalitarian world was seen as a frontier as well. Accosting a frontier is a moment when the true American spirit emerges. When the purely geographical frontier ceased to exist, the American technology created new frontiers.⁵⁵³

⁵⁴⁸ Marty (1984) p. 64

⁵⁴⁹ Mead (1977) p. 51

⁵⁵⁰ Curry (2001) p. 48

⁵⁵¹ Marty (1984) p. 158

⁵⁵² Reagan (28.1.1984) Radio Address to the Nation on the Space Program
<http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1984/12884a.htm>

⁵⁵³ Niebuhr (1954) p. 29

The challenge of pushing back frontiers is part of our national character. And as we face the vast expanses of space, let us recapture those stirrings in our soul that make us Americans. Space, like freedom, is a limitless, never-ending frontier on which our citizens can prove that they are indeed Americans.⁵⁵⁴

America is a land of frontiers, but at the same it is a land, which has a compulsive need to set up mental walls in an effort to compartmentalize the world. There was the iron curtain, which was solidified and made concrete in the Berlin wall, as well as the bamboo curtain, or the wall of separation. The division of church and state is an artificial construct and indeed can only exist on the level of actual formal structures. The structure of the church has no official connection with the structure of the state, while the same people can be involved in both of these structures. On the level of organisational charts the separation is clear but the involvement of actual people muddies the water. The same artificiality is apparent when one tries to separate politics from religion. According to William James, religion is collective entity, which cannot be separated into a category of its own. There is no object or action, which would be specifically religious and nothing else. Religiosity is a part of many different things but does almost never comprise the whole of anything.⁵⁵⁵ Religion has always played a role in American politics since the Founding Fathers but the shape of this religiosity has varied greatly.

The religiosity of Thomas Jefferson can be described as deism. He liked to refer to God with very particular terminology, like “the holy Author of our religion [...] Lord both of body and mind.” For him the “Almighty God had created the mind free.”⁵⁵⁶ When it comes to religious beliefs, a good example is the Virginia Assembly for which Jefferson wanted that

no man shall be compelled to frequent or supports any religious worship, place, ministry whatsoever, nor shall be enforced, restrained, molested, or burdened in his body or goods, nor shall otherwise suffer on account of his religious opinions or belief; but that all men shall be free to profess, and by argument to maintain, their opinions in matters of religion, and that the same shall in no wise diminish, enlarge, or affect their civil capacities.⁵⁵⁷

In a way, Jefferson was a true free-thinker of his times, who advocated total and complete religious freedom for every individual. Certain religious affiliation should

⁵⁵⁴ Reagan (29.3.1985) Remarks at the National Space Club Luncheon
<http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1985/32985b.htm>

⁵⁵⁵ James (1981) p. 27-28 Naturally this argument is dependent upon whether one wants to consider religion as personal or as institutionalized. The church as an organization is naturally religious but in the personal, private life of people religion or religiosity is only a part of a greater whole.

⁵⁵⁶ Jefferson (1955) p. 33-34

⁵⁵⁷ Jefferson (1955) p. 35

not harm nor benefit anyone in other spheres of life. Jefferson did not seek for uniformity in matters of religion, since uniformity is not a part of true democracy. Some of Jefferson's secular orientation to religious liberty might be a result of European influences, since he spent some time in France during the most anticlerical and antireligious period in Western history, and became immersed in the intellectual style of the French Enlightenment. One should not, however, discredit the role of religion in the founding of the United States of America. As Robert Bellah argues: "there is every reason to believe that religion, *particularly the idea of God*, played a constitutive role in the thought of the early American statesmen."⁵⁵⁸ It was not so much religion, but precisely the "idea of God" which influenced their thinking, but this was closer to the Aristotelian prime mover or Enlightenment Nature's God than the Christian God. The Declaration of independence has four references to God: one speaks of "Nature's God", one of "Creator," one of "Supreme Judge of the world" and one more of "divine Providence." As Bellah argues, "this religion is clearly not itself Christianity."⁵⁵⁹ Sidney Mead has even referred to the dominant religion among the founders as "Enlightened Christianity" or even just as "Enlightenment."⁵⁶⁰ Jefferson's deism was not absolute and strict denial of Christian values, since he wrote that "to the corruptions of Christianity I am indeed opposed; but not to the genuine precepts of Jesus himself."⁵⁶¹ James Madison saw that humans would form factions around religious beliefs and to endow the government with any power in religious matters, would eventually lead to a struggle for dominance between these factions. Liberty would, according to him, be best protected by mutually suspicious religious groups checking and balancing each other and not by sanctioning a dominant position on any single faction of believers, which would then become the "national religion" to which others would have to conform to.⁵⁶² As a matter of fact, he was in unison with Jefferson who wrote that "difference of opinion is advantageous in religion. The several sects perform the office of *sensor morum* over each other."⁵⁶³

The founding of America was then certainly imbued with religiosity on behalf of all of the most important founding fathers, but all the talk of the deists

⁵⁵⁸ Bellah (1967) p. 6. Italics mine.

⁵⁵⁹ Bellah (1967) p. 7

⁵⁶⁰ See for example Mead (1977) p. 105 or Mead (1975) p. 118

⁵⁶¹ Jefferson. Cited in White (1999) p. 13

⁵⁶² Curry (2001) p. 36-37

⁵⁶³ Jefferson (1955) p. 37

concerning “Nature’s God” or “Providence” shows clearly that to label it as a specifically Christian event, from which later generations supposedly have fallen, is a misstatement of fact. Usually the people today who see America’s origins as Christian belong to the religious right.⁵⁶⁴ This misstatement, however, only shows us the power of sacred stories and myths. The fall of Lucifer, exile of Adam from Eden, the Exodus, or sin and redemption abound in old stories and myths and these leak over into the American historical experience. The story of **the** fall from grace exists in the background so strongly that in this particular occasion it has managed to shape history. When Reagan chooses to portray America as a New Israel, God’s chosen land and people, he rearticulates one foundational myth. According to the Declaration of Independence, America was not specifically exalted in its position, but merely wanted to “assume among the powers of the earth the separate and equal station to which the laws of Nature and of Nature’s God entitle them.”⁵⁶⁵ America wanted to be slightly different, but just nation among others and it was this equal role to other nations in the world, which was its (Nature’s) God given right. Meacham puts things very neatly, when he claims that the founding religion expressed in the Declaration was “based more on a religion of reason than of revelation.”⁵⁶⁶

Schurmann is one of many to claim that it was because the Founding Fathers were “drenched in the fermentation of the Enlightenment” that the Declaration of Independence became such a visionary document and acquired a status “close to that of the Bible and the Qur’an. Even now in this “postmodernist” age Americans act as if the Constitution is The Book.”⁵⁶⁷ Reagan fully agreed on this and indeed held the Declaration to be unique in its nature, astounding in its inspired wisdom and practically a sacred document; “Well, there’s a special faith that has, from our earliest days, guided this sweet and blessed land. It was proclaimed in the Declaration of Independence and enshrined in the Constitution.”⁵⁶⁸

There is a strange relationship between religion and Enlightenment in America. One actually supports the other. De Tocqueville notes that there is a

⁵⁶⁴ As an example one can use Jerry Falwell who in 1980 wrote “Any diligent student of American history find that our great nation was founded by godly men upon godly principles to be a Christian nation.” Cited in Meacham (2006) p. 219

⁵⁶⁵ Jefferson (1776) Declaration of Independence

⁵⁶⁶ Meacham (2006) p. 74

⁵⁶⁷ Schurmann (1995) p. 17

⁵⁶⁸ Reagan (13.12.1988) Remarks to Administration Officials on Domestic Policy
<http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1988/121388a.htm>

paradoxical quality in being an American. “In America, it is religion that leads to enlightenment; it is the observance of divine laws that guides man to freedom.”⁵⁶⁹ The same idea is abundant in Reagan’s narration. Enlightenment itself more of less decried religion, but the path to inner enlightenment in America does not lead through intellect, and is not attainable merely by powers of observation for many of the protestant creeds. The more evangelical the denomination is, the more religion and religiosity open the true way into self-improvement. Intellect plays a great role in it, but only as the means used to ponder upon the Bible. At the same time the conservative part of America prides itself on its love and lust of total personal freedom in all matters and shuns everything, which seems to even a small degree interfere with the individual’s right to choose for himself. Every law and regulation has to be negotiated through the discussion on whether it limits the individual freedom afore in comes into effect. It is a very common perspective that only divine laws are able to create freedom for man. A conservative Christian as an American cannot be free unless he is bound by the law of God. This is an insurmountable paradox. Generally laws and regulations thwart individual freedom, but to truly be free, an American needs to live according to divine laws.

Reagan argued that “some suggest we should keep religion out of politics.” But he added: “Well, the opposite is also true. Those in politics should keep their hands off the religious freedom of our people.”⁵⁷⁰ Nowadays, the battle fought over the church and the state in America is political, ideological, and only partially religious. It implicates not only funding, or questions of religious symbolism and ritual, but the American identity itself. Due to this battle the church-state relationship has changed in a very fundamental manner during the past fifty years, but neither side has made such progress as to be able to claim to be winning. Feldman goes so far as to argue that America is increasingly becoming a nation divided by God, because of the continuation of this battle. While the religious and secular people alike aim at unifying the nation, the conflict is on its way to becoming a political and constitutional crisis of its own.⁵⁷¹ While the battle may not have significantly changed in the past fifty years, there has nevertheless been a profound change, when compared to the way church-state relationship was

⁵⁶⁹ de Tocqueville (2000) p. 42

⁵⁷⁰ Reagan (25.9.1982) Remarks at a Candle-Lighting Ceremony for Prayer in Schools. s. 1219

⁵⁷¹ Feldman (2005) p. 213, 234-235

perceived to be in the nineteenth century and reported by de Tocqueville, who wrote that he “did not encounter a single man, priest or layman, who did not come to accord on this [the separation of church and state.]”⁵⁷²

After all this talk about deism it should not be forgotten, that while most of the Founding Fathers embraced deism, they still did think of themselves as Christian and for example Jefferson saw his deism represented in the heart of Jesus’ teachings.⁵⁷³ Even today America is often misleadingly characterized as a Christian nation. As I have argued, the original religious beliefs of the statesmen, who gave birth to the nation, were not at least purely Christian despite their religiousness. Hughes has argued that the Declaration of Independence made Deism America’s national faith.⁵⁷⁴ This gives rise to a thought that the religion, or religious beliefs used in prophetic politics, need not be Christian, or perhaps not even religious at all. As long as the mechanisms and structures of belief are there, prophetic politics remains sound, regardless of the nature of the object of belief. Prophetic politics is not bound by any specific religion, or actually not even by religiosity itself, but the need of a human to believe in something and to gain assurance from that belief. Thus by choosing a suitable object of faith, such as the mythical community of “America” it is not only a Christian but a Moslem as well as an atheist, who might be ensnared by the storylines of prophetic politics.

2.1.2. AMERICAN SAINTS

Political narratives function on two levels. First, on the individual level people construct a narrative of their own lives to be able to construct what they are and what direction they are headed in. Second, on the collective cultural level “narratives serve to give cohesion to shared beliefs and to transmit values.”⁵⁷⁵ The values of the culture are carried in stories that provide positive role models, whose examples to follow and negative models to avoid. Polkinghorne chooses to use the “story of Jesus of Nazareth” as a fitting example. A person will live a good life in our western culture, if he imitates as closely as possible the life of Jesus and in

⁵⁷² de Tocqueville (2000) p. 282

⁵⁷³ Hughes (2003) p. 50-51

⁵⁷⁴ Hughes (2003) p. 54 And this gave birth to the myth of Nature’s Nation. Ibid. p. 56

⁵⁷⁵ Polkinghorne (1988) p. 14

doing so, creates a personal story of the highest cultural value.⁵⁷⁶ In the culturally dominant narrative Reagan offers the Founding Fathers to provide alternative life stories to imitate in order to live a good American life. Boorstin has written that in no other Western country “has the hagiography of politics been more important” than in America. “The lives of our national saints have remained vivid and contemporary for us.”⁵⁷⁷ Even the names of the political parties are borrowed from the early age of America and they actually do not have any of their original meaning any longer.

There are still people who label themselves as “Reaganites” or “neo-Reaganites,” certain political views can be described as “Jeffersonian” or “Wilsonian.” In fact, Boorstin argues, the lives of the great men of the nation play a peculiarly large role in attempts at self-definition. Great biographical works about the late presidents are “a hybrid between what the lives of the saints or of the Church Fathers are for Catholics and what the lives of gods and goddesses were for the ancient Greeks.”⁵⁷⁸ But, as Durkheim argues, humans have always been able to distinguish between deified men, the demigods of the society, and deities proper⁵⁷⁹ However, that is only in connection with status as divine. The status of having been divinely inspired seems to be permanently attached to the Founding Fathers. Americans, in the words of Reagan, look back to the founding with nostalgic longing, and try to deify the founders; “and generations will look back on us, as we do on the Founding Fathers, and give thanks in the name of God.”⁵⁸⁰ There is a long tradition to portray the Founding Fathers as quasi-divine. Thomas Jefferson himself wrote about the Constitutional Convention that “it is really as assembly of demigods.”⁵⁸¹

Frederic Jameson’s interpretation of Northrop Frye states that nature works as a collective representation of community and can even be used in Durkheimian sense as the locus, where the identity of a group is foregrounded.⁵⁸² Jameson goes further to claim that “the religious figures then become the symbolic space in which

⁵⁷⁶ Polkinghorne (1988) p. 14-15

⁵⁷⁷ Boorstin (1953) p. 17

⁵⁷⁸ Boorstin (1953) p. 19

⁵⁷⁹ Durkheim (1995) p. 75-76

⁵⁸⁰ Reagan (17.2.1987) Remarks to Business Leaders at a White House Briefing on Economic Competitiveness <http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1987/021787b.htm>

⁵⁸¹ Jefferson (1955) p. 136

⁵⁸² Jameson (2002) p. 55

the collectivity thinks itself and celebrates its own unity.”⁵⁸³ This place can be occupied by a prophetic politician as well. Even a politician can become the focus of the collectivity. Martin E. Marty sees Abraham Lincoln as the man who “stands in the spiritual centre of American history and increasingly is seen as the theological thinker whose reflections are most apt and most profound.”⁵⁸⁴ This clarifies the point that the religious figure can be supplanted by the more earthly figure of a prophetic politician, but at the same time it is ironic, since Lincoln has been so far the only American president known to have never joined the church, and during his career, he was constantly charged by the pious for infidelity. Paradoxically at the same time some in his contemporary society saw him as a truly religious man and posterity agrees fully with this evaluation. Mead calls him “the most profound and representative theologian of the religion of the Republic.”⁵⁸⁵ Lincoln was able to create a lot of what Franklin was not able to accomplish, but he called it “political religion” instead of public religion. This faith could draw on points of overlap or agreement among the established churches on the “essentials of every religion.” These essentials could assist the society to find a moral consensus to support political order. Lincoln used the Bible and while he did not idolize the Union he did see “the nation itself as a kind of uncanonical church.”⁵⁸⁶

Lincoln added something else into the American public religiosity. He had a profound understanding of sin and redemption. Lincoln’s God was not such a benign and sunny father figure as Reagan’s, but truly a Lord, for whom everyone is accountable. The God of his political religion was attentive to history and had power to affect the course of individuals as well as entire nations. Such a God cannot only be a source for comfort, but hard-driving and demanding. The loving father, who brought Jesus to heaven with him, is the same God, who made him die a painful death of the cross. The God, who provided for the people of Israel in the wilderness, is the same God, who tormented Job cruelly and mocked him in his suffering. God does unto Americans as Americans do unto others, and such black spots as slavery in the nation’s history, would not, according to Lincoln, go away without redemption. Lincoln perceived the bloody Civil War as just such an occasion of

⁵⁸³ Jameson (2002) p. 55-56

⁵⁸⁴ Marty (1984) p. 220

⁵⁸⁵ Mead (1975) p. 68

⁵⁸⁶ Marty (1984) p. 221-223

divine vengeance and for him the judgements delivered by God were indeed true and righteous.

When Lincoln was assassinated, he was immediately sanctified and it was argued, that he gave the nation a moral genius and his only problem was claimed to have been his likeness to Christ.⁵⁸⁷ While Lincoln remains today a central figure of political religion, he has been turned into a powerful mythical character as well, and the political saint, that is the object of so much adoration, is removed from the historical individual

Places like the Arlington cemetery, The Washington Monument, Lincoln Memorial or the Statue of Liberty are examples of holy places that like temples “draw worshippers to *believe in* our government by both agreeing with its principles philosophically and by showing their devotion to it in more emotional and quasi-religious ways.”⁵⁸⁸ But often many of these places are tied to the personalities I have chosen to call American saints, just as the Lincoln Memorial, and indeed Erickson goes further to claim that several fictionalized American leaders, like Abraham Lincoln or John F. Kennedy, are saints to be recalled on “Holy days” like Fourth of July or Thanksgiving. In addition to the saints, there are also “our priests and prophets, among whom the president is usually considered the most important.”⁵⁸⁹ Erickson fails to describe the thinking of Reagan in one very essential sense. In the religious narrative of Reagan, it is definitely not the government which acts as an object of belief. “Now, we have been living in an age when the *cult* of overwhelming government was the reigning ideology.”⁵⁹⁰ For Reagan, America is an object of faith, and he attacks government in the same way Jesus attacked all the institutions, which had grown around the temple. The saints, even political ones, are detached from the state apparatus and connected only with the nation and especially the people. Primarily they personify the people and their spirit and represent the state only as a by-product. As Reagan depicted Washington,

It has been written that the most sublime figure in American history was George Washington on his knees in the snow at Valley Forge. He personified a people who knew it was not enough to depend on their own

⁵⁸⁷ Stout (2006) p. 451-454 for more on the process of sanctifying Lincoln.

⁵⁸⁸ Erickson (1985) p. 3. See also Zelinsky (1988) p. 177

⁵⁸⁹ Erickson (1985) p. 3. See also Aaltola (2007) p. 149

⁵⁹⁰ Reagan (1984) Heritage Foundation Dinner. (3.10.1983) p. 187 Italics mine.

courage and goodness: they must also seek help from God, their Father and Preserver.⁵⁹¹

The choice of words given the context is interesting. “It’s been written” has a prophetic ring to it as if it had been written in some sacred text. Actually such is the case, if we shift from a Judeo-Christian viewpoint to that of a more political religion. Once we see that “it is written” in one of the sacred stories that tend to mythologize the American history, we can understand Reagan better. Every American president is despite his outward appearance one of the humble people, who has the strength to admit their own weaknesses, and seek help from God. Personal and earthly characteristics are not enough to keep America prosperous. The idea of presidents on their knees is humbling, not only because it shows that everyone is a religious person and able to show it, but it also proves that since America has fared so well throughout its independence, there has to be a God to answer those prayers and help the presidents persevere. Ironically the image of Washington kneeling in the snow was not what really happened. Washington was another deist, and while he explained the American victory in the Revolution as a work of “the hand of Providence” he did not take communion and would not kneel to pray.⁵⁹² The image of the praying Washington derives from artistic impression and along with the entire happenings at Valley Forge is of later recreation. The reality of what happened at Valley Forge has been replaced in the American collective memory with a mythical story, which while not real, is more passion-stirring as the original accounts. In his book “Founding Myths: Stories that hide our patriotic past” Ray Raphael discusses Valley Forge myth at length.⁵⁹³ Nevertheless, Washington remains the one American saint above anyone else and Wilbur Zelinsky claims that, to talk about deification in his case is not a figure of speech, but a sombrely realistic assessment.⁵⁹⁴

It is beneficial here to take a longish quotation from Emile Durkheim who asserts that the society never stops creating new sacred things or sacred individuals.

If society should happen to become infatuated with a man, believing it has found in him its deepest aspirations as well as the means of fulfilling them, then that man will be put in a class by himself and virtually deified. Opinion

⁵⁹¹ Reagan (1984) The 250th Anniversary of the Birth of George Washington. (22.2.1982) p.10 A similar portrait of Washington was given elsewhere as well. See for example Reagan (1984) (30.1.1984) p. 118

⁵⁹² Meacham (2006) p. 11

⁵⁹³ Raphael (2004)

⁵⁹⁴ Zelinsky (1988) p. 34

will confer on him a grandeur that is similar in every way to the grandeur that protects the gods. [...] Moreover, the routine deference that men invested with high social positions receive is not qualitatively different from religious aspect. [...] Sacredness is ascribed to princes, nobles, and political leaders in order to account for the special regard they enjoy.⁵⁹⁵

It is an old and well established tradition to speak of American leaders with terminology that has strong religious overtones. It is not always that they are likened to religious leaders or prominent biblical figureheads, but the terminology is always there to be employed. For example Alexis de Tocqueville called Thomas Jefferson the “the most powerful apostle that democracy has ever had.”⁵⁹⁶ At the same that this confirms the tendency to associate leaders with biblical figures, it implies that democracy is a faith which has apostles of its own. We need to consider democratic faith, or rather faith in democracy, on a level parallel with religions. Democracy is still able to raise feelings and emotions that enflame passions in people like religion. Often religious and democratic zeal vanishes when either is well established. Then it becomes just one more aspect of the status quo. It is only in places where democracy is not the established norm that it can truly rouse passions.

Boorstin makes an important contribution to understanding the American character, when he claims that in America there are less Great Men than in many other societies.⁵⁹⁷ This is because America allows itself only to have a few such people like Lincoln, Franklin or Washington. These men are revered, because they are perceived as embodying popular virtues. They are objects of admiration, because they reveal and elevate the average American, and because they are “one of us” and embody popular virtues. It is easy to compare Reagan with, say, Lincoln. Both were men of the people, born in poor surroundings and left the lower levels of American society to climb to the summit of power and prestige, the presidency. In such success stories Americans find themselves, because they are symbols of the American virtues of equality and status. The Americans have a firm belief that there must be an equality of opportunity for all, and these exemplary men have fulfilled their potential. Everyone’s opportunity for social mobility is the “fabric of the American Dream. [...] it does provide the motive power for much of what Americans do in their daily lives.”⁵⁹⁸ Naturally there is a great difference in how

⁵⁹⁵ Durkheim (1995) p. 215

⁵⁹⁶ de Tocqueville (2000) p. 249

⁵⁹⁷ Boorstin (1962)

⁵⁹⁸ Warner (1962) p. 128-130

these two are revered by the posterity. While Reagan is being endowed with more and more importance as time passes, it is unlikely that he will ever reach Lincoln's importance as an American symbol. Lincoln is revered as the second most important American saint and his great achievement was to endow the presidency itself with special prestige. As a "supreme myth" he still continues to provide a heightened importance to the office he once occupied, so that anyone who becomes the President of the United States is immediately gaining an aspect of the sacred on his persona.⁵⁹⁹ Zelinsky argues further that the power of the US presidency ultimately rests on the symbolism and image of his office.⁶⁰⁰ The President of the United States is often in popular culture depicted as the "most powerful man on Earth" but it is a part of the democratic system that his power is restricted, even dramatically so, by the House of Representatives and the Senate. But the president is a figurehead, a powerful symbol of the nation. He can even be seen as the fleshy manifestation of the nation, its anthropomorphication, so to say. The president as a leadership figure has to take the role of a living symbol of the American Way of Life to touch the hearts and minds of the populace. If successful, the political prophet becomes larger than life, a symbol instead of a living, breathing person. The president may be able thus to become "the unifying force in our complex system."⁶⁰¹

The elevation into sainthood was most startling in the case of George Washington. Washington had more than his share of enemies and for all of his life he remained a controversial figure, whose judgment and integrity had been impugned. Boorstin writes that, "what is most remarkable is not that Washington eventually became a demigod, Father of his Country, but that the transfiguration happened so quickly."⁶⁰² According to him the best evidence of the desperate need of Americans for a dignified and worshipful national hero was "their passionate haste in elevating Washington to sainthood."⁶⁰³ This same haste is taking place with the stories told about Reagan. It is highly unlikely that he would ever be elevated to a status comparable with Washington, but even today he is depicted as larger than life. Perhaps someone else from the modern presidents will assume a place of greater importance than him, only time will tell. But there is a tendency in

⁵⁹⁹ Zelinsky (1988) p. 46-48

⁶⁰⁰ Zelinsky (1988) p. 57

⁶⁰¹ Woodrow Wilson. Cited in White (1988) p. 36

⁶⁰² Boorstin (1965) p. 339

⁶⁰³ Boorstin (1965) p. 339

Americans to elevate heroes of their respective golden ages to the status of demigods. While Washington was the saint of the times of the independence, giving birth to the new nation, Reagan may yet become the saint of the post-Cold War era. He may become the “destroyer-god” of the Soviet Union, like Washington was the “creator-god” of America. If the end of the Cold War shall remain to be perceived as one of the great turning points of modern history, there is no telling how Reagan shall be seen by the future generations. As of today, modern conservatism can, according to Garry Willis, be called Reaganism, but experience has shown that Reaganism without Reagan is unsustainable.⁶⁰⁴

Hopefully there is, at least in academic writing, no clearer example of the process of Reagan’s divination than these words by Dinesh D’Souza;

There is no point in pining for “another Ronald Reagan.” Great leaders don’t come along very often, and in many ways Reagan was an American original. He isn’t returning and there never will be another quite like him. But the truth is, we don’t need another Reagan. Rather, we simply need to ask in every situation that arises, what would Reagan have done?”⁶⁰⁵

Many of the books lately written about Ronald Reagan are not only biographies. They have indeed taken the shape of hagiographies. This serves as a great but nevertheless saddening proof of many points I make in the course of this dissertation. Besides creating a widespread and widely accepted version of civil religion in his narratives by visionary storytelling, Reagan has himself since become an object of faith among some people. If D’Souza had not admitted that Reagan is *not* coming back a reader could replace “Reagan” with for example “Christ” in every instance. Reagan is no longer just someone who articulated civil religion, but a mythical quasi-divine entity one can use as an example how to lead one’s life and look to him for guidance. He is portrayed as unique and his vision was what caused his success. Furthermore his story is used as an example of the benefits of a democratic society in such a manner, that he becomes a Christ-like figure, who can offer hope of the fulfilment of the American dream to anybody. I have claimed that Reagan can be interpreted as a prophetic politician, one with a vision and prophetic treatment towards the American people, but I find no basis on claiming that he was a figure larger than life.

⁶⁰⁴ Willis (2000) p. ix

⁶⁰⁵ D’Souza (1997) p. 264

Now he is gradually elevated in status to become at least a saint or perhaps even a secular demi-god for civil religion. If America, the American Way of Life and the American Dream form the “holy” secular trinity that composes the God for public religion, Reagan seems to get increasingly portrayed as the “all-American son” of this god-like entity. His life story proves that his was the “American Life,” as the title of his biography claims, and therefore he could be God incarnate for civil religion, because in him the aforementioned trinity is embodied in flesh to give hope to all Americans. Reagan was not this kind of “American Jesus,” nor is he yet, but maybe one day he shall become one by the means of storytelling. It’s all in the power of stories. Some of them become sacred and are told and retold until they lose all similarity to the person described and rather tell of how the future generations want to portray their history of the Reagan era.

At the moment Reagan is a heroic figure to the conservatives and Republicans. He is still abhorred by many liberals and left-wingers. But already the perceptions have altered somewhat to the positive direction. Some of his vociferous critics have taken tentative steps towards acceptance. As each year passes and the Reagan era falls further behind in the past the strong emotions he raised are likely to mellow.⁶⁰⁶ Maybe there shall be another great communicator, who looks back to the 1980’s and portrays it as a golden past, just like Reagan did with the time of the Founding Fathers and recreates the history anew to reach a yet more glorious future.

One good reason to avoid the sanctification of political figures lies in the lives of the saints of the Catholic Church and their deeds. In the lives of this holy men and women the spiritual characteristics are very dominant, but the intellectual capacities are often low enough to give their lives an impression of going too much to the extremes. Spiritual zeal becomes pathological when interest in other things in life is lacking and the intellect is too strictly bound. Even piety, when unbalanced often becomes zealotry.⁶⁰⁷

⁶⁰⁶ If we take a look at such recent scholarly works as Kengor (2004) or Wallison (2003) do we find a less emotional approach as for example Knellman (1985). And then there are works like D’Souza (1997), which are dire attempts to almost sanctify him. But all in all, no recent work tries to portray Reagan as a “dunce” anymore. We could say that within the conservative thinkers there is a conscious attempt to present Reagan as larger than life, but simultaneously we are finally approaching a time when studies on Reagan can be objective as well. Even some liberal thinkers like Sean Wilentz treat Reagan in a non-condemning manner. See Wilentz (2008)

⁶⁰⁷ James (1981) p. 254-265 contains a quite thorough discussion on these traits evident in many of the saints.

2.1.3. THE ROLE OF PROTESTANTISM

According to John F. Wilson, American culture can be viewed as characterized by religious meanings. Among this cluster of meanings can be found ideas of America as a perfected and pure society, which is receptive to the homeless and the deprived of the world and where opportunity abounds. America is seen as “fulfilment of the *dreams and aspirations* of the ages”.⁶⁰⁸ Occasionally this has been evident in visions of America as the place, where the streets are paved with gold and fortune waits for the migrant ready to make it. Or, as Reagan put it, “The streets of America would not be paved with gold, they would be paved with opportunity.”⁶⁰⁹ At other times America could be seen as synonymous to religious liberty and freedom. In both cases it was the “New World,” where men could start their lives over again, leave the history behind and see what opportunities would wait for them in this New Israel. In both cases the religious meanings lie beneath the surface of the narrative of this near-perfect society.

It can be argued that Puritanism has been the most important shaper of American religious and public life. Wilson sees it as an evitable psychological response to particular aspects of the American society and as proverbially American as apple pie.⁶¹⁰ Puritanism has had, and still continues to have, a strong influence on the American self-perception and the American self in general. De Tocqueville wrote that the “whole destiny of America [was] contained in the first Puritan who landed on its shores.”⁶¹¹ Only supposedly after the Puritanism was outspent, did multiple sectarianism become a prominent national feature.⁶¹² But is Puritanism truly outspent after all? Maybe we should not talk of Puritanism in singular but rather “Puritanisms,” since several religious collectivities have become more puritan during their existence in America and the society itself seems to be on a quest for purity and separation from the taint of the world, dividing the world into a bipolar us versus them framework. To be pure, to be a puritan, requires a worldview of fundamentally authoritarian patterns of relationship and not a very allowing or flexible attitude towards the shortcomings of others, while being practically blind to

⁶⁰⁸ Wilson (1979) p. 95-96. Italics mine

⁶⁰⁹ Reagan (1.8.1983) Address to the American Bar Association s. 160

⁶¹⁰ Wilson (1979) p. 100-101

⁶¹¹ de Tocqueville (2000) p. 267

⁶¹² Kelly (1984) p. 3

one's own negative sides.⁶¹³ Wilson does not see it as surprising, that Calvinism in a severely truncated mode influences the public belief even today and he bases his argument on the concept of national covenant, which formulates the proper relationship between the nation and God.⁶¹⁴ According to the “gospel” of Reagan,

Of the many influences that have shaped the United States of America into a distinctive Nation and people, none may be said to be more fundamental and enduring than the Bible.⁶¹⁵

The abundant growth of religious denominations in America is an important development in entire Christianity. The extremist fundamentalists aside, most Christians are able to treat the other denominations with mutual respect, and not consider the one they belong to as being the “one and only true faith.” In the tradition established by the denial of an “official” state church, all churches have been given a very democratic free rein in developing themselves. For majority of Americans even today other Christian denominations are viewed as Christian and thus tolerated and treated with respect. The situation where each Christian is able to make up his or her mind about what constitutes his religious faith and allegiance portrays America as a fundamentally very religiously tolerant nation. At least as long as the religion can be seen as relatively conformist and definitely Christian.⁶¹⁶

Brigham Young once said: “The framers of the Constitution laid a foundation and it was for after generations to rear a superstructure upon it. It was”, he said, “our progressive, gradual work.” Will the foundation of our land still be solid? We’ve just been building a house of cards on it so far. Today we’re returning to the principle [...] of reward for honest toil, living within our means, and paying heed to the spiritual values that have always been the inner strength of America.⁶¹⁷

It is interesting to note that Reagan cites Brigham Young, who was a Mormon and a leader of the Church of the Latter Day Saints, only this one time in his Presidential public speeches. Young was called on occasion with nicknames such as the “American Moses,” because he lead the Mormons through the desert into Utah, which he saw as a promised land in a manner very similar to the sacred story of exodus and became the first Governor of Utah. The fact that Reagan chose to quote Young may just have been an attempt to more effectively cue the Mormons in America to get withdrawn into his story world, but the Mormon scriptures tell a very

⁶¹³ Wilson (1979) p. 103-104

⁶¹⁴ Wilson (1979) p. 60

⁶¹⁵ Reagan (3.2.1983) Proclamation 5018 -- Year of the Bible, 1983
<http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1983/20383b.htm>

⁶¹⁶ Kosmin – Lachan (1993) p. 24

⁶¹⁷ Reagan (10.9.1982) Remarks at a Utah Republican Party Picnic in Hooper. s. 1134

similar story about the nature and purpose of America as Reagan does. Naturally Reagan was speaking in Utah and that is a good reason, but it is strange that it still is the one and only citation. Mormons were and always have been “good Americans”, since they share with Reagan the belief that the United States Constitution and the Declaration of Independence were divinely inspired documents. This made them intense and conservative patriots and more willing to enjoy the red-white-blue-celebrations than the majority.⁶¹⁸ But Reagan depicted either consciously or unconsciously religion in more traditional and to a large degree Protestant terms.⁶¹⁹

Martin E. Marty colourfully expressed that Protestants “ran the show” in America. They “once managed, controlled, and directed what went on among the vast majority of people.”⁶²⁰ The “Protestant Crusade” started at the drafting of the Constitution and lasted until the outbreak of the Civil War without any challenge to Protestant domination.⁶²¹ We can safely say that Protestantism was until the 1960’s the leading faith in America, at least in terms of ideology. Other faiths have not really counted in the vision Americans had of their nation progressing towards millennium. The measure of this progress was often the growing adherence of people around the world to some form of Protestantism. Perhaps this is an understandable tendency, since the birth of the nation in terms of its early settlement was closely related to protestant faiths and the rise of Calvinism in England. The prosperity the Protestants gained in America in material terms might constitute one of the reasons, why they chose to ultimately begin to see themselves as the elect of God.⁶²² The fundamentalist Protestants began to adopt a premillennial perspective towards history at the end of the nineteenth century, because their conception of America’s covenant with God ceased to be the dominant narrative among the largest denominations. Modernist and more liberal Protestants assumed that God still intended to work for mankind through America and sociological factors caused them to start including the Jews and Catholics in their efforts to working-out America’s millennial mission. This was seen to be just as much the task of Catholics and Jews as well as progressive humanists. Another thing that brought the faiths

⁶¹⁸ Marty (1984) p. 205

⁶¹⁹ Hughes (2003) p. 158-159 argues that there was one important thing in common in terms of ideology between the Mormons and the Disciples of Christ Reagan belonged to. Both built their identities around the effort to “restore a golden age of the past as the means to introduce the golden age of the future.”

⁶²⁰ Marty (2004) p. 10

⁶²¹ Marty (2004) p. 42-43

⁶²² McLoughlin (1978) p. 2-3

together was the fear of Communism, which represented for them the Anti-Christ, and threatened not only capitalism, but the Judeo-Christian faith in general. Even the most fundamentalist protestants were able to find things in common with other in defending “the Cross and the Flag” against the Soviet Union.⁶²³

John F. Wilson claims that the hegemony of Protestantism ended either in 1908, when the Catholic Church declared America to be no longer a mission field, but a separate entity, or alternatively in 1958, when the campaign began to secure the election of catholic John F. Kennedy to the highest office in the land in the 1960 election. I tend to see the latter focal point in time as more crucial. After that time the Protestantism could no longer claim a hegemonic position as the public or civil religion of the American nation and religious pluralism became accepted as cultural reality.⁶²⁴ The wane in the importance of Protestantism seemed to be only temporary, but the pluralism in religious thought has remained. At the same time, in connection with public religion, the counterculture movement rejected the spiritual Americanism and arguably the spiritual mould of public religion was broken with the civil struggle in the 1960s.⁶²⁵

Nowadays Protestantism seems to be on expansion again, but this expansion concentrates on the more evangelical denominations, which is not in unison with the common perception of the word becoming more secularized. Among these creeds are several that many are inclined to label as “sects” or “cults” as well as the religious right and premillennialists. Ernst Troeltsch has dichotomized religious bodies into “churches” and “sects” and in his classification churches tended to be instruments of the state and its ruling classes, inclusive with their memberships, and “endowed with the *mana* of grace and salvation.”⁶²⁶ Sects, on the other hand, were formed voluntarily by choice or conversion and acted as havens for the unprivileged and rebellious.⁶²⁷ Yinger extrapolated and divided religious bodies into “the universal church”, which is inclusive and responsive to the societal and individual needs; “the Ecclesia,” which was a national church and less inclusive and less responsive, “denomination,” which was particularistic in its beliefs; “the Established sect,” like the Quakers, which was exclusivist but broadly integrated to society; “the

⁶²³ McLoughlin (1978) p. 4-5

⁶²⁴ Wilson (1979) p. 14-15. Wilson prefers the expression “public religion” as it was the “original” term coined by Benjamin Franklin.

⁶²⁵ Wilson (1979) p. 16-17

⁶²⁶ Kelly (1984) p. 67

⁶²⁷ Kelly (1984) p. 67

Sect,” which was similar to Troeltsch’s concept; and “the Cult,” which is frequently charismatic and has little or no orientation to social order and is almost totally involved in servicing individual needs.⁶²⁸ One could say that the more a certain denomination is considered to be a “sect” instead of a more legitimate “church,” the more its members feel excluded from the mainstream America.

But it is not only the marginalized sects but the entire evangelical community in America that traditionally has seen itself as “an embattled minority,” that feels the culture is going in the wrong way and wishes to change its course back to the old ways, but already half expects to lose. Reagan as well as Bush Jr. after him, have been able to turn this feeling of being a prosecuted community (but still a proud community, because they suffer for their faith as good Christians always have) and marginalized in the American society around.⁶²⁹ Every one of the surprisingly numerous times Reagan addressed the National Association of Evangelicals or spoke of the traditional values of “faith, family and neighbourhood,” he narratively transported the evangelicals from the margins of the society to the very centre of it. There would have been no great and pressing political need for Reagan to woo more support by addressing the NAE as often as he did, and the fact that he chose to do so, speaks of the status of the evangelical movement in his narrative creation of American identity. Their political impact aside, Reagan seemed to want the evangelicals as additional messengers of the values embedded in his storytelling.

Those subtleties of truth – the belief in the importance of the family, of community and church- the realization that the Western ideas of freedom and democracy spring directly from the Judeo-Christian religious experience – are not often publicly discussed. Yet they --- Every place I go lately there’s an echo.⁶³⁰

Reagan has sometimes been claimed to have risen to power with the help of the religious right, but Reagan clearly impressed a large number of other people as well. Ira Chernus argues that for the political neoconservatives, Reagan was initially a blessing, since he was a political star the Neocons could hitch their wagon to.⁶³¹ Reagan’s first personal reference to the neoconservative movement was in a radio

⁶²⁸ Kelly (1984) p. 99

⁶²⁹ Chernus (2006) p. 106

⁶³⁰ Reagan (3.8.1982) Remarks at the Centennial Meeting of the Supreme Council of the Knights of Columbus in Hartford, Connecticut. s. 1010

⁶³¹ Chernus (2006) p. 32

address in 1979 where he described them as deplored with “a decline of morality accompanied by a decline of institutions such as religion, the family and government. They are a pragmatic group, more interested in keeping the machinery of society working in an orderly way, rather than in any particular ideology.”⁶³² He went further to argue that neoconservatism “has become a potent political and intellectual force.”⁶³³ At the same time the Neocons were able with their connections to Reagan to create a useful alliance with those politically active groups of conservative evangelical Christians, who later came to be known as the “religious right.” It has to be noted that the expression “Christian right” is probably more fitting, since despite the presence of orthodox Jews the movement is primarily among white evangelical Christians.⁶³⁴ Actually, when all is said and done, the affiliation with the religious right was not purely beneficial for Reagan, since what the religious right poses, is fundamentally a threat to creating a democratic unifying civil religion, and thus a hindrance to Reagan’s policies as well.

These same people, who are inclined to take a very fundamental and passionate stand for their respective religious beliefs, could even pose a threat to democratic decision-making, since their more than occasional zealotry does not allow for true pluralism to bloom within the society. Reagan had a relatively good success in getting the religious right to support his politics and accept his version of the civil religion, but mostly the fundamentalists can be seen as a counterforce to civil religion. They could also be a “resistance” against the growing secularization of the American society. While many Americans proclaim their faith and attend churches regularly, they are likely to derive their values and modes of thought from secular sources instead of religious ones. Perhaps “true, burning faith” has been and will continue to be replaced with a more transcendental faith, which by prophetic politicians is being gradually turned into a cultural or American faith.⁶³⁵

⁶³² Radio address, Folder Speeches and Writings – Radio Broadcast, Taping date – 1979, July 27
 “Neoconservatives” Typescript 2/3, Box 36, Reagan, Ronald: Pre-presidential papers, Series I
 Speeches and writings, Ronald Reagan Library

⁶³³ Ibid.

⁶³⁴ Wilcox (1996) p. 5. Wilcox shows the debate concerning the name for the movement. The choice between “Christian” and “religious” is primarily a concern of how ecumenical the movement wants to be pictured. Still others object to the word “Right” since it places them outside the political mainstream and prefer being called “conservative.” And there is no doubt that when the expression “conservative” in politics is extrapolated, religiosity is one of the characteristics involved in it.

⁶³⁵ Kosmin-Lachlan (1993) provides a very good overview into the religious behaviour patterns of Americans.

According to Phillips Christianity in general, but especially Protestantism, has always been evangelical or of missionary nature with a streak of racialism. “Some message has always had to be preached, punched or proselytized.”⁶³⁶ In Reagan’s case the message was for both God and Freedom and he spoke just as fervently for either one. “This is a great time of year because it gives me an opportunity to get out and around and spread some gospel.”⁶³⁷ No other contemporary Western nation has shared this religious intensity and the concomitant proclamation of being God’s chosen people and nation on such a grand scale as the Americans.⁶³⁸ Nevertheless, one should not forget that the power of the Christian Right has by no means been beyond debate. As Clyde Wilcox asserted, Reagan only gave rise to the phenomenon and approximately every two years the media has either asserted its tremendous importance or its powerlessness. This is not due to the fact that the movement had alternatively risen and fallen in numbers of supporters, but occasionally its leaders have been more sophisticated and more effective in enlisting vociferous supporters and in proclaiming their message. The number of supporters of the Christian Right has been constantly between 10 and 15 per cent of the white population.⁶³⁹ While this is naturally a huge amount of people, it is still a marginalized section. It allows good news coverage, since every so often in a culture as devoted as America the fear of the rise of intolerant and somewhat radical Christian Right can be resurrected. It can be used to be summoned as a bogeyman when there is a political need for such a threat to the stability of the society to be narrated to exist.

But just as we need to be very careful when treating the connections Reagan had with the Neocons or the larger conservative movement, we need to question the links to established religion as well. Reagan was not a mindless puppet of these external forces, but rather quite often at odds with them during the presidency. In his own words describing the National Council of Churches, “Sometimes I think (forgive me) the Nat. Co. believes God can be reached through Moscow.”⁶⁴⁰ It has been occasionally argued that Reagan put politics in the service of religion, but this does not withstand critical enquiry. Jerry Falwell’s Moral Majority certainly put

⁶³⁶ Phillips (2006) p. 100

⁶³⁷ Reagan (4.10.1988) Remarks at the Republican Governors Club Dinner
<http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1988/100488e.htm>

⁶³⁸ Phillips (2006) p. 100

⁶³⁹ Wilcox (1996) p. 4-5

⁶⁴⁰ Reagan (2007) p. 13. Diary entry for 17.4.1981.

religious faith in the service of politics, and not the other way around. Voting as a mass for Reagan in 1980 was primarily a way to signal to the public that the evangelicals should be taken seriously as a force at work in the society. Some evangelical voters undoubtedly believed that supporting the candidates specified by the organization was a way to promote true religion, but rather the goal of evangelical politics was to promote a set of moral values that were derivative from faith and relevant to practical politics.⁶⁴¹ More than anything else the connection of Reagan administration and religious right derived from the fact that certain religious figures wanted to establish themselves in the political world. Some central figures of the religious right such as Jerry Falwell and Pat Robertson were relatively important figures in the Reagan administration. Both have been extremely vociferous in religious matters and Falwell has even through his “100 Club” radio program and other media advocated the Rapture, Armageddon and the end of times in general.⁶⁴² They found Reagan a suitable bandwagon to hitchhike on. Carter was more devout by any standards than Reagan, but Reagan reflected the background of evangelical voters better than the incumbent president.⁶⁴³

Bruce Dierenfield poses an interesting question how this actually happened, since the relationship between Reagan’s own commitment to upright personal life and the imperatives of the Religious Right appeared tenuous. He lists as reasons the facts that Reagan drank alcohol (albeit seldom, and very little), his tendency for off-colour jokes, the habit to seldom read his Bible (which cannot be actually deducted from any sources), the fact that he preferred the high-society Presbyterian church of Bel Air, avoided taking communion, was divorced, was an allegedly inattentive father, and in his policies as governor had defended homosexuals, the Equal Rights Amendment, and abortion.⁶⁴⁴

Often the mental association between the religious right and Reagan was easy to establish, since Reagan constantly spoke of revival and reawakening that are taking place in America. This part of Reagan’s narration resonated well with the

⁶⁴¹ Feldman (2005) p. 193-194

⁶⁴² For a relatively good interpretation on the Armageddon concept of Jerry Falwell and allegedly some others of the Reagan administration, even Reagan himself and his Secretary of State Caspar Weinberger, another evangelical Christian, can be found in Knelman (1985) p. 179-183. It has to be noted, however, that there are multiple ideas and theories as to how the end of the world will indeed happen. A good alternative example is the popular “Left Behind” book series. I shall nevertheless explain some of Reagan’s ideas further on.

⁶⁴³ Wills (2000) p. 457

⁶⁴⁴ Diernfield (1997) p. 235-236

ideas of the religious right, who were worried that America is losing its spiritual characteristics and values.

There is no need in our land today greater than the need to rediscover our spiritual heritage. Many nations in the past centuries have exchanged their gods for other gods, but no nation has ever exchanged its god for no god at all and lived to add further pages to its history.⁶⁴⁵ Great Awakenings and religious revivals have historically within the American culture been tied to periods of radical political change. In the words of William McLoughlin, “Awakenings begin in periods of cultural distortion [...] when we lose faith in the legitimacy of our norms, the viability of our institutions and the authority of our leaders in church and state.”⁶⁴⁶ For a country that prides itself for its pragmatic nature, it is surprising that spiritual, ideological, or religious factors have always been able to release enormous energies throughout American history.⁶⁴⁷ The First Great Awakening started to bring politics and religion together, the Second started laying the foundations of evangelical Christianity and the myth of the Christian nation, but it was finally what some sociologists call the America’s Third Great Awakening (but McLoughlin the Fourth⁶⁴⁸), that saw the return of Christian fundamentalism in a new wave. Moral Majority and later Christian Coalition led the infusion of new religious viewpoints into politics. This time it was not of their own particular creed they advocated, but values that supposedly could be shared by all persons of faith.⁶⁴⁹ Jimmy Carter rode on the crest of that wave into presidency as the first modern president to openly speak of being born-again.⁶⁵⁰ In his due time Reagan called for an “awakening” and a “revival” and his era, besides being situated in the timeline at the time of the aforementioned awakening, was certainly a time of stress both militarily and economically.

I came into office thinking that -- for some time I was thinking that there was a hunger for a spiritual revival in America, and I think that has taken place. I hear from more and more people talking about the pride they have in country.⁶⁵¹

In the communist world religion has sometimes been called “opium for the people,” but while Reagan speaks of the “revival” and “reawakening” of spiritual values and

⁶⁴⁵Speech: Welcoming the Reverend Billy Graham, 9/28/69. Box 44 Subseries E, Reagan, Ronald: Pre-presidential papers, Series I Speeches and writings, Ronald Reagan Library

⁶⁴⁶ McLoughlin (1978) Cited in Gutterman (2005) p. 8

⁶⁴⁷ Schurmann (1995) p. 52

⁶⁴⁸ McLoughlin (1978)

⁶⁴⁹ Feldman (2005) p. 13-14

⁶⁵⁰ Feldman (2005) p. 190

⁶⁵¹ Reagan (16.12.1988) Remarks and a Question-and-Answer Session at the University of Virginia in Charlottesville <http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1988/121688b.htm>

spiritual America, he uses religion and freedom rather like amphetamine. Reagan wants to electrify the nation, raise it from its slumber, imbue it with energy and prevent it from falling asleep again. “At an important moment in our history, we set forth together to awaken our nation and rally her spirit.”⁶⁵² Reagan’s America should be “a nation forever young, forever bursting with energy and new ideas, and always on the cutting edge, always leading the world to the next frontier. This quality is vital to our future as a nation.”⁶⁵³ America is set for another “high” and religion is the propellant and catalyst for these hyper effective times. In his era, “in the past few years our country has seen a rebirth of energy and freedom -- a great national renewal.”⁶⁵⁴ At the same time, to pursue the analogy, Reagan wanted the citizenry to share his vivid illusions of what America once had been, and how it could soar even higher in the future. While Reagan detested illegal drugs, this was one high that Americans should experience. And why not, since it is a part of his story logic that America “I believe this country hungers for a spiritual revival,”⁶⁵⁵ and only spiritual and religious values can bring about “rebirth of a nation, the revival of the independence, vitality, and resourcefulness that tamed a savage wilderness and converted 13 small struggling colonies into what Abraham Lincoln called “the last, best hope of Earth.”⁶⁵⁶

The concept of spiritual revival here explained helps explain the connection between religion and civil religion as well. Reagan called for a spiritual revival and claimed that it had taken place, because people were talking about the “pride they have in country.” In other words the revival he had in mind was first and foremost the revival of American pride in itself. America and the way of life it advocates is an object of spiritual faith as part of civil religion, but there is something more to this. For Reagan to believe in America, and to practically worship it, is a part of believing in God and worshipping Him, because America is His Promised Land. Therefore, the pride people have for their country, patriotism, nationalism,

⁶⁵² Reagan (7.10.1985) Remarks at a White House Meeting With Reagan-Bush Campaign Leadership Groups <http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1985/100785b.htm>

⁶⁵³ Reagan (19.1.1989) Remarks at the Presentation Ceremony for the Presidential Medal of Freedom <http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1989/011989b.htm>

⁶⁵⁴ Reagan (7.2.1984) Remarks at the Annual Convention of the National Association of Secondary School Principals in Las Vegas, Nevada
<http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1984/20784a.htm>

⁶⁵⁵ Reagan (15.3.1982) Address Before a Joint Session of the Alabama State Legislature in Montgomery. s. 296

⁶⁵⁶ Reagan (20.1.1982) Remarks to the Reagan Administration Executive Forum. s. 45

whichever term one wishes to use, is religious by nature in the American context. This is a fact that has to be understood to grasp the meaning of Reagan's political storytelling. Nationalism and religiosity are intertwined and not only on the level of political religion, but Christian religion as well.

It is true that the conservative or maybe even the neoconservative movement have become more than a mere minority because of the contribution of Bible believers. However, there is no guarantee that the Christians, who under many denominations and sects still combine the bulk of the American society, would in the predictable manner follow the policies of individual leaders or even the parties to any given point.⁶⁵⁷ While patriotism is strongly connected to American Christianity, they can be unpredictable with their support as a whole and certain policies certainly alienate some sects, while they are pleasing to others. The Christians in America are not a unified block with same beliefs and opinions. The idea Reagan shares with the evangelicals, conservatives, and neoconservatives alike is as Chernus put it, that "people can be virtuous only if their values are sanctioned by the authority of the past; a nation will have moral order only when it lives by the values of its past."⁶⁵⁸ Or, in the words of Reagan, "We're seeing rededication to bedrock values of faith, family, work, neighbourhood, peace and freedom – values that bring us together as one people."⁶⁵⁹

We cannot leave out of our calculations the effect these and similar words, anecdotes, and entire stories Reagan told during his 1980 campaign, had. For the first time in least fifty years, an absolute majority of Jewish votes was denied from the Democratic candidate, and over 60% of Protestants with even higher percentage of born-again Christians voted for Reagan.⁶⁶⁰ This was at least partially caused by a conscious effort of, in the words of Lyn Nofziger, an important Reagan aide, "paying a little bit of attention to the Jewish community, because they are ripe for plucking."⁶⁶¹ As a result of this, a self-proclaimed born-again Christian with the status of incumbent President was ousted from the White House. Reagan's ties to evangelicals, fundamentalists and other conservative Christians were established

⁶⁵⁷ Wolfe (2005) p. 102-103

⁶⁵⁸ Chernus (2006) p. 130-131

⁶⁵⁹ Reagan (1984) State of the Union Address (25.1.1984) p. 346

⁶⁶⁰ Kosmin-Lachan (1993) p. 181

⁶⁶¹ Nofziger. Memorandum. Folder Hannaford/CA – Ronald Reagan Speeches – 2/24/1978, CTRF Seminar, Los Angeles, Box 23 Ronald Reagan 1980 Campaign Papers, Series I, Ronald Reagan Library.

long before the election of 1980 when their support was most visible.⁶⁶² Just four years earlier it had been the evangelical vote, which enabled the born-again Carter to win the close election. Never since the Civil War years, had evangelicals given the majority of their votes to a Democratic candidate.⁶⁶³ But Carter was an exception to the rule. In the first years of the 21st century it has occasionally even been argued that Christian evangelicals, fundamentalists, and Pentecostals would muster approximately 40 percent of the electorate of the Republican Party.⁶⁶⁴ While this may be an exaggeration, it is nevertheless evident, that a strong connection exists between Republicans and the more fundamental Christians and that this “alliance” began with Reagan.

It needs to be acknowledged that Reagan with his prophetic message was able to create a religious master narrative that for at least the duration of the 1980 presidential campaign totally dominated the religious storytelling. It is no use to evaluate which candidate was more religious, but it is a fact that Reagan managed to produce stories that touched the hearts and minds of the religious citizenry better than Carter. The results in the 1984 campaign were even more stunning, since against Carter’s vice president, Walter Mondale, Reagan won the votes of more than 80% of white evangelicals, 73% of white Protestants and 55% of Catholics. In this election Reagan lost some Jewish votes to Mondale but only the black vote, both protestant and catholic, remained in large numbers on the side of the Democratic candidate.⁶⁶⁵ It is evident from these figures that Reagan’s religious message only gained more acceptance and credibility during the first four years of his presidency, but he still remained unable to reach the black population with his stories.

While Reagan’s civil religious message was plausible, acceptable and inclusive to a majority of Americans, both religious and non-religious, his all-encompassing vision of the American Dream was unable to include the black population. The slight drop in the numbers of Jewish votes also indicates that his religious storytelling created a civil religion, which was too biased towards the Christian faith, while Reagan tried to remain ecumenical. De Tocqueville characterizes the moment of the election of the president of the United States as “a

⁶⁶² Pemberton (1997) p. 61

⁶⁶³ Hayward (2001) p. 487-488

⁶⁶⁴ Phillips (2006) p. xii

⁶⁶⁵ Kosmin-Lachan (1993) p. 182

period of national crisis.”⁶⁶⁶ While this makes it one of the pivotal turning points in time to be exploited by prophetic politicians, and they depict it as a moment, when the direction of the future is to be decided, there is another meaning to the moment of election as well. It is a moment, which has only a moderate influence for each individual citizen, but matters to all citizens and thus becomes a general interest. Thus, the electoral votes and statistics of them could serve as great quantitative indicators in the process of trying to interpret and ascertain the plausibility of the stories told in the course of the campaigning.

Reagan was able to shape presidential campaigns and politics for years to come. It was to a large degree a matter of his support that his vice president George H. W. Bush got elected in 1988 elections. Nevertheless, Bush was able to rally together some of the religious traditionalists, who had drifted away from Reagan due to the Donald T. Regan allegations of the role of astrology in the presidential couples’ lives.⁶⁶⁷ Bush was able to consolidate his Christian-right support for the nomination against such a religious figure as Pat Robertson, and later carried this support to the general election as well.⁶⁶⁸ When Bush was beaten by Bill Clinton in 1992, William Safire observed that “never has the name of God been so frequently invoked, and never has this or any other nation been so thoroughly blessed, as in the 1992 campaign.”⁶⁶⁹ Ironically Clinton has been called Reagan’s best pupil, because he adopted so much of Reagan’s style.⁶⁷⁰ George Lakoff has argued that religion is the one thing the Democratic Party is not able to use to their advantage and that the Republican Party repeatedly misuses it.⁶⁷¹ In this election Clinton, a Southern Baptist, managed to use very Reaganesque rhetoric and storytelling. In his address at the Georgetown University he spoke of “a new covenant” between “the people and their government.”⁶⁷² The “new covenant” became more or less a slogan for Clinton and he also used the “great crusade” expression coined by Reagan. While he undoubtedly tried to reach the votes of the evangelical and fundamentalist

⁶⁶⁶ de Tocqueville (2000) p. 127

⁶⁶⁷ Reagan (1989) asserts that all the schedules of the President had to pass the judgement of an astrologist to determine if they were suitable and especially safe. According to him this practice came into effect after the 1981 assassination attempt on Reagan by John Hinckley. Regan claims that this practice was initiated and continued due to demands from the First Lady

⁶⁶⁸ Phillips (2006) p. 187

⁶⁶⁹ Safire. Cited in Koslin-Lachan (1993) p. 158

⁶⁷⁰ White (1998) p. ix

⁶⁷¹ Lakoff (1996)

⁶⁷² Clinton (1991) Cited in Kosmin-Lachan (1993) p. 160

Protestants, who rarely vote for Democrats, his approach astonished the Republicans, who have always been more adept to use Christian imagery to their advantage. One could say that this led in the 1992 election to a veritable “Bible-race.”

Sacvan Bercovich summarized the role of Protestantism as compared to Puritanism in the America politics by writing that “Protestantism may have given modern culture its ethic, but Puritanism gave it the myth of America. And no culture, let me add, ever stood more in need of a myth.”⁶⁷³ It was the lasting legacy of Puritan thought in the American literary tradition that an idealized ideal of America sprung up,⁶⁷⁴ While Reagan put the ethic of Protestant Christianity to work on his behalf, it was this myth of America, which acted as both a tool for Reagan’s political leadership and at the same time strengthening the myth was a goal of polity. The Puritans provided the original myth, the *ur*myth Reagan extrapolated.

2.1.4. DISCIPLES OF CHRIST AND REAGAN’S PERSONAL FAITH

He was very spiritual and he believed in God, of course, and he prayed a great deal. [...] He prayed every time a plane took. He’d sit and look out of the window and he’d look lost in his thoughts but he was praying. And aides would come to him to say something and I’d wave them off, and let him have his prayers.⁶⁷⁵

-Nancy Davis Reagan

Part of my argument in this thesis is that Reagan used the mechanisms of belief as a political tool to provide more credibility to his narration. Therefore, this section deals with his own religious convictions and other beliefs. It has often been questioned if Reagan had any faith at all and that is another reason why a short look into Reagan’s inner faith, at least as he narrated it aloud, is necessary. Michael K. Deaver, a close aide of Reagan for three decades, wrote his own memoir on Reagan and chose to call it “A Different Drummer.” The title does not refer to Reagan himself, but the fact that, according to Deaver, Reagan was guided and inspired by “a profound spiritual faith that grounded him and left him with a nearly perpetual peace of mind [...] His steady sense of purpose grew from him complete

⁶⁷³ Bercovich (1993) p. 40

⁶⁷⁴ Bercovich (1993) p. 87

⁶⁷⁵ Cited in Noonan (2001) p. 98. A cynic might argue that this had something to do with Reagan’s almost pathological fear of flying which he decided to overcome during the governorship which included a lot of travel. All his trips during the General Electric years he did by train or car.

acquiescence to a drummer only he could hear.”⁶⁷⁶ Whether it should be called predestination, fatalism, or mysticism, Reagan felt called and ordained to be president and this belief gave him a solid rock to stand on mentally and emotionally, no matter what one thinks of the solidity of that argument. I do not make any claims about the inner beliefs of Reagan, but focus of the ways his beliefs were narrated aloud. Thus, what I write about Reagan’s beliefs in concerned only with the language mediated and communicated version.

Reagan’s religiosity came as a surprise to many Americans when he was elected to become president, because he rarely paraded his faith or merchandised it for political purposes outside a political office.⁶⁷⁷ Reagan privately spoke of his faith during the governorship as well and when asked if he knew the Lord Jesus or only knew “about” him, Reagan replied: “I *know* Him.” Reagan claimed that his faith is very personal and that he had had a personal experience, when he invited Christ into his life and made him a leader of his life.⁶⁷⁸ While the Governorship of California was Reagan’s dress rehearsal for the biggest role in his life and a try-out for Washington, it was also a time when he began to occasionally express his faith publicly. In his Inaugural speech he quoted Benjamin Franklin’s words about any man who would dare to bring the teachings of Jesus Christ into public office revolutionizing the world and promised to follow the example of the Prince of Peace, but would not be so presumptuous as to imply that he would do so completely.⁶⁷⁹ The same week at a prayer breakfast he said that “Faith in God is absolutely essential if a person is to do his best. Sometimes we are afraid to let people know that we rely on God. Taking this stand just seems to be a logical and proper way to begin.”⁶⁸⁰

In his presidential addresses Reagan often used expressions such as this “Prince of Peace,” probably out of respect to those, Jewry in the forefront, that do not recognize Jesus as the son of God. For Reagan personally Jesus was not only a prophet or a great teacher or philosopher, but “the promised Messiah, the Son of

⁶⁷⁶ Deaver (2003) p. 3

⁶⁷⁷ This is evident from the typescripts and handwritten originals of his gubernatorial papers and radio addresses held at the Ronald Reagan Presidential Library. The small number of evocations of Gods name is striking when compared to the presidential papers

⁶⁷⁸ Linden (1981) p. 26-27

⁶⁷⁹ Reagan (2.1.1967) Inaugural Invocation and Prayer Breakfast invocation delivered by the Reverend Donald L. Moomaw

<http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/govspeech/01021967b.htm>

⁶⁸⁰ Reagan. Cited in Linden (1981) p. 86

God come to earth to offer salvation for all mankind.”⁶⁸¹ Interestingly in all of the radio addresses Reagan gave between the governorship and the presidency only a few dealt with religious matters. The same applies to his speeches before the governorship.⁶⁸² But what he focused on, according to Mary E. Stuckey’s analysis, was “reaffirmation and purification of America and the American Dream.”⁶⁸³

The founder of Reagan’s denomination, the Disciples of Christ, was Alexander Campbell, who is described by Kelly as “a man of great scope and curiosity and a powerful and persuasive orator, Campbell was simultaneously a crusader, an educator, a theologian, a populist, and a patriot.”⁶⁸⁴ It is in a way ironic, that simultaneously as Campbell wanted to return all Christianity to the presumed practices of the early primitive church and put an end to the plenitude of religious denominations, he ended up creating a denomination of his own and thus further splitting the church. Disciples of Christ is primarily a form of restoration Christianity. Almost all of the new Christian movements have proposed a return into an early or pure New Testament Church, and the Disciples added their own touch of down-playing the importance of the Old Testament. Reformers chose names such as Christian Church, Churches of Christ and Disciples of Christ for their congregations, and their modern descendants are deeply divided among themselves, while their congregations remain difficult to distinguish from one another for an outsider.⁶⁸⁵

The boom of the Disciples began in 1832, when a majority of western and southern Christians blended with them under the leadership of Alexander Campbell, an Ulsterman, who had immigrated to the USA in 1809 and who moulded a set of distinctive doctrines and practices for the movement. In the beginning it was his father Thomas, who practically founded the Disciples movement by writing and presenting a “Declaration and Address,” as a constitution for them and a plan for achieving the unity for all churches. His argument was that the New Testament was

⁶⁸¹ Reagan (2001) p. 17. Radio address for 9.1.1978 Original to be found in Radio address, Folder Speeches and Writings – Radio Broadcast, Taping date – 1978, January 1 6 ”Christmas” Holograph 1/4, Box 17, Reagan, Ronald: Pre-presidential papers, Series I Speeches and writings, Ronald Reagan Library

⁶⁸² Box 1-44, Reagan, Ronald: Pre-presidential papers, Series I Speeches and writings, Ronald Reagan Library

⁶⁸³ Stuckey (1989) p. 17

⁶⁸⁴ Kelly (1984) p. 144

⁶⁸⁵ Conkin (1997) p. 1 Indeed, it was in 1830 that the Disciples of Christ and Christians broke from each other. See Conkin (1997) p. 25-26

to be followed in what it prescribed and to resist innovation in areas, where it offered no guidelines. In a similar vein the Disciples should have no terms of communion, except those expressly taught by Jesus. Later on the Disciples turned this advice into a formula: “Where the Scriptures speak, we speak; where the Scriptures are silent, we are silent.”⁶⁸⁶ One of the things Reagan certainly shared in faith with the father of his church, was the belief that the Bible was humanly written, but divinely authenticated. Where their views differ probably the most, is in the fact that Campbell advised Christians not to take an active role in politics, because he considered it to be a corrupting practice.⁶⁸⁷

Alexander Campbell formulated his beliefs mainly between 1813 and 1823. The movement had a slow start and a rift existed between the father and the son. The former still wanted a Christian unity, but the latter was bent on creating a new sect. Alexander wrote and spoke for the remitting role of baptism and adult immersion and claimed that the Holy Spirit was a gift solely for Christians and applied to sinners only through the Word it had informed. One had to read or hear the New Testament to gain the conviction that Jesus was the Messiah, and then reasonably and trustingly accept his lordship. Only then came the repentance, baptism, and commitment to Christian obedience, that made one a member of the Church and enabled him to receive the help of the Spirit. Alexander Campbell further denied ministerial authority based on university training and affirmed the complete separation of church and state and urged his followers to avoid participation in benevolent or missionary societies.⁶⁸⁸

Campbell was a millennialist and had growing hopes for the coming millennial age. His idea of “millennium” was a thousand-year period of great happiness for the church, but he did not believe that this great age would be inaugurated by the miraculous return of Christ. Like Reagan, he rejoiced of all examples of material progress America made and despite periods of disengagement from American party politics an enthusiast for American democracy. Whatever else Campbell was, he was certainly not a coherent dogmatist or theologian. He can be quoted to different effect according to time and place, but usually he looked forward to religious, moral, and political reforms and for him the Anglo-Saxon civilization

⁶⁸⁶ Conkin (1997) p. 13-16

⁶⁸⁷ Kelly (1984) p. 146

⁶⁸⁸ Conkin (1997) p. 20-23. Against this background it is interesting to note as Wills does that the Disciples set up so many universities they had a hard time trying to finance them. See Wills (2000)

was the hope of the world.⁶⁸⁹ In this matter he saw eye to eye with Reagan who repeatedly claimed that,

America has already succeeded where so many other historic attempts at freedom have failed. Already, we've made this cherished land the last best hope of mankind. It's up to us, in our generation, to carry on the hallowed task.⁶⁹⁰

Campbell saw that a contractual sense of authority, obligation, and allegiance confirmed the cohesion of the society and enabled it to perform its duties, while at the same time the institution of civil government was legitimated. Politics was undergirded by an absolute dependence in the sacred sphere, but that sphere did not dominate politics; it merely provided authorization.⁶⁹¹ Campbell wanted to keep the realm of politics separate from the realm of religion. The only connection was that the religious realm gave the ultimate authorization to the political realm. While the people patiently waited for the Second Coming, they had allowed themselves the more earthly blessings of responsible self-government. Generally in Christianity politics has been regarded as the “necessary buffering of the earthly city against chaos, a temporal space to be protracted as needed for the kingdom to come.”⁶⁹² Reagan was not so naïve in his beliefs that he did not see the corruptive side of the political world. He once even remarked that “someone once said that politics is the second oldest profession. I'm beginning to think it bears resemblance to the first.”⁶⁹³ While it would be natural for us in Europe to label Disciples of Christ, or the Church of Christ as they sometimes call themselves, just one of the multitude of American sects, already by 1950's the Disciples had long before established themselves as a respected church, indeed one among “the pillars of Protestantism.”⁶⁹⁴

It is probable that one of the greatest influences of Reagan's personal faith, his mother, had been later in life a convert into Disciples of Christ and thus born again, like Reagan himself. There are arguments supporting it, like the fact that Nelle Reagan's proficiency in dancing would have been hard to obtain as a lifelong member of a church that disapproved of such an activity. More convincing are the records that she was baptized as a Disciple by total immersion in Tampico, Illinois

⁶⁸⁹ Conkin (1997) p. 26-27

⁶⁹⁰ Reagan (23.3.1982) Remarks in New York City on Receiving the Charles Evans Hughes Gold Medal of the National Conference of Christians and Jews. s. 361

⁶⁹¹ Kelly (1984) p. 151

⁶⁹² Kelly (1984) p. 191

⁶⁹³ (RR) "Viewpoint, Disc 75-04, Taping date February 23 1975, Box 39, Subseries C, Reagan, Ronald: Pre-presidential papers, Series I Speeches and writings, Ronald Reagan Library

⁶⁹⁴ Herberg (1960) p. 122

on March 27th in 1910, less than a year before Reagan was born, and undoubtedly had the ardour of a convert in her religiosity.⁶⁹⁵ Reagan belonged to the same church as his mother, while his older brother, Neil, was a Catholic after their father. When Reagan moved to Hollywood in the 1930, he joined the Hollywood Beverly Christian Church which was also a Disciples church.⁶⁹⁶ He did not constantly attend Disciples churches later in life, but nevertheless listed himself as a member of that nomination.⁶⁹⁷ Reagan, for example chose to join later on the Bel Air Presbyterian church in Los Angeles, but was simultaneously a student of the type of Protestant sects that believed in and debated about prophecies, and that led to a belief in Armageddon and other phenomenal events.⁶⁹⁸ He discussed with Billy Graham among others, whether the next great event of world history would be the second coming of Christ and believed that the founding of Israel as a state in 1948 was one of the biblical signs that the world is entering its last stage in history.⁶⁹⁹

Reagan was introduced by his mother-in-law to Billy Graham in the 1950s and the two men became friends. This friendship was to remain all throughout Reagan's political career and especially after Graham's disillusionment with Nixon Reagan became his main contact in the political world.⁷⁰⁰ Graham visited Reagan in the White House informally many times during the two terms and spent nights there as well.⁷⁰¹ The senior pastor of the Bel Air Presbyterian Church Donn D. Moomaw was a central figure in Reagan's life, but he seemed to have the role of a personal friend at least in the same degree as a religious figure. Moomaw was present and especially mentioned in many of Reagan's presidential public occasions such as the dedication ceremony of his presidential library, or his first inauguration and was given a role in a presidential committee for physical education, since he was an ex-footballer. Moomaw was a personal friend to Reagan and allegedly shared many moments of prayer and theological discussion with him. Undoubtedly, given this

⁶⁹⁵ Cannon (2003) p. 14. Originally the source is Willis (2000) p. 21. Willis made a very thorough research into Reagan's past and surely is one of the best sources of issues related to Reagan's early life.

⁶⁹⁶ Reagan's mother joined the same church after he and Jack moved to California in 1937. See Wallis (2000) p. 29

⁶⁹⁷ Kengor (2004) p. 49

⁶⁹⁸ Reeves (2005) p. 74 As Kengor notes, Reagan joined the Bel Air Presbyterian after his marriage to Nancy. Kengor (2004) p. 117

⁶⁹⁹ D'Souza (1997) p. 213-214

⁷⁰⁰ Reagan way by no means the only associate Graham had in the world of politics, while naturally his presidency made him the most important. Graham had friends in the Reagan administration as well, for example Alexander Haig. See Haig (1984) p. 69

⁷⁰¹ As an example, Reagan (2007) p. 31. Diary entry 17.7.1981

close relationship, Moomaw's ideas of Christianity as well as of political and social issues had an effect on Reagan's narration. Indeed, Moomaw claims that many of the illustrations used in Reagan's gubernatorial campaign speeches originated in his sermons.⁷⁰² Moomaw also claimed that he and Reagan "have spent many hours together on our knees."⁷⁰³ Cardinal Cooke was another religious figure who was a close personal friend of Reagan. Probably one of the reasons was their shared zeal for pro-life causes. Their meeting in 1981 after the assassination attempt was perhaps the most important between the two men. Mike Deaver arranged the Cardinal to fly to Washington and he had a one-hour conversation with Reagan in the White House. It was after this meeting that Reagan voiced his idea that "whatever time I may have left is left for Him."⁷⁰⁴ One is tempted to label this as the moment when Reagan became a prophetic politician. As Lindblom writes, "a prophet knows that he has never chosen the way himself: he has been chosen by the deity. He points to a particular experience in his life, through which it has become clear to him, that the deity has a special purpose with him and has designated him to perform a special mission."⁷⁰⁵ But we cannot verify this thought, since Reagan never spoke publicly of this experience, or of any other, when he would have felt being specially chosen for anything.

When it comes to publicly proclaiming his faith, Reagan did not shy away from that. He answered the questions, but attempted to mellow down his religiosity somewhat. Once Reagan commented that,

Well, I was raised to have a faith and a belief and have been a member of a church since I was a small boy. In our particular church, we did not use that term, "born again," so I don't know whether I would fit that -- that particular term. But I have -- thanks to my mother, God rest her soul -- the firmest possible belief and faith in God. And I don't believe -- I believe, I should say, as Lincoln once said, that I could not -- I would be the most stupid man in the world if I thought I could confront the duties of the office I hold if I could not turn to someone who was stronger and greater than all others. And I do resort to prayer.⁷⁰⁶

Reagan was more cautious than Carter four years earlier in ascertaining his faith. While he has in his private life and letters claimed to have been born again, here he evades the question by claiming that his "particular" church did not use that

⁷⁰² Kengor (2004) p. 119-120 discusses Moomaw's meaning to Reagan.

⁷⁰³ Linden (1981) p. 90

⁷⁰⁴ For more info of the relationship between the two men see Deaver (2003) p. 145-147

⁷⁰⁵ Lindblom (1962) p. 6

⁷⁰⁶ Reagan (7.10.1984) Debate Between the President and Former Vice President Walter F. Mondale in Louisville, Kentucky <http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1984/100784a.htm>

expression. It is clearly an evasion, since personal faith is a central aspect of the Disciples of Christ. They Christ practice baptism by immersion and usually these baptisms occur between the ages of twelve to fifteen. Therefore every member of the church needs to be “born again.” Such a strong point to make publicly might have sounded alarming to those who saw Reagan as too closely connected to the Christian right. Despite his strong inner faith, Reagan did not want to take religion up as a subject in the campaign of 1984, because of the fear of affiliation with the political right-wing Christians. It is worth noticing, however, that he does not deny his faith either. Such a move would have been even more damaging than playing up the role of the religion. Reagan was not even the first Disciple to become a president. In the election of 1880 a sometime Disciples minister James A. Garfield was elected, which was a source of pride for the church.⁷⁰⁷

Nevertheless, elsewhere Reagan claims that he felt “called” and had “a personal experience when I invited Christ into my life.”⁷⁰⁸ Reagan remembers being immersed at the age of twelve⁷⁰⁹ but was in fact baptised at the age of eleven. Later in life he claimed to have had the experience of “being born again.”⁷¹⁰ This is not in the American context as spectacular as it may sound to a European. Jimmy Carter had already before his presidency claimed to have been “born again” and thus took the role of the first president of the United States of America to do so.⁷¹¹ In the mid-1980s some 30 percent of American respondents to the Gallup Poll told that they had been “born again.”⁷¹²

One could speculate about the importance of childhood experiences in the development of personality, if Reagan did not give evidence of the contrary himself. While the few years in Tampico were his “Huck Finn years”⁷¹³, in was the years spent in Dixon, which provided Reagan with “faith [that] is unshakeable” and “peace beyond description.”⁷¹⁴ There nevertheless seems to be no need to speculate, whether Alexander Campbell had an influence on Reagan or not. The writings of

⁷⁰⁷ Conkin (1997) p. 37

⁷⁰⁸ Kengor (2004) p. 17

⁷⁰⁹ Reagan (1990) p. 32

⁷¹⁰ Reagan (1976) in a letter. See Kinner-Anderson-Anderson (2003) p. 256

⁷¹¹ We are talking about a president publicly making the claim of being born again. Carter was certainly not afraid of expressing his beliefs. He was the first US President, as so far the only one, that has officially reported a UFO sighting.

⁷¹² Phillips (2006) p. 106

⁷¹³ Reagan (1984) a letter in Kinner-Anderson-Anderson (2003) p. 5

⁷¹⁴ Reagan (1973) a letter in Kinner-Anderson-Anderson (2003) p. 278-279

Campbell were introduced to Reagan by the preacher father of his high-school sweetheart Margaret Cleaver. Reverend Ben Cleaver emphasized God's plan for America and continued to be an important figure in Reagan's life until his death. Reagan called him "much responsible" for the fact that his "faith is unshakeable"⁷¹⁵ Reagan's relationship with the preacher's daughter started in high school and by all accounts the relationship was a serious one. After high school both young people left for Eureka College, which was to become an object of life-time affection for Reagan. The college was very small, under funded, and not very competitive academically, but most important of all, it was a college of the Disciples of Christ. The college life left its imprints on Reagan and would shape the course of his life, but the relationship with Margaret Cleaver did not last. It withered away after Reagan had graduated and was working in Des Moines and "Muggs" had become a teacher.⁷¹⁶

Nevertheless, the Disciples of Christ as a denomination, even with these key personalities excluded, had an impact in Reagan's future vision that connected religion and politics. As Kengor notes, the nineteenth century Disciples often interpreted America's destiny prophetically. Their faith in the American nation was identified closely with their Christian faith. They often saw America's role as "a democratic mission to save the world from autocrats."⁷¹⁷ Herberg saw the Disciples of Christ as a group that "was entirely American, emerging in response to American conditions."⁷¹⁸ Many of the themes of the Reagan presidency had been already discussed in the Disciples of Christ church for one hundred and fifty years. The "shining" city Reagan spoke of, was certainly the same city and "beacon of light" Campbell had advocated as a "light unto nations."⁷¹⁹ These very same expressions were often used by Reagan to describe America and his influences came from the Christianity of his youth, which had remained undiluted throughout the years.⁷²⁰ For Alexander Campbell, the moving speeches he made of the City on a Hill depicted his belief that God had chosen Americans to fulfil a mission on earth. According to Campbell, God's message could be understood by rational study and discussion and

⁷¹⁵ Reagan (1973) a letter in Kinner-Anderson-Anderson (2003) p. 278-279

⁷¹⁶ Wills (2000) p. 134. It was indeed Cleaver who broke the engagement.

⁷¹⁷ Kengor (2004) p. 34

⁷¹⁸ Herberg (1960) p. 104

⁷¹⁹ Kengor (2004) p. 34 This is essentially the same idea of "light to shine before men" as in Matthew 5: 16

⁷²⁰ See for example "the beacon of hope for all mankind" in Reagan (24.2.1982) Remarks on the Caribbean Basin Initiative to the Permanent Council of the Organization of American States. s. 215

in his theology humanity's destiny was in human hands and progress in all sides of life was promoted.⁷²¹ As I will later on discuss in more depth, progress was a central part of Reagan's message as well, and the fact that destiny is ours to shape, is one of the cornerstones of his prophetic politics. Hughes writes that the concepts of Manifest Destiny and the Millennial Nation find their clearest expression in the writings of Campbell who collapsed the myths into one unifying vision.⁷²² In his words "Campbell typified the sentiments of an entire generation of Americans. For those Americans, the millennium would be a golden age of peace and tranquillity precisely because Anglo-American civilization, the Christian faith and the English language would dominate it."⁷²³ This vision as Hughes describes it is very close to the vision Reagan had for the world with America "that still offers that last, best hope of mankind."⁷²⁴

Reagan joined the Disciples officially by immersion after reading a book called "That Printer of Udell's."⁷²⁵ This book is an almost forgotten example of Christian literature and tells a story of a man from a humble background, who through hard work and even harder belief makes it in life. It is often referred to by Reagan as his favourite book along with the Bible and he himself claims that it was the book, which stirred the decision in him to join the Disciples of Christ and be baptized and even further, that its author "set me on a course I've tried to follow to this day."⁷²⁶ "That Printer of Udell's" had a very deep impact on Reagan and one

⁷²¹ Pemberton (1997) p. 9

⁷²² Hughes (2003) p. 122

⁷²³ Hughes (2003) p. 123

⁷²⁴ Reagan (25.8.1983) Remarks at the Hispanic Economic Outlook Preview Luncheon in Los Angeles, California <http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1983/82583b.htm>

⁷²⁵ Wright (1903) The hero of the book is Dick Walker who after his mother's death flees his violent drunkard of a father. He becomes a tramp, wandering around until he walks into a church which becomes something of an anchor in his life and man named Udell hires him as an apprentice printer. Dick Walker grows up, becoming a Christian but not attaching himself to any denomination and being a "practical" Christian. In his adulthood he comes up with a plan to save Boyd City, the city he lives in from moral decadence. He sees himself as inspired by God to do the work of Christ and embarks on a mission of social welfare which distinguished between the deserving and undeserving. His attempts take place on a local level of grass-roots initiatives and ultimately, as is fitting for such an "educational" book, bars are closed down and whores acquire new careers while church attendance is soaring. Even Walker himself decides to join a church, and, a practicing and good Christian that he is, he naturally joins the Disciples of Christ, marries a good girl from the church and ultimately is sent to do his good deeds in Washington D.C. as a representative elected from Boyd City. There are a lot of interesting comparisons with Reagan's own life, if one chooses to read the book looking for them. On this see Kengor (2004) p. 18-26 who practically casts Reagan into the role of Walker.

⁷²⁶ Reagan (1990) p. 32. The quotation from Reagan (1984), a letter in Kinner-Anderson-Anderson (2003) p.6. It has to be said that his favourite book keeps on changing, but always it is something he had read in his youth. Another example is a book called "Northern Trails" which, according to Reagan, gave him his love of the outdoors. On this see Reagan (3.11.1984) Written Responses to

can speculate, as Paul Kengor does, that Reagan associated himself with the hero in the novel, Dick Walker. The fictive Walker was “a follower of no creed but Christ,” and able to “believe in the truths that Christ teaches” without “some denominational harness.”⁷²⁷ Reagan was himself later in life never particularly attached to any specific nomination, but saw Christ as a central figure in his life and was beyond doubt deeply devout in his nature.

For the Disciples of Christ “the Bible alone is the Bible only, in word and deed, in profession and practice, and this alone can reform the world.”⁷²⁸ Alexander Campbell wrote that “the words of the bible contain all the ideas in it.”⁷²⁹ But according to him the human intelligence has to play a part since “the words and sentences of the Bible are to be translated, interpreted and understood.”⁷³⁰ Thus the Disciple becomes a story recipient, with the responsibility on translating the God’s will from the metanarrative the Bible constitutes.

Campbell saw the Bible as “to the intellectual and moral world of man what sun is to the planets of our system, - the fountain and source of light and life, spiritual and eternal. There is not a spiritual idea in the whole of human race that is not drawn from the Bible.”⁷³¹ Reagan believed alike that the Bible was of divine origin and a source for wisdom and guidance.

Can we resolve to reach, learn and try to heed the greatest message ever written – God’s word and the Holy Bible. Inside its pages lie all the answers to all the problems that man has ever known.⁷³² Reagan considered the Bible to be the complete set of guidelines for all of the problems one faces in his or her life. While he calls for everyone to study this “greatest message ever written”, it must be stressed that according to his faith, the Bible does not read literally, but human intelligence has to be used in translating its meaning. For Reagan this process of translation produced for example a belief in creationism. He seemed to believe that if indeed the world and its inhabitants were

Questions Submitted by France Soir Magazine
<http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1984/110384a.htm>

⁷²⁷ Wright (1903) cited in Kengor (2004) p. 21

⁷²⁸ Campbell (1988) p. 77

⁷²⁹ Campbell (1988) p. 79

⁷³⁰ Campbell (1988) p. 79

⁷³¹ Campbell (1988) p. 79

⁷³² Reagan (3.2.1983) National Prayer Breakfast s. 122-123

not created in six days, at least it should be taught in schools as a viable alternative to the theory of evolution.⁷³³

I'm accused of being simplistic at times with some of the problems that confront us. But I've often wondered: Within the covers of that single Book are all the answers to all the problems that face us today, if we'd only look there. ``The grass withereth, the flower fadeth, but the word of our God shall stand forever."⁷³⁴ [...] It's my firm belief that the enduring values, as I say, presented in its pages have a great meaning for each of us and for our nation. The Bible can touch our hearts, order our minds, refresh our souls.⁷³⁵

Reagan quotes here Isaiah, who seems to be one of his favourite prophets. The quotation refers to people being as grass, because the spirit of the Lord bloweth on it and makes it wither, while the word of God is eternal and unchanging. The Bible, to which Reagan in this case refers to only as "Book", could give answers both to the fact that he himself is simplistic in his approach to problems and the problems themselves. Reagan tells that his simplistic approach is due to the fact that he is a "good Christian" and that the answers to all the problems can be found just studying the Bible. Reagan seems to try to spread his personal faith among his story recipients by asking them to study the Bible as well. The "enduring values" presented in the Bible have meaning for both America and Americans and some of those values have indeed become American values as well in Reagan's story logic.

I believe that faith and religion play a critical role in the political life of our nation and always has. [...] those who created our country, the founding fathers, and mothers, understood that there is a divine order which transcends the human order. They saw the state, in fact as a form of moral order and felt that the bedrock of moral order is religion.⁷³⁶

When Reagan was asked to reveal his favourite Bible verse, he quoted John 3:16 from memory.⁷³⁷ Almost equally treasured was II Chronicles 7:14.⁷³⁸ Reagan

⁷³³ Reagan spoke of his creationistic beliefs during the 1980 campaign for Presidency on the 22nd August to an audience in Dallas participating in a "Roundtable National Affairs Briefing." Reagan argued that the theory of evolution "is a scientific theory only. And in recent years it has been challenged in the world of science and is not believed in the scientific community to be as infallible as it once was. I think that recent discoverines down through the years have pointed up great flaws in it." Los Angeles Times Aug 23rd 1980 A1-A2. The descriptive name of the article by Richard Bergholtz was *Reagan Tries to Cement His Ties With TV Evangelicals*. While the composition of the audience undoubtedly was a reason why Reagan expressed this belief he kept out of his narration throughout the eight-year Presidency, it cannot be discounted as merely telling his audience what it wanted to hear. The implications of admitting to such a belief were potentially extremely harmful to a presidential candidate and the PR people of the Reagan campaign encouraged the future president to avoid such controversial opinions.

⁷³⁴ Isaiah 40:8

⁷³⁵ Reagan (31.1.1983) Remarks at the Annual Convention of the National Religious Broadcasters <http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1983/13183b.htm>

⁷³⁶ Reagan (1984) Ecumenical Prayer Breakfast (23.8.1984) p. 109

⁷³⁷ Kengor (2004) p. 106. The text of John 3:16 reads " For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life."

quoted this verse often in his presidential speeches and had used this very verse in his inauguration, when the president places his hand on an open bible for the swearing. The Bible that was used on the occasion belonged originally to Reagan's mother, who had written next to this verse the words "A most wonderful verse for healing the nation."⁷³⁹ Reagan further claimed in a letter that the verse "is ever present in my mind."⁷⁴⁰

If my remarks were a sermon, my text would be lines from the 126th psalm: "We were like those who dreamed. Now our mouth is filled with laughter and our tongue with shouts of joy. The Lord has done great things to us. We are glad."⁷⁴¹

Despite the elevated importance of the Bible for the Disciples of Christ, for Reagan even the Holy Bible does not seem to be a source to quote verbatim. He omits half of the second verse, where it is said among the nations that the Lord has been good to them.⁷⁴² The sanctity of the Bible is not something that would prevent Reagan from manipulating it as well. Cannon argues that "before a microphone or on stage he lived in a world of make-believe in which it was legitimate to invent or alter a story for dramatic or political purposes."⁷⁴³ For Reagan, a good story was the first and foremost matter and even the Scriptures had to bend to better fit his narration. Reagan's beliefs about the sanctity of the Bible surpassed those of Campbell in his narrative practices.

⁷³⁸ If my people, Which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and forgive their sin, and will heal their land.

⁷³⁹ See for example Kengor (2004) p. 158

⁷⁴⁰ Reagan (1982) in Skinner-Anderson-Anderson (2003) p. 654

⁷⁴¹ Reagan (27.1.1981) Remarks at the Welcoming Ceremony for the Freed American Hostages s. 41

⁷⁴² Psalm 126. 1-3. The Holy Bible, King James Version. I have not been able to find the translation of the Bible that Reagan uses in this occasion, if his quote in fact is exact. I have made the decision of using the King James Version of the Bible as my reference and if I should use another translation, it will henceforth be included in the footnotes. From the KJV I shall only use chapter and verse. The reason for choosing the King James Version is its association with the American Protestants in general, since Kennedy was the first and only catholic president so far. The King James Version is the one American presidents, including Reagan, and the majority of Christians are familiar with. The version I am using, however, does not have the 17th century introduction that describes the pope as "that man of sin." My choice is not that biased. Naturally there are many translations, each associated with different denominations but essentially the Bible is a "religious and not a sectarian book." Feldman (2005) p. 81-85. It even seems that for Reagan the preferred translation of the Bible was the King James Version since he argued that this translation was "taking the people to the religion and lifting them with a beauty of language that has outlived the centuries. Radio address, Folder Speeches and Writings – Radio Broadcast, Taping date – 1977, September 6 "The Bible" Edited Typescript 2/4, Box 13, Reagan, Ronald: Pre-presidential papers, Series I Speeches and writings, Ronald Reagan Library. Based on this one can argue that for Reagan the importance was not only in the message since it was the same in the Good News Bible and the traditional KJV but in the language, and they way things were told. This is just another piece of evidence how much value Reagan place on good storytelling; it could surpass the actual message itself.

⁷⁴³ Cannon (2003) p. 45

For Reagan the foundation for all community life is religion. Religion is the factor that creates moral order in the world and state is a being in which moral order takes its form. Therefore if a religion is a prerequisite of a moral order to exist in a form of a state, the state must be founded on the basis supplied by religion. This is the way Reagan's story tells us the Founding Fathers thought and Reagan tells us he follows only their thoughts. There can be no moral order or even statehood in the case of the Soviet Union, because religion is, according to Reagan's narrative, outlawed there.

It was broadly acknowledged that religious leaders had a right to and a duty to speak out on the issues of the day. They held a place of respect and any politician who spoke to or of them with a lack of respect would not long survive in the political arena. It was acknowledged then [the era of John F Kennedy] that religion held a special place, occupied a special territory in the hearts of the citizenry.⁷⁴⁴

Despite the reference to the era of JFK's presidency, the narrative seems to point out to Biblical times or at least times further back in history. Religious leaders had the obligation and necessity to speak of "the issues of the day." These indicate to all matters social and political. In this sense the concept of prophetic politics seems to be fulfilled in the way Jim Wallis calls for.⁷⁴⁵ But Reagan refers only to religious leaders and in fact seems to empty out the possibility of a political leader to participate in the discourse in any contradicting manner. Whatever the religious leaders, or prophets, point out cannot be denied. If a contradiction can be made, it must be made delicately and with special tact in order not to disrespect them. The respect people held for religious leaders, according to Reagan's telling, made the political leaders in a way subservient to them. The story world construction by sacred stories in the form of prophesying was given to the religious leaders and the political leaders have to abide to their story logic. This seems rather strange for Reagan to claim but he continues

The truth is, politics and morality are inseparable. And as morality's foundation is religion, religion and politics are necessarily related. We need religion as a guide. We need it because we are imperfect. And our government needs the church because only those humble enough to admit they're sinners can bring democracy the tolerance it requires in order to survive.⁷⁴⁶

⁷⁴⁴ Reagan (1984) Ecumenical Prayer Breakfast (23.8.1984) p. 110

⁷⁴⁵ Wallis (2004) p. 72-74

⁷⁴⁶ Reagan (1984) Ecumenical Prayer Breakfast (23.8.1984) p. 111

Put like this, the religious leaders have an essence of good in them that enables them to talk of matters political in an unblemished way. The imperfection of the people causes the political sphere to need religious guidelines to operate for the common good. While the priest, prophet or any other religious leader is able to point out matters of right and wrong in politics, the common politician should, because of his imperfect nature, stay out of the religious realm. It is necessary to note here that since Reagan is a member of the Disciples of Christ, he does not believe in institutionalized clergy and on the other hand distances himself from politicians “as usual”. He, or any other true believer, should bring religious matters into politics, since the government needs the church and not the other way around. Church is strong enough to stand on its own, but it must steady the political structure. The way a person practices his religion is not of great importance, but the same moral arguments, stands, and obligations should exist both in the private and the public life, which are influenced by religion.

If you practise a religion, whether you’re Catholic, Protestant, Jewish or guided by some other faith, then your private life will be influenced by a sense of moral obligation. And so, too, will your public life. One affects the other.⁷⁴⁷

Religion should play a part in shaping the politics, but Reagan seems to deny the right of politics to shape religious belief.

The churches of America do not exist by the grace of the state. [...] They have their own vantage point, their own authority. Religion is its own realm. It makes its own claims.⁷⁴⁸

This seems to somewhat differ from Reagan’s usual storyline. The Church and the State are separated and that is the way it should be for Reagan, but it is unusual for him to separate religion itself from the political life, since this is not what he typically advocates. The state has no say in matters of religion, but since religion is the basis of moral order, it should with its own authority speak out on political issues. It is not a state church Reagan calls for, but active participation by all religious leaders in discussion on faith and values that should guide politics.

I’ve always believed that we were, each of us, put here for a reason, that there is a plan, somehow a divine plan for all of us. I know now that whatever days are left to me belong to Him.⁷⁴⁹

Reagan had privately talked of the same conviction earlier, but this was the first public acclamation that God had saved him in the assassination attempt for a

⁷⁴⁷ Reagan (1984) Ecumenical Prayer Breakfast (23.8.1984) p. 111

⁷⁴⁸ Reagan (1984) Ecumenical Prayer Breakfast (23.8.1984) p. 111

⁷⁴⁹ Reagan (4.2.1982) Remarks at the Annual National Prayer Breakfast. s.109

purpose. All his days belong to the Lord and this is the new zest of Reagan's story. According to his story logic, God had a plan for him and his survival only proved that his task is not done. He commits the rest of his life to pursuing the vision of global freedom he has so long advocated, and the mere fact he lives on, is proof for the "doubting Thomases" that he is indeed doing God's work under His protection. Reagan refers to a "divine plan" often in his speeches and it is evident that in his story world at least God has a plan for every one of us. People were God's instruments and He had a plan for everybody. In his autobiography "An American Life", Reagan makes at least four references to the "God's plan" for himself.⁷⁵⁰ This is not arrogance or self-centeredness, he simply believed that there was a plan for everyone and his plan happened to include things like the presidency. All things happened for a reason and this reason had its origins in God. Reagan felt more profoundly after the assassination attempt that he is doing God's work, because God's plan for him did not allow him to die.

In the words of his daughter Patti Reagan, "He talked to God all the time. It didn't mean that he was any more special in God's eyes or that he believed that. [...] He just had conversations with God [...] he would just tell me sometimes, 'Well, I asked God about this and this is what he said back to me.'"⁷⁵¹ While it would be easy to use a citation like this to try to argue that Reagan saw himself as a prophet in the manner Moses was to the people of Israel, to do so would be erroneous. Joseph Ratzinger claims that the root of the prophetic element is in the interaction with God a person has. A prophet is "talking with Him as a friend."⁷⁵² Reagan did not consider himself to have such a direct access to God that His will would be spelled out to him in detail at the very instance the need for guidance arose. However, he saw himself as advancing God's plan on Earth for all humankind, but the plan was to be understood through prayer and intellect. This great plan for humankind included freedom and liberty, but on a more personal level, nobody could know what the plan included. "It isn't given to us to know or understand God's plan for each one of us – we simply must have faith in his infinite wisdom and mercy knowing that he has a purpose."⁷⁵³

⁷⁵⁰ Reagan (1990) p. 49, 57, 70, 123

⁷⁵¹ Patti Davis. Cited in Noonan (2001) p. 154-155

⁷⁵² Ratzinger (2007) p. viii

⁷⁵³ Reagan (2001) p. 85. Radio address 8.11.1977

It is important to note, however, that the existence of God's plan did not mean that everything was predetermined. During his Governorship he told Oakland Tribune that

There is nothing automatic about God's will. I think it is very plain that we are given a certain control of our destiny because we have a chance to choose. We are given a set of rules or guidelines in the Bible by which to live and it is up to us to decide whether we will abide by them or not.⁷⁵⁴

God does not force his plan on any individual. Everybody is free to make choices of their own. This fits the concept of prophetic politics excellently, since if everything was predestined, there would be no room or indeed even need for politics at all. God gives individuals only guidance and it is finally up to them to act accordingly with His will and fulfil his plan. What then did this divine plan include for Reagan? Certainly the fall of the Communist system was a part of it. According to long-time aide William P. Clarke, Reagan had fully expected communism to fall in his lifetime, but the credit was not his. Reagan claimed that the fall of the Berlin wall and ultimately communism itself was "part of the Divine Plan, teamwork, and God's Will."⁷⁵⁵ No credit belonged to Reagan. His administration worked as a team to carry out the Divine Will, but they were mere instruments for its use.

It has been argued in many occasions that Reagan was not a religious person, because he attended church so seldom during his presidency. This is a misunderstanding, since Reagan's reluctance to attend church services derived greatly from the fact that the extra safety measures, such as arriving in a motorcade or having sniffer dogs search the church, would have caused discomfort for the other churchgoers. In the beginning of his presidency Reagan felt that some answer must be sought to the problem of not attending church.⁷⁵⁶ But at the same time he wished for God to realize that he felt as if he was in a temple, when being out in the "beautiful forest & countryside."⁷⁵⁷ He reflects the same idea in a radio address claiming that "standing in one of the cathedral-like groves of [Redwood] trees is a moving experience and one can feel very close to God and very humble."⁷⁵⁸ Reagan's ranch, Rancho del Cielo was, according to Judge William Clark, "an open

⁷⁵⁴ Reagan. Cited in Linden (1981) p. 90-91

⁷⁵⁵ Clark. Cited in Kengor (2004) p. 215

⁷⁵⁶ Reagan (2007) p. 36. Diary entry 6.9.1981

⁷⁵⁷ Reagan (2007) p. 41. Diary entry 4.10.1981

⁷⁵⁸ Radio address, Folder Speeches and Writings – Radio Broadcast, Taping date – 1977, Apr 13 "Redwoods" Edited Typescript 2/4, Box 8, Reagan, Ronald: Pre-presidential papers, Series I Speeches and writings, Ronald Reagan Library

cathedral” to him and Reagan said that “It casts a spell [...] I think of a scripture line, ‘I look to the hills from whence cometh my strength.’”⁷⁵⁹ The numerous times Reagan spent in his ranch during his presidency had a special importance to him. The ranch was a source of inner, spiritual strength for Reagan, not merely a vacation spot. It could be argued, that the God Reagan believed in had at least some aspect of the Nature’s God, but it is more likely that Reagan as a long-time outdoorsman just saw the beauty of the nature as one more example of the omnipotence of God.

There has been a lot of talk about Reagan’s belief in astrology, which was revealed to the public by Donald T. Regan in his autobiography, where he claimed that practically every move and decision the Reagan’s made, was cleared in advance by a San Francisco astrologer Joan Quigley, so that certain days were declared bad or dangerous and others favourable for action.⁷⁶⁰ When confronted by the press on his beliefs in astrology, Reagan repeatedly claimed that it did not affect his policymaking or even his schedules as Regan had claimed. Reagan’s explanation was that it was more or less Nancy Reagan’s worry about him after he had been shot that she wanted to get over the traumatic experience and know “what does it look like now” occasionally. Reagan claimed that “we made no decisions on it, and we are not binding our lives to this [astrology]. And I don’t mean to offend anyone who does believe in it or who engages in it seriously.”⁷⁶¹ When asked directly, whether Reagan himself believed in it, the answer was direct but evasive; “I don’t guide my life by it, but I won’t answer the question the other way because I don’t know enough about it to say is there something to it or not.”⁷⁶² After Regan, many others started talking as well, old acquaintances as well as astrologers, and it is practically undeniable that astrology did play a large part in both scheduling and even creating the Reagan era politics. Reagan had dabbled with astrology for 30 years or more and thus the claim of “not knowing enough” sounds incredible.⁷⁶³ Larry Berman calls Reagan’s relationship to astrology “more than a casual interest.”⁷⁶⁴ Reagan was inaugurated as the Governor of California at midnight. Personally he claimed that it was because he wanted the first possible moment to take over the governorship and

⁷⁵⁹ Reagan. Cited in Noonan (2001) p. 105

⁷⁶⁰ Regan (1989)

⁷⁶¹ Reagan (17.5.1988) Remarks and a Question-and-Answer Session with Reporters.
<http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1988/051788b.htm>

⁷⁶² Reagan (17.5.1988) Remarks and a Question-and-Answer Session with Reporters.
<http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1988/051788b.htm>

⁷⁶³ Reeves (2005) p. 455-456

⁷⁶⁴ Berman (1990) p. 5

thus prevent his predecessor from burdening him with supposedly corrupt appointments. If the former Governor Pat Brown had wanted to do that, he would have had over two months to make his appointments. Other explanations Reagan used in different times to explain the odd hour of his swearing in were that there were several football bowl games on television and he did not want to interfere with those and that since the previous administration ends at midnight he did not want to leave the state without a governor for even a few hours.⁷⁶⁵ Many people, including the former Governor Pat Brown, suggest the reason for this midnight ceremony to lie in the involvement of Jeanne Dixon, who was Mrs. Reagan's astrologer.⁷⁶⁶ Wills argues that the timing indeed was due to recommendations from astrologers but that originally the meaning was to startle by being sworn in as soon as possible. Thus Reagan could be seen "responding to new winds of inspiration but not to magi."⁷⁶⁷

There is no doubt that Nancy Reagan believed in astrology and found this belief to be sufficiently in unison so as not to collide with her religious beliefs. Perhaps Reagan found room in his religious beliefs for astrology as well. But it is more likely that his interest in the subject was less profound.⁷⁶⁸ In his diaries Reagan vehemently denies the astrology allegations by claiming that "We have never seen her in our lives & don't know her [Dixon] at all."⁷⁶⁹ In this particular case it might not do to believe Reagan, since as Reagan alleged it was Nancy who conferred with the astrologist and Reagan did not have a good memory for even the people who worked in close interaction with him. But to understand what Reagan actually believed in, astrology cannot be left outside the equation any more than the fact that he genuinely believed the ghost of Abraham Lincoln inhabits the White House⁷⁷⁰ or his belief in extra-terrestrial life which he brought up publicly in front of such distinguished audience as the General Assembly of the United Nations by

⁷⁶⁵ Boyarsky (1981) p. 16

⁷⁶⁶ Morris (1999) p. 345. Mrs Dixon actually predicted that Reagan would be a president one day. Since this happened in 1966 and she predicted on the same occasion on television that the Chinese would invade Russia and the USA and the USSR would ally together against them and that the Soviets would land the first man on the moon, there seems to be slight inaccuracies in her mystical powers. See Kengor (2004) p. 189

⁷⁶⁷ Wills (2000) p. 355

⁷⁶⁸ Kengor (2004) p. 184-196 argues that Reagan disavowed astrology because of his belief in the guidance of the Christian God and the fact that he never brought up the subject and yet he freely discussed flying saucers, ghosts, aliens and Antichrist for example. He was not a man to hide his beliefs.

⁷⁶⁹ Reagan (2007) p. 604. Diary entry for 3.5.1988.

⁷⁷⁰ Reagan (2007) p. 385. Diary entry for 22.1.1986 "I think the ghost of Abe Lincoln is stirring upstairs where we live."

declaring that, “Perhaps we need some outside, universal threat to make us recognize this common bond. I occasionally think how quickly our differences worldwide would vanish if we were facing an alien threat from outside this world.”⁷⁷¹ It can be summarized that Reagan held strong personal beliefs concerning a wide variety of topics and this concoction makes it difficult to pin down his beliefs. One can say that Reagan believed mainly in two things, God and America. They were the objects of his worship.

2.2. “AMERICAN RELIGION”

There is one other part of our national character I wish to speak of. Religion and faith are very important to us. We’re a nation of many religions. But most Americans derive their religious belief from the Bible – the Bible of Moses, who delivered a people from slavery; the Bible of Jesus Christ, who told us to love thy neighbour as thyself, to do unto your neighbour as you would have him do unto you. And this too has formed us. It’s why we wish well for the others. It’s why it grieves us when we hear of people who cannot live up to their full potential and who cannot live in peace.⁷⁷²

-Ronald Wilson Reagan

In this section I shall move from the realm of more established church religion into civil religion. I argue that there is no need for civil religion to rise from solely the Judeo-Christian tradition. All religions tend to become Americanized on the soil of the USA. By this I mean that they lose some of their original characteristics and gain some particularly American qualities and characteristics. Since it seems to be a natural tendency for established churches to include a certain patriotic element into their dogma I argue that belief in God and belief in “America” are so closely related that the creation of a civil religion becomes easier than in many other countries. I argue that to a degree America itself can become the object of worship. This naturally distorts the concept of religion to the point of heresy, when examined from the perspective of religious studies, but emphasizes the importance from the viewpoint of political studies.

Religion does not need to derive directly from a certain god, like in this case the God of Christianity, or, slightly surprisingly, from any god at all. Durkheim argues that there are rites without gods and indeed some rites which create or give

⁷⁷¹ Reagan (21.9.1987) Address to the 42d Session of the United Nations General Assembly in New York, New York <http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1987/092187b.htm>

⁷⁷² Reagan (1984) Fudan University, Shanghai (30.4.1984) p.44.

birth to gods. Likewise there are cults, which do not even attempt to unite or connect a man to deity. For him “religion is broader than the idea of gods or spirits and so cannot be defined exclusively in those terms.”⁷⁷³ Durkheim finally formulates a definition for religion: “a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden - beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community called a Church, all those who adhere to them.”⁷⁷⁴ Thus G.K. Chesterton’s statement about America being a nation with the soul of a church is more than fitting.⁷⁷⁵ When creating civil religion or in other ways exploiting religious beliefs for political purposes, the entire country is rallied into a “moral community.” Mead argues that a nation is a spiritual society.⁷⁷⁶ For religious belief to exist, there necessarily does not have to be a deity in existence. The mere belief in the sacredness of something can unify individuals to such a moral community. Reagan claimed that “We are a nation under God. Freedom is not granted to us by government; it is our by divine right.”⁷⁷⁷ Freedom itself can gain the illusion of being sacred in repetitive tellings and thus can be a basis for religious belief just as well as the community of America itself. “That faith in freedom, that abiding belief in what the unfettered human spirit can accomplish, defines us as a people and a nation.”⁷⁷⁸

Democracy itself can take the role of a religion. As Patrick Deneen writes: “If faith is a belief in that which is unseen, then it may be that democracy is as justifiably an object of faith as a distant and silent God.”⁷⁷⁹ Indeed, the idea of “democracy” as well as that of “the nation,” or “the state,” is something no man can experience for himself in a concrete manner. No one can visit the state or speak to it directly. He can only do so to the representative of it. As Deneen notes, it is paradoxical that a political system that was designed to minimize claims of faith, itself rests on faith, and that the most anti-utopian regime may at the moment it loudest congratulates itself for the defeat of utopianism in politics, become the most

⁷⁷³ Durkheim (1995) p. 33

⁷⁷⁴ Durkheim (1995) p. 44

⁷⁷⁵ Mead (1975) even named his book after this notion of Chesterton.

⁷⁷⁶ Mead (1975) p. 51

⁷⁷⁷ Reagan (19.7.1982) Remarks at a Rally Supporting the Proposed Constitutional Amendment for a Balanced Federal Budget. p. 942

⁷⁷⁸ Reagan (3.6.1988) Remarks Upon Returning From the Soviet-United States Summit Meeting in Moscow <http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1988/060388c.htm>

⁷⁷⁹ Deneen (1964) p. xvi

utopian system itself.⁷⁸⁰ Carl Schmitt argues that “democracy is the expression of a political relativism and a scientific orientation that are liberated from miracles and dogmas and based on human understanding and critical doubt.”⁷⁸¹ If this holds true, democracy can be seen as religion, where the object of faith is changed and in which the post-enlightenment need for rational, empirical, and deductible proof and scientific arguments have taken the role of miracles as proof and dogmas as arguments. Thus Reagan’s message about the interconnectedness of God and America seems less radical as a claim. The God has been secularized into America and Reagan only tries to reverse the process. Very often America is seen as a synonym for “freedom” and this concept gets a religious sheen on it as well. De Tocqueville has noted that “Americans so completely confuse Christianity and freedom in their minds that it is almost impossible to have them conceive of the one without the other.”⁷⁸² Freedom is what belief in America is about, and democracy and freedom are connected to the plan of God for mankind. God is pushed actually into the sidelines in this discussion and these political concepts become part of the religious dogma if not, indeed, the object of faith.

For Will Herberg “being a Protestant, a Catholic or a Jew was understood as the specific way, and increasingly perhaps the only way, of being an American and locating oneself in American society.”⁷⁸³ To be American, one must belong to one of these.⁷⁸⁴ He writes that these three religions are the “three great branches or divisions of “American Religion,”” and together they possess “an underlying theological unity.”⁷⁸⁵ While there indeed may be a theological unity, there certainly is a democratic unity, since as de Tocqueville already noted, “in the United States there is no single religious doctrine that shows itself hostile to democratic and republican institutions.”⁷⁸⁶ The foundations of religious faith in America are essentially hospitable to democratic politics, and this political unity of all faiths assists greatly in the creation of a truly unifying civil religion. While I focus on

⁷⁸⁰ Deneen (1964) p. xvii

⁷⁸¹ Schmitt (2005) p. 42

⁷⁸² De Tocqueville (2000) p. 280-281

⁷⁸³ Herberg (1960) p. 39

⁷⁸⁴ In his diaries Reagan describes a meeting with a “Cabinet room full of religious leaders covering every denomination - Protestant, Catholic & Hebrew.” It is easy to see that Reagan clearly thought along the same lines as Herberg about the faiths that are America. Reagan (2007) p. 450. Diary entry for 14.11.1986. Italics Mine

⁷⁸⁵ Herberg (1960) p. 38

⁷⁸⁶ de Tocqueville (2000) p. 277

Herberg's theory, it is beneficial to gain a wider view of theorist, such as Robert Bellah, whose argument was almost completely opposing to Herberg's.

It is my argument that the American civil religion can not be conceived as a stable concept, but it gets altered in time and, furthermore, each individual and subgroup of the society interprets it in a different manner. The prophetic politician needs to narrate his version of civil religion just as fluidly. The huge body of literature written about American civil religion can be divided into five different understandings of the concept. These are (1) "transcendent universal religion" as Bellah's idea of America as a bearer of universal moral values exemplified. (2) "Democratic faith" as a set of humanistic Enlightenment values (liberty, equality, justice, etc.) treated as sacred and distinctively American, with no reference to a spiritual or transcendent source. (3) "Folk religion" as exemplified by Herberg's American Way of Life. These are a set of beliefs and practices of the ordinary people as they define what being American means for them. (4) "Religious nationalism," where nation becomes the object of religious and patriotic fervour and (5) "protestant civic piety," where primarily protestant categories are used to articulate American nationalism.⁷⁸⁷ While this taxonomy helps us better understand how civil religion has been seen in the field of academic studies, it does not help us understand Reagan.

Mostly his civic religious narratives are focused on the concept of folk religion, but he blends all these different interpretations together in his storytelling. America was for him a standard of universal moral values. "For those who seek freedom, security, and peace, we are the custodians of their dream."⁷⁸⁸ Likewise, the Enlightenment values had their place in the storytelling, "We are the keepers of the flame of liberty. We hold it high tonight for the world to see, a beacon of hope, a light unto the nations."⁷⁸⁹ The American nationalism is just as often articulated in terms of Protestant Christianity's high values, "History is asking us once again to be a force for good in the world. Let us begin in unity, with justice, and love."⁷⁹⁰ At the same time patriotic zealotry underlies Reagan's storytelling, "Now, you know, some

⁷⁸⁷ Chernus (2009)

⁷⁸⁸ Reagan (19.7.1985) Proclamation 5357 -- Captive Nations Week, 1985

<http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1985/71985d.htm>

⁷⁸⁹ Reagan (3.7.1986) Remarks on the Lighting of the Torch of the Statue of Liberty in New York, New York <http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1986/70386e.htm>

⁷⁹⁰ Reagan (6.2.1985) Address Before a Joint Session of the Congress on the State of the Union <http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1985/20685e.htm>

people -- and without wanting to flatter me -- have referred to me as a super patriot. Well, I guess maybe I'm old-fashioned, but I don't think you can love America too much.⁷⁹¹ But, this is civil religion, as Reagan articulated it, and there are practically as many civil religions as there are people trying to determine what it is.

Ira Chernus sees the American civil religion “as a broad, dynamic field of contending forces rather than an imagined unified tradition.”⁷⁹² All too often we overlook this pluralistic nature, which applies not only to American religions, but American civil religion as well. There is not now, nor ever was, such a version of civil religion, which would have encompassed all of Americans. Different subgroups of people have chosen as their points of belonging their own versions and ideas what the American Way of Life means for them and what is the role it plays in their lives. Thus, the political narrator needs to narrate the contents of civil religion in multiple ways so as to be able to create a story verse. The common core in these versions of civil religion is the patriotic love of America, and while the interpretations of what America means differ, the importance bestowed on it remains constant.

There has been a debate whether civil religion indeed exists anywhere outside the academia, if it is a purely scholarly invention of a term for something that no-one else calls anything. But Jonathan Z. Smith argues that the same applies for all religion. “Religion is solely the creation of the scholar’s study. It is created for the scholar’s analytic purposes of comparison and generalization. Religion has no independent existence apart from the academy.”⁷⁹³ I have taken heed of the advice of numerous recent scholars, Ira Chernus perhaps among the most vociferous, who claim that whatever these foundational “truly American” values are that American civil religion supposedly has been built on, have been the values of a rather small elite group of white men, the Founding Fathers. Furthermore I acknowledge that American civil religion, like any religion and even like America itself exists only as an imagined community; that is, only if people identify themselves to be a part of it.⁷⁹⁴ My main point of interest, however, is not whether American civil religion has ever had a concrete and inclusive existence for all

⁷⁹¹ Reagan (18.9.1986) Remarks at a Senate Campaign Rally for Representative W. Henson Moore in Metairie, Louisiana <http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1986/091886a.htm>

⁷⁹² Chernus (2009)

⁷⁹³ Smith (1982) p. xi

⁷⁹⁴ Chernus (2009)

Americans, but rather the political use of civil religion as the factor legitimizing politics. And, as always in politics, the majority of the voters matter. If the majority of eligible voters in America identify themselves with the civil religion the prophetic politician, in this case Reagan, produces, he is able to reap the benefits of that belief. I will, nevertheless, argue that there is a way to produce a more unifying version of American civil religion through the use of narratives by depicting the civil religion not only as an imagined community, but by turning it into multiple story worlds, or a story verse, in the process.

Ours is a nation on many heritages. Diverse religious, ethnic and racial backgrounds find unity in our common belief in the dignity of the individual and our national commitment to self-government.⁷⁹⁵

In Reagan's story verse the belief in the American Way of Life and the values it is built upon, such as personal and national freedom, takes different forms and is elevated in status even above the traditional religious belief. No matter what God one believes in and what country ones parents came from, there is, according to the story, still common ground for belief. The aspect of civil religion and its objects of worship can and do surpass problems caused by different religious views. Civil religion could, at least theoretically, work as an umbrella of belief, under which all Americans can take shelter and create a sense of community and shared values. Eck argues that *E Pluribus Unum* should not mean that one religion should be made out of the many. She denies that American unity would require a religious melting pot., but argues that the *unum* should be civic oneness.⁷⁹⁶ It is not my argument that Americans should practice any type of civil religion, but from the perspective of political leadership there is a need to create a feeling of civic oneness. This could be possible by crafting a story verse of belief in America which would automatically assume some religious trappings. This could be called civil religion as well, but it should not be understood as a religion that is practiced *per se*, but a general feeling of nationalist and patriotic belief as a guideline of behaviour.

To sum up some of the points I intend to make, civil religion is not a unified concept. It is rather an attempt to label certain unnamed phenomena and pin them down for academic study. My point of departure will be Herberg's idea of it as belief in the American Way of Life and I develop the meaning of the American Dream in it, arguing that both support and enforce each other. But neither of these

⁷⁹⁵ Reagan (13.2.1981) Message on the Observance of National Brotherhood Week. s. 100

⁷⁹⁶ Eck (2001) p. 31

concepts, nor the idea of civil religion itself, is a single story or way of thought. It is my argument that civil religion is a field of diverse beliefs, constantly in flux and forever changing. Multiple storylines create a web of various beliefs and interpretations of the American Way of Life and Dream and the story worlds they construct combine into an elaborate story verse that can be called American civil religion; a combination of stories about the meaning of being an American. Every individual has his own story and interpretation and the fact that they are joined in the story verse only gives an illusion of unified belief. Furthermore, the amount of this belief has varied throughout the ages just as much as the interpretations. Some scholars have argued that civil religion has never even existed. And they are right, if we treat civil religion as common set on values. But treating it as a story verse and seeing the commonality as an illusion created by the story world-building process allows us to treat civil religion in a different manner. We must take into consideration that civil religion is a master narrative that creates meanings within the culture. Even if the religion itself has been taken away, the story still remains and has considerable influence. Even is the master narrative itself has no meaning in our times and has vanquished itself, the tellings still resonate and spread continuously. American civil religion has been turned into a story or stories about itself and these can be put to use in the service of politics.

2.2.1. ON CIVIL RELIGION

Alasdair MacIntyre argues that “the practice of patriotism as a virtue is in advanced societies no longer possible in the way that it once was.”⁷⁹⁷ He claims that if the government is merely an institutional arrangement, that imposes a bureaucratic unity on the society instead of representing the moral community, loyalty to the country is detached from the obedience to the government which de facto rules the citizen. And the loyalty to the country as a community is, and will be a central virtue, but it moves away from the government in our modern societies, and was possible only in premodern smaller societies like the Greek city states.⁷⁹⁸ Reagan wanted to see his America as a virtuous society. He wanted loyalty for the family, community, and society and claimed that the government has distanced itself from the American

⁷⁹⁷ MacIntyre (1984) p. 254

⁷⁹⁸ MacIntyre (1984) p. 254

citizen. He emphasized patriotism, but at the same time he wanted to get the people to feel patriotism towards America as a community of the American people.

The new patriotism is a positive force that unites us and draws us together -- all of us -- from every race, religion, and ethnic background. It gives us confidence because it's based on enduring values which we hold so dear -- the dignity of work, respect for family, faith in a loving God, a belief in peace through strength, and a commitment to protect the freedom which is our legacy as Americans.⁷⁹⁹

Reagan's patriotism was not to be directed at the state as it is manifested in the form of the government, but the society of Americans. "Together, with faith in each other, with freedom as our guide, there is nothing that we cannot do."⁸⁰⁰ Patriotism, faith in each other, and faith in America are as necessary as the traditional religious beliefs. There is faith in the community and society and the nation and this becomes a strong motivation and an object of belief.

The terminology that surrounds the concept of civil religion is, again, very diverse, with many scholars seeking to attribute something new to the body of research. Kelly lists in his book at least the variants "religion-in-general", "American Way of Life", "political theology", "national religion", "Religion of the Republic", "public religion", and "public piety." Naturally, each and everyone had their own special emphasis, but even the scholars, who had chosen "civil religion" as their point of departure, identified in a 1974 volume five different variants; "folk religion", "the transcendent universal religion of the nation", "religious nationalism", "democratic faith" and "Protestant civic piety."⁸⁰¹ The terminology is diverse and in constant flux. If one talks of public religion the idea that emerges, is a top down process, where the authority in the form of state is both the object of belief and the one, who directs the expressions of faith.

What is now usually referred to as public religion is actually precisely what Jean-Jacques Rousseau meant when he invented the entire concept of civil religion.⁸⁰² His civil religion combines serving God and loving the laws. While it turns the state into an object of admiration for the citizens it also teaches them that

⁷⁹⁹ Reagan (9.9.1984) Remarks at a Polish Festival in Doylestown, Pennsylvania
<http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1984/90984a.htm>

⁸⁰⁰ Reagan (25.9.1984) Remarks at the Annual Meeting of the Boards of Governors of the International Monetary Fund and World Bank Group
<http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1984/92584a.htm>

⁸⁰¹ Kelly (1984) p. 224

⁸⁰² Rousseau (1997) p. 208-225

serving the state is also serving the God who protects the state.⁸⁰³ (If America is interpreted to be a Christian country, then it would be the God of Christianity) It is the state that sets the creed of civil religion, but these things should not be treated as religious dogma but rather as ways of thinking that direct the citizens to feel a sense of communion or belonging together.⁸⁰⁴

This type of civil religion responds to thinkers like Thomas Hobbes with his state as a quasi-divine all-powerful Leviathan that once has gained its authority from the people, but then acts and performs the role of a god and uses ultimate power over the citizenry as an uncontested sovereign.⁸⁰⁵ Another suitable example is aforementioned Carl Schmitt with his idea of political theology, where again the state assumes the role of the God and the “sovereign is he who decides on the exception.”⁸⁰⁶ The sovereignty of God is handed down to human authority, which defines himself directly with the people, but nevertheless reserves the authority to decide and overturn his own decisions.⁸⁰⁷ In these instances, state has taken over the empty space God has left in our secularized world and assumes some responsibilities, qualities and rights of a divinity. Here state enforces the belief of its citizenry and just occupies God’s place.

We can safely say the God seems to be the foundation of American civil religion and the foundation upon which much of the infrastructure of common beliefs has been built. The God of American religion is a transcendent God, but though not very clearly expressed, He still is not the God of deism the Founding Fathers preferred. But He is not the Christian God either.⁸⁰⁸ Sidney E. Mead seemed to agree when he wrote that the religion of the American culture he called “religion of the Republic” is not the Christianity exhibited in the form of any denomination in American religiously pluralistic society.⁸⁰⁹ According to Niebuhr, what connects the deist God to the Christian concept of God, whose existence can be read between the

⁸⁰³ Ibid. p. 216-217

⁸⁰⁴ Ibid. p. 222

⁸⁰⁵ Hobbes (1999)

⁸⁰⁶ Schmitt (2005) p. 5

⁸⁰⁷ Schmitt (2005) p. 10

⁸⁰⁸ Rousseau (1997) was himself a man of Enlightenment in his approach towards

Christianity. According to him a society of true Christians would no longer be a society of men and furthermore, the *Vaterland* of a Christian is not the nation or state he lives in but the Kingdom of God. See p. 218-219. For Rousseau, the state has to be tolerant toward any religion that takes a tolerant approach toward other religions if, and only if, there is nothing in its dogma and teachings that would not be in accord with the responsibilities of the citizen. P. 224

⁸⁰⁹ Mead (1975) p. 5

lines of Reagan's storytelling, is that "His purposes are relevant and related to the human enterprise, and the highest human virtues give us some glimpses of His purposes."⁸¹⁰ Deist God had an interest in the world and its affairs and Reagan's references to "Manifest Destiny" and "Divine Providence" imply the same thing.

It's long been my belief that America is a chosen land, placed by some Divine Providence here between the oceans to be sought out and found only by those with a special yearning for freedom. This nation is a refugee for all those people on Earth who long to breathe free.⁸¹¹

But when contrasted with the Christian concept of God the deist God is more of the type of the Aristotelian concept of the prime mover. He set the universe in motion and devised a plan for it. His intentions can be derived by intelligence and while He has a purpose in the shape of divine providence, He lacks the active influence in the worldly affairs the Christian God has. The deist God does not intervene in human affairs, His plan should be evident and manifest (as is destiny) to the humans, but he will not step in to steer people on the right path if they stray from it.

The concept of civil religion as Reagan pictured it is a bottom-up process. The citizens create the object of their faith, and it is something different than the state as God. In the case of Reagan's version of civil religion, the object of faith of the American people is not the state, but rather the "imaginary community" of America in the sense Benedict Anderson used the term.⁸¹² Some writers like Zelinsky argue that object of faith of civil religion is the state itself as manifested in for example the government and the military but in the words of Reagan, "We're turning America away from yesterday's policies of big brother government."⁸¹³ Paradoxically the story logic of Reagan distaches the military and the police from the governmental apparatus by their function to protect the freedoms of Americans while rest of the government is narrated to curb these freedoms.

Instead of believing in the state represented by the government, Americans are guided by Reagan to believe in themselves, their families, and communities and out of this web of belief emerges the mystical America with its Dream and Manifest Destiny. The state is portrayed only as a false god and belief in it is misguided. "And it's not an exaggeration anymore to refer to the almighty Federal

⁸¹⁰ Niebuhr (1986) p. 14

⁸¹¹ Reagan (17.9.1982) Remarks at the Swearing-In Ceremony for United States Citizens in White House Station, New Jersey. s. 1178

⁸¹² Anderson (1993)

⁸¹³ Reagan (13.7.1982) Remarks at the Annual Convention of the National Association of Counties in Baltimore, Maryland. s. 918

Government.”⁸¹⁴ Reagan raises the federal government to the status of a false divinity by the use of words like “almighty.” Nevertheless, Reagan does not claim that the federal government, or indeed the United States it is a manifestation of, is in any way omniscient or omnipotent. It just has raised itself to the status of a false idol or a demi-god. In the thinking of Luoma-aho, a state is practically a God as an object of political belief and is bestowed with the same divine rights as God had in the pre-modern times.⁸¹⁵ This is exactly the idea Reagan tries to deny in his narration. As little power as possible should be delegated to that “great Leviathan” of the federal government. It should be subservient to the people and their wishes. Reagan advocates the old values of the Founding Fathers and sticks to the quotation of “one nation, under God” and the fact that the Constitution grants rights to the government “by the people”.

But our most precious resources, our greatest hope for the future, are the minds and hearts of our people, especially our children. We can help them build tomorrow by strengthening our community of shared values. This must be our third great goal. For us, faith, work, family, neighbourhood, freedom, and peace are not just words; they're expressions of what America means, definitions of what makes us a good and loving people.⁸¹⁶

The power should be divided among the people and the power of the people to dream big and accomplish great deeds should be the object of faith, according to his storytelling. People deserve the power over their own life, which has so far been delegated to the government. Power resides only in people themselves and naturally the God they are under. The state is just a middleman for which there is no urgent need. Despite Reagan’s status as the president of the country, he emphasizes in his narration that he has no power himself, but all the power he wields belongs to the people and he uses it only according to the will of the people. Thus his position (also as a speaker) is that of a prophet. He delegates and translates the will of God, the actual ruler of the American people, and once this vision gains acceptance, receives the power to perform his politics from the people and similarly all his deeds are exactly what the people will him to do.

As Alexis de Tocqueville noted; “The people reign over the American political world as does God over the universe. They are the cause and the end of all

⁸¹⁴ Reagan (9.2.1982) Address Before a Joint Session of the Indiana State Legislature in Indianapolis. s. 154

⁸¹⁵ Luoma-aho (2009)

⁸¹⁶ Reagan (25.1.1984) Address Before a Joint Session of the Congress on the State of the Union <http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1984/12584e.htm>

things; everything comes out of them and everything is absorbed unto them.”⁸¹⁷ Here De Tocqueville makes another observation, which is even more interesting than it probably ever appeared to him to be. Since one of the tasks of Reagan’s civil religion and prophetic politics is to blend the worlds of the sacred and the profane into almost undistinguishable story worlds, the relationship between God and the people is distorted in the process as well. The people take the position if not alongside God, then at least just below Him as the source of ultimate authority. The people and their will are turned into something only a little less sacred than the will of God, and perhaps even one can be deducted from the other with careful examination. Then the voice and the will of the free people could be a source from which to gain knowledge of the will of God and His message can be interpreted from it.

This emphasis on the will of the people is, at least with its intensity, a unique characteristic of America, as Schmitt notices. From the times of Tocqueville onwards, the voice of the people acts as a voice of God in the political realm. There is a pragmatic and reasonable belief that in American democracy the people “hover” above the politics of the state, like God does over the world.⁸¹⁸ The same idea of the role of the people is evident in the narratives of Reagan as well. Reagan found, or at least told he did, his inspiration and the ideal of democracy in the Declaration of Independence. This document sets aside the American people in a very distinct manner. They are portrayed as the source and a cause of all political power.

Policies come and go. Leaders will pass from the stage. The enduring sail and compass of our nation is “We the people.” When the American people are strong and confident, when their leaders hear their voices, America, whatever storms it might be weathering, will make it through. It will survive, and it will prevail.⁸¹⁹

It is “We, the people” who grant their power in the form of sovereignty to the state instead of God. Naturally, this should be the basis of all democratic thought, but casting a vote every few years to determine who will govern you, is not the extent of power Reagan narrated the American people to have.

Here is the genius, the hope, and the promise of America forever and for all mankind: “We the People.” In our Constitution, we the people tell

⁸¹⁷ de Tocqueville (2000) p. 55

⁸¹⁸ Schmitt (2005) p. 49

⁸¹⁹ Reagan (10.1.1989) Remarks at the Franklin D. Roosevelt Library 50th Anniversary Luncheon <http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1989/011089c.htm>

government what it may do and what it may not; the people are sovereign, not the state.⁸²⁰

God's will is not the basis of government's authority to decree upon the lives of individual citizens, but the will of the citizenry, which endows the "powers that be" with all of their power. And this power can supposedly be taken back at any time by "We, the people." Everything in American political power emanates from the people and ultimately returns to the people. This in turn might work to emphasize the special and exceptional nature of Americans as "God's new chosen people."

On the nature of sacredness it has to be noted that whether one is talking about stories or other representations of the sacred, all sacred beings are sacred only because they are commonly imagined to be so.⁸²¹ Once the community stops believing in them, they are no longer sacred. Sacredness is not an inherent quality of anything, but superadded to things by belief. Sacredness is bestowed by the social life and even the most idealistic religion cannot escape the social aspect.⁸²² Durkheim further adds that "the purpose of the cult is not only to bring the profane into communion with sacred beings but also to keep the sacred beings alive, to remake and regenerate them perpetually."⁸²³ While the sacred things and beings are superior to mortal men, they can only live and exist within the human consciousness and Durkheim goes on to argue that in the end "the sacred principle is nothing other than *society hypostasized and transfigured*."⁸²⁴ Chernus points out that Durkheim does not mean that the society is worshipping itself, but rather its highest ideals.⁸²⁵ The vision of chauvinistic nationalism or idolatrous worship of the state ultimately was the reason why Robert Bellah gave up on the concept of American civil religion. "Bellah was calling on Americans to worship their nation's highest ideals—America as it ought to be—to counteract what he saw as excessive worship of the nation as it was."⁸²⁶ But when we look at Ronald Reagan's narratives, his mythical America indeed was "America as it ought to be." His narration showed no doubt of his America being a living proof of the highest ideals of the USA. As Sidney Mead wrote, all too often patriotism is confused with idolatrous worship of

⁸²⁰ Reagan (21.4.1987) Proclamation 5634 -- Law Day, U.S.A., 1987
<http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1987/042187t.htm>

⁸²¹ See Smith (1982)

⁸²² Durkheim (1995) p. 349

⁸²³ Durkheim (1995) p. 350-351.

⁸²⁴ Durkheim (1995) p. 350-351. Italics mine.

⁸²⁵ Chernus (2009)

⁸²⁶ Ibid.

the state, and my country, right or wrong, is the ultimate idolatry in politics.⁸²⁷ Thus, while seeing civil religion as misunderstood idolatry from a purely religious perspective, the ultimate and twisted form of national worshipping is crucial from the perspective of political studies.

While America is religiously a very diverse nation with its many different creeds, there is a process of Americanization at work within practically every religious denomination. Catholics as well as Jews along with other churches in America have become to a large degree individualistic within their respective religions. Many religions seem to assimilate into a Protestantized American consensus. An example of this is the attitude among American Catholics towards birth control and abortion, which quite radically differs from those propagated by the Holy See.⁸²⁸ Indeed, American Catholic Church wanted to integrate itself better with the American society and started to “phase out what they considered inessential Romanist traditions and to present the Catholic faith positively.”⁸²⁹ Another example of a religion being Americanized shows in the words of Reform Judaist Isaac Mayer Wise, who claimed that “America is our Zion and Washington is our Jerusalem.”⁸³⁰ If it often seems among the Protestant creeds that America is envisioned as a new Promised Land, the same does apply to some of the Jews as well. Belief in America, Americanized religion, and a strong undercurrent on civil religion shines through everywhere. A democratic society seems to breed the notion that in order for different creeds to coexist, they ought to be fundamentally quite similar. In the words of Daniel J. Boorstin, “religions are unimportant in American life; but religion is of enormous importance.”⁸³¹ It is important for political leaders and citizenry as well to be religious, but it is of no great importance politically or socially to which religion or church they belong.

In each Protestant denomination, as well as in Judaism or Catholicism and any religious affiliation, there is something that differentiates it from other denominations, while enough common ground exists to use the expression “Judeo-Christian experience.” Massachusetts congressman Barney Frank once joked that he

⁸²⁷ Mead (1977) p. 2

⁸²⁸ Kosmin-Lachan (1993) p. 10-11

⁸²⁹ Hunter-Rice (1991) p. 320

⁸³⁰ Wise. Cited in Kosmin-Lachan (1993) p. 25

⁸³¹ Kosmin-Lachan (1993) p. 11

would understand what was meant with “Judeo-Christian”, when he met one.⁸³² Indeed, the term itself is an artificial concoction and not dependent on any historical tradition. It is just another linguistic or even storied means used to legitimize the Jewish experience in a culture, which always in the past had been unapologetically Christian. On one hand this expression is an easy rhetorical move from the Christians, but on the other hand it signals a remarkable sign of openness, where Jews are retrospectively included in the American national project.⁸³³

Americanization of religions and blending them together blunts both the sense of uniqueness and that of universality and all are converted into expressions of American spirituality. If there indeed is a Judeo-Christian faith, it gets falsified and the faith itself is reduced to being only an American culture-religion.⁸³⁴ De Tocqueville wrote that all the different sects of American Christianity perceive their religion in the same light.⁸³⁵ I argue that it is the civil religious light of patriotism, which influences all the sects. This is a good breeding ground for an effective civil religion and the fundamental religiosity of the society enables a well-formulated type of civil religion to be very inclusive and communicable. At the same time as the society itself allows suitable conditions for a civil religion to develop, a particular characteristic of the American religious life is to turn every religion into an Americanized version of itself. While civil religion prospers, also the “churchly” religions gain more profane societal influences.

Hunter and Rice argue that the American religious community has created alliances across denominational lines on social and value-related issues, and the division to handle politically is not along denominational lines, but rather on the divide to the orthodox and the progressive within the religious traditions. Somehow the division between these two groups has taken precedence over the divisions between major faiths.⁸³⁶ Their argument is that as the boundaries set by Biblical culture have eroded, the axis of definition for religious and cultural pluralism is

⁸³² Feldman (2005) p. 166

⁸³³ Feldman (2005) p. 167 It can be argued that Herberg’s 1955 book was another attempt to raise Jewishness into national prominence it had not properly gained until then, while he did not use the explicit term in his text.

⁸³⁴ Herberg (1960) p. 262

⁸³⁵ De Tocqueville (2000) p. 423

⁸³⁶ Hunter-Rice (1991) p. 319, 323

shifting outside those boundaries. This realignment is central to the restructuring of America itself as well as religion.⁸³⁷

As thousands gathered in prayer in places of worship and encampments throughout the new land, the dispersed colonists found a new spirit of unity and resolve in this remarkable expression of public faith. For the first time, Americans of every religious persuasion prayed as one, asking for divine guidance in their quest for liberty and justice. Ever since, Americans have shared a special sense of destiny as a nation dedicated under God to the cause of liberty for all men.⁸³⁸

According to Reagan's story logic the mere being of an American was such a unifying factor among the Puritan colonists that a new feeling of unity was created among them. America's existence, and the fact of arriving there across the seas, was a religious experience in itself, and as such experiences go, strong enough to convince even the "doubting Thomases". While the dogmas between the religious denominations of the colonists were different and they were not such a unified whole as the term Puritan used to cover them all implies, Reagan tries to argue that in America they found such a unifying concept that "American" belief could replace for example Calvinist or Protestant belief. Americans could pray together as one for the blessings of God in their "quest for liberty and justice." Reagan picks these words from the Constitution drafted much later to cue the story recipient to believe that liberty and justice were since the dawn of America such values, that there was indeed a quest to realize them. Therefore, what America stands for in Reagan's story verse, is essentially the same as in the beginning of the colonies, and the values he advocated at the time of his narration are exactly the same as he claim to have caused colonists of different denominations to pray and believe in a unified manner. Unified belief in God was born along with the entire imagined unified community of America, and Reagan tries to offer belief in America as a superior object of belief that could accommodate different concepts of worship. Belief in God unites Americans, but belief in America unites Christians as well as other religious denominations and the common cause or quest for liberty needs belief in both.

De Tocqueville remarked that when religion is intimately united with the earthly government, "it must adopt maxims that are applicable only to certain peoples. So, therefore, in allying itself with the political power, religion increases its

⁸³⁷ Hunter-Rice (1991) p. 327, 331

⁸³⁸ Reagan (12.2.1982) Proclamation 4897 – National Day of Prayer. s. 171

power over some and loses the hope of reigning over all.”⁸³⁹ Once politics and religion are combined, there is a tendency for religion to become more exclusive. Both factors increase their influence upon a certain constituency, but tend simultaneously to alienate others. Religion is at its most unifying, when it concerns itself solely with the matters considering the other world, the *civitas Dei*. So, it is harmful for religion itself to be used merely as a political tool in order to reach purely political goals. Some of the negative results of the combination process can be diminished narratively by trying to depict the goals of religion and politics to be essentially the same. In this storytelling the politician must be careful in order not to emphasize one over the other, that is, not to rally people behind his politics using religion, nor to wave the colours of politics in order to advance religion. The meanings of religion and politics need to get narratively blurred and intentionally made fuzzy, so that the citizen as a story recipient cannot be sure where religion stops and politics start and vice versa. Civil religion beautifully blends together the love of country, which people of almost every political persuasion still subscribe to, and the faith in democracy as a religion, which is almost universally accepted in Western societies.

If we ponder upon the limitations of civil, public, or civic religion, it is self-evident that it means and according to Herberg has always meant “the sanctification of the society and the culture of which it is a reflection [...] Civic religion is a religion which validates culture and society without in any sense bringing them under judgement.”⁸⁴⁰ Civil religion sanctifies the culture and society by claiming that they constitute an uncontested expression of spiritual and religious values and ideas. This leads to a situation, where religion is transformed into “*the cult of culture and society*, in which the “right” social order and the received cultural values are divinized by being identified with the divine purpose.”⁸⁴¹ This is what American civil religion is at the very bottom, at least from the perspective of prophetic politics and a way of leadership. It sanctifies the meaning of being American to such a degree, that the object of belief is the imagined, mythical community of America and its heroic inhabitants, the Americans.

⁸³⁹ de Tocqueville (2000) p. 284

⁸⁴⁰ Herberg (1960) p. 263.

⁸⁴¹ Ibid. Italics mine

There are only three words that are necessary to say. They say all we mean, all we hope for, all we believe in. They are: God Bless America.⁸⁴² Underneath the rhetoric religion sanctifies or even creates the society into something sacred. Society and culture seep into the religious sphere and thus become harder to separate. One can even argue that if religion and civil religion can be narrated as the same faith, like the aforementioned examples of “Americanized” religion, it is the culture and the society, which become the objects of religious belief and religious feelings towards God are bastardized into religious idolatry of the society. In the worst scenario America, or any given nation where the process is well formulated enough, will ultimately supplant God as the object of belief in large part due to political religion or rather politics influencing and invading the realm of religion. Furthermore, it can achieve this without the worshipper even noticing the transformation of his object of belief. Mead argues that the primary religious concern of a nation is to be on guard against such national idolatry and the state becoming a God.⁸⁴³ But the idolatry is a powerful political motivator as well. If the nation becomes a God, especially during a war or other national crisis, the worship of the nation could unify people as nothing else can. As such it poses a grave threat to pluralistic democracy, but could be politically exploited should the need arise.

According to Boorstin God Himself is created in America anew to become a pseudo-event of a self-fuelling prophecy. “What preoccupies us, then, is not God as a fact of nature, but as a fabrication useful for a God-fearing society. God himself becomes not a power but an image.”⁸⁴⁴ In contemporary politics then, the reason for God is not to act as the type of “Nature’s God” Jefferson saw as the prime mover, but more as only an image, a figurehead, that symbolically can be used to stamp approval on political actions. The God of civil religion, or any other form of political religion, is to be not a power, but an image of power. And, as Boorstin writes, “an image is something we have a claim on. It must serve our purposes. Images are means.”⁸⁴⁵

2.2.2. DEVELOPMENT OF PUBLIC TO CIVIL RELIGION

⁸⁴² Draft, Folder Hannaford/CA HQ – R. Reagan Speeches – 7/1/1980, Acceptance Speech (Research) – Convention (2/2) Box 25, Ronald Reagan 1980 Campaign Papers, Series I, Ronald Reagan Library. Underlining in the original, perhaps to

⁸⁴³ Mead (1975) p. 76

⁸⁴⁴ Boorstin (1962) p. 183

⁸⁴⁵ Boorstin (1962) p. 198

Ours is a nation grounded on faith, faith in man's ability through God-given freedom to live in tolerance and peace and faith that a Supreme Being guides our daily striving in this world. Our national motto, "In God We Trust" reflects that faith.⁸⁴⁶

-Ronald Wilson Reagan

There is an important distinction to be made between public religion and civil religion as Jean-Jacques Rousseau originally described it in his "Social Contract"⁸⁴⁷ and the way these terms are employed today. Rousseau's civil religion is a product of the state, the state produces or manufactures it and public religion is only something the state nurtures. The origins lie in different places. Civil religion is supposedly crafted by the state, while public religion has its origins in the people themselves. The distinction was not only in the origins, but the object of faith as well. In Rousseau's times civil religion was propagated by the state to get the people to believe in it. Public religion originated in the people who saw themselves as worthy of adoration and above the system of governance. Civil religion was concerned most importantly with the power of the king in Rousseau's times, and thus would be about the state in our contemporary world. For Rousseau civil religion was a vital mediating tool between moral authority and politics and emphasized the importance of such authority for the proper functioning of politics.⁸⁴⁸ Public religion was something that dealt with the freedom and power of the people over the state apparatus. Therefore, since it is not the United States of America as a state or a union of states that Reagan preaches for, but "America" as people, his stories could be interpreted to deal with public religion according to Rousseau.

Martin Marty among others notes that in the beginning the first expressions of public religion prospered under many names just as it has later on been portrayed in a multitude of academic studies. To its enemies within the church it was infidelity, to philosophers an American version of the Enlightenment, for theologians deism, and for politicians the "religion of the Republic."⁸⁴⁹ As it grew, it developed and recreated itself and as noted earlier, its later versions were called

⁸⁴⁶ Reagan (7.6.1982) Remarks Following a meeting With Pope John Paul II in Vatican City. s. 736-737

⁸⁴⁷ Rousseau (1997)

⁸⁴⁸ Rousseau 1979

⁸⁴⁹ Mead (1975) for example p. 117 has used that label as well because to him it seemed that "the constellation of ideas that dominated the thinking of those we call the nation's founders [...] seems rightfully called religious."

with various names.⁸⁵⁰ The statesmen who founded the United States had actually, in the words of Martin E Marty, “set out to convince churchly citizens that religion was larger than their own sects. Many of them channelled their own religious impulses into something larger, such as the nation. Benjamin Franklin, for example, was the first propagator of “publick religion” in his 1749 proposal relating to the education of the youth of Philadelphia⁸⁵¹ and while he was a religious man; his religious affiliation was the Deism of other Founding Fathers.

Franklin argued that such a faith would be useful to the public, because it would promote religious character among private persons and counter the “mischief of superstition” abundant in most sects. Nevertheless, this new religion would not be anti-Christian, because it would have to reflect some of its origins in a specific faith and ultimately show the “the Excellency of the CHRISTIAN RELIGION above all others ancient or modern.”⁸⁵² Kelly sees Franklin’s “publick religion” not so much as a “religion of the republic,” but as a religion favourable to republicanism and adaptable to the practice of republicans.⁸⁵³ Franklin’s view held that history shows that such a civil religion ultimately was good for a society. History was in many other ways crucial to the education of the people as well, since historic examples would illuminate morality and religion. Using these examples, people could be taught to show a spirit of charity to others and build a generous moral disposition.

Franklin was pressured to spell out his thoughts on the relationship between Christian and public religion. Franklin endorsed Christianity as his favourite religion to build a publick religion upon only because of necessity. He claimed that Jesus indeed produced the best system of morals and religion the world had ever seen, but also added that God did not show any evident disfavour to people, who did not believe in Jesus.⁸⁵⁴ In a way, Franklin was trapped in the context of his time. Since then there was no question whether America was a Christian nation or not, he was forced to ally his public religion with the Judeo-Christian tradition. Had the religious topography of the United States then been similar to what it is nowadays, Franklin might have been able to create a much more ecumenical public religion. Even in this case, while the creation of rituals acknowledging a dependence on

⁸⁵⁰ Marty (1984) p. 156

⁸⁵¹ Marty (1984) p. 154

⁸⁵² Franklin (1749) cited in Marty (1984) p. 155

⁸⁵³ Kelly (1984) p. 216

⁸⁵⁴ Marty (1984) p. 157-158

divine providence took a Christian shape, essentially the idea was ecumenical and not sectarian.

American civil religion, even the version preached by Reagan, holds that there is a God, called by Jefferson in the declaration of independence “Creator” or “Nature’s God,” who made all human beings in his image, and endowed them with the “sacred rights of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.” This God was by no means the God of Abraham, or the Father in the Holy Trinity, but rather, less specifically “Creator”. Private and public religions were separated by the Founding Fathers. Any citizen could within his own church believe in the version of God he wanted to believe in, but when God was brought into the realm of public, it was seen as necessary that He could work as a unifying force and not be divisive.⁸⁵⁵ This idea can be seen in the narration of Ronald Reagan as well. When he says “God bless America,” he uses a God that adheres to his own private faith, but more importantly each of his listeners or readers is able to define the God, whose blessings are asked for in the way he chooses to. Even such a religious man as Reagan is careful in choosing his expressions in such a manner that this “insert-name-of-deity-practice” is almost always available for his audiences.

De Tocqueville asserts that in order for a society to exist and prosper, the minds of the citizenry must be unified by “some principal ideas; and that cannot happen unless each of them sometimes comes to draw his opinions from one and the same source and unless each consents to receive a certain number of ready-made beliefs.”⁸⁵⁶ He managed to clarify two of the points that I am trying to make with one stroke. First and foremost the creation of a unifying civil religion is more than essential to the unification of the society. Secondly, in order to create a civil religion, one does not have to re-invent the wheel. The narrative building blocks are already in existence, they just have to be brought together anew and reassembled with elaborate storytelling as the cement to hold them together. Old common beliefs exist in any society. Some are religious, some are mythical, and some blend both elements together. These beliefs and truths have to be resurrected and given a new semblance with differing retellings of the old stories and perhaps a glossing of ideological and cultural beliefs. Intertextuality plays a huge role in this process, since the “ready-made beliefs” only have to be conjured up from the collective

⁸⁵⁵ Meacham (2006) p. 20-23

⁸⁵⁶ de Tocqueville (2000) p. 407

memory of the society. Every society has told and tells stories about its own existence and there is a virtual library at the use of the prophetic politician. Mostly these stories are what can be labelled “myths,” but very often these myths get their original justification from the tenets of some religion. But in any case, there is an enormous importance that the society bestows on these retellings of ready-made beliefs.

To understand the role of public or civil religion in both contemporary and Reagan era America, one must understand that, following the argument of the Supreme Court, a secular state is not necessarily the same as a non-religious state.⁸⁵⁷ The mere attempt by the government to erect the aforementioned wall of separation means the government has to take a certain religious stand, and a state that would attempt to do so, is no longer fundamentally a secular state. The artificial construction that separates the religious and political realms is only make-believe and the mere need to try and separate them speaks volumes about how they are intertwined and connected in very fundamental ways. The interlinking of religion and politics is important in the long run. As de Tocqueville has observed, what has long made governments prosper is religion; “There is nothing in the world but patriotism or religion that can make the universality of citizens advance for long toward the same goal.”⁸⁵⁸ Naturally, the combination of both would be even more effective. Thus prophetic politics needs to be able to combine the love of God and the love of country narratively in such a way that loving one means practically the same as loving the other as well. If one’s own country can be narratively recreated as the kingdom of God on earth, or at least as something striving to actualize it in this world, the two great motivational factors work for the same purpose.

2.2.3. TOWARDS MODERN CIVIL RELIGION

There is something eternal in religion that is destined to outlive the succession of particular symbols in which religious thought has clothed itself. There can be no society that does not experience the need at regular intervals to maintain and strengthen the collective feelings and ideas that provide its coherence and its distinct individuality.⁸⁵⁹

-Emile Durkheim

⁸⁵⁷ Curry (2001) p. 113

⁸⁵⁸ de Tocqueville (2000) p. 89

⁸⁵⁹ Durkheim (1995) p. 429

For Robert Bellah the God of the civil religion is “Unitarian” and also “on the austere side.” He is more a God of law, order, and right than of love and salvation. The God of the civil religion is “somewhat deist in cast” but “actively interested and involved in history, with a special concern for America.”⁸⁶⁰ This American civil religion is not, however, a substitute for Christianity, since there is an implicit division of function between the two. Bellah argues that civil religion was by no means “religion in general” but rather expressed what the Founding Fathers felt was appropriate under those circumstances they lived in. There is a certain generality to civil religion, but it was and still is specific enough when it came to the topic of America, and this helped it serve as a genuine vehicle for religious self-understanding for the entire nation.⁸⁶¹

Bellah argues that the first point where American civil religion was altered to a large degree was the Civil War. Before that the primary focus of the civil religion was the event of the Revolution as a final act of the Exodus. The Civil War brought a new theme into civil religion, namely that of death, sacrifice and rebirth. Before the war civil religion had been in essence Hebraic without clear references to Judaism but the war turned it into Christian faith without anything specific in its “dogmas” connected to the Christian church.⁸⁶² In the reading Wilson gives of Bellah he argues that in the American context the characteristic Biblical themes and motifs had deeply blended with purely American matters and this combination created the civil religion.⁸⁶³ It was only the symbolism that began to be derived from the New Testament and the sacred stories told which shaped the civil religion increasingly and had their origins in it as well.

Kelly is among the serious scholars, who deny the actual existence of a civil religion, but stated that if it ever had existed, it might have been during the period of 1865-1918. He argues that the “thirst” for civil religion was created by scholars and calls it “a despairing intellectual panacea for a country confused in its political and spiritual motives.”⁸⁶⁴ As we can see, he times it in accordance with the assertion by Stout, that the incarnation of a national American civil religion may have been the

⁸⁶⁰ Bellah (1967) p. 7

⁸⁶¹ Bellah (1967) p. 8

⁸⁶² Bellah (1967) p. 9-10. See also Stout (2006)

⁸⁶³ Wilson (1979) p. 19

⁸⁶⁴ Kelly (1984) p. 4

final legacy of the Civil War.⁸⁶⁵ During the war both sides created their own creed of civil religion, which were diametrically opposed to each other. While the North managed to tie the Puritan past seamlessly into the present, the South sought to define itself as a purely Christian Nation in opposition to the North, which excluded God from its constitution.⁸⁶⁶ Nevertheless, neither man denies that there is a connection between religion and politics. Kelly even argues that both have a similar bi-dimensional structure of the interior and the exterior; the believer and the citizen and the church and the state. His argumentation states that “the ideologies of present-day America cheapen and delegitimize both.”⁸⁶⁷ It is interesting to note that the “present-day America” of Kelly’s writing was simultaneous with the first years of the Reagan era. There was no doubt that the interplay of religious and political motives in Reagan’s narration sullied both, neither could remain pure. But Reagan’s policies were an attempt at recreating belief in American again.

Ira Chernus sees civil religion peaking in the 1950s and ending with the Vietnam War in the late 1960s. Since most of the studies on civil religion were written from late 1960s to mid 1970s all work was that of a historian: studying a movement after its demise.⁸⁶⁸ The self-understanding of the society had altered radically, and by that time simultaneously too many studies had depleted the concept. Wilson argues, that a major question concerning civil religion is, if it can be successfully vitalized after it has once been depleted. He answers by saying that elements of sufficient piety to give birth to it have existed, and it be said that civil religions have come into being and passed away again during the course of the American history. He even hypothesizes that a more lasting civil cult may emerge.⁸⁶⁹ So far it certainly has not happened, at least not in a bipartisan discourse, but I argue that with the use of religious-mythical storytelling, there is a possibility to bring about the revival in civil religion as well.

Martin Marty writes that the period of revivals in America ended with and were followed by three revolutions, out of which the latter two he would rather call evolutions. The first revolution was the American Revolution itself, followed by the second revolution, spurred by the Enlightenment idea that church and state should

⁸⁶⁵ Stout (2006 p. 459

⁸⁶⁶ Stout (2006) p. 54, 391 for example

⁸⁶⁷ Kelly (1984) p. 4

⁸⁶⁸ Chernus (2009)

⁸⁶⁹ Wilson (1979) p. 20-21

be separated. The third revolution took place in the minds of leaders of both church and state, who wanted to make religion a matter more of reason than heart and accessible to all.⁸⁷⁰ The post-war years and the Eisenhower era, which began in 1952, brought about this revival of religion or at least of an interest in religion. Eisenhower himself was the pinnacle of this revival, a newly baptised president, who used the “bully pulpit” to promote a “generalized and nationalistic religion.” Eisenhower’s treatment of the churches was friendly enough, but “as a priest of this national faith he found it more important to see the nation itself as a kind of shrine or instrument of God.”⁸⁷¹ Marty argues that during the Eisenhower years the revival was convenient, since people found themselves becoming devoted to the religion of the American Way of Life as well.⁸⁷² Concerning this particular revival, there is not much to be said about the role of God in it, since this revival promoted faith in faith itself more than actually flocking people to join established churches.⁸⁷³ According to Mead, this was not even a revival of religion, but “a revival of *interest* in religion” allowing the religion in general to prevail.⁸⁷⁴

Eisenhower was, according to his own words “the most intensely religious man I know. That doesn’t mean I adhere to any sect. A democracy cannot exist without a religious base. I believe in democracy.”⁸⁷⁵ In that manner Eisenhower followed the non-sectarian approach of Jefferson and Lincoln, who are seen to have been deeply religious men in their heart of hearts. It stands to reason that the political leader of the nation is most effective in conducting interfaith ceremonies and getting people to follow his prophetic politics, when he does not adhere to any sect, but is “generally religious.” William Lee Miller fittingly commented that Eisenhower, “like many Americans is a very fervent believer in a very vague religion.”⁸⁷⁶ As a matter of fact, religion defined in these terms is almost too vague to be granted the name of religion. It is rather a belief system and the objects of that belief can just as well be the American myths Hughes has studied which only have their origins in religion.

⁸⁷⁰ Marty (1984) p. 131

⁸⁷¹ Marty (1984) p. 404

⁸⁷² Marty (2004) p. 53

⁸⁷³ Hughes (2003) p. 170

⁸⁷⁴ Mead (1975) p. 15

⁸⁷⁵ Eisenhower (12.1.1952) in Chicago Daily News. Cited in Boorstin (1953) p. 146

⁸⁷⁶ Miller, Cited in Hughes (2003) p. 171

“Our government makes no sense unless it is founded in a deeply felt religious faith – and I don’t care what it is.”⁸⁷⁷ This quotation is often attributed to President Dwight Eisenhower and works as a good example of the functional approach to American religiosity by the political leaders. This statement is a very compact definition on the public and political uses of religion. Religion is one good justification for the political system in the United States, and while being excluded from the political arena on the rhetorical level, it still offers some of the most crucial cornerstones of the American infrastructure. One could simplify things by saying that it does not actually matter, which religious doctrine or denomination one observes and believes in, as long as one believes in religion itself. Once a citizen believes and has some kind of religion, it provides the society with internal order, and as a by-product offers a prophetic politician a resource to tap into, when establishing or enforcing a particular version of civil religion.

Non-denominationalism makes it easier to blend politics and religion together in many senses. Since there are no sharp theological doctrines, the boundaries of religious sentiment are not clearly established either. The same applies in turn to the relationship between political doctrines, or the lack of them, and the political sentiments. At the same time two things happen. The two “guidelines to good living” overlap and blend and both religion and politics seek to compensate for the vagueness of the other by becoming more explicit themselves, while perhaps still remaining imprecise. Just as Durkheim wrote, the sacred tries to infiltrate the profane, but this goes both ways. That is why Americans have politically active preachers and preaching political leaders. As Boorstin argues, “for people who have no clear theology, there is no reason why political ideas should *not* be expected to supply the place of personal philosophy. For those who find it difficult to express their political ideas, there is no reason why they should not expect the deficiency to be made up by their religious preachers.”⁸⁷⁸

Boorstin goes even further by arguing that the “more popular and influential preachers of our national ideas have stood midway between politics and religion: Franklin, Washington, Jefferson, Lincoln, Bryan, Theodore Roosevelt, Wilson, and even Franklin D. Roosevelt.”⁸⁷⁹ The important idea is that they indeed have “stood

⁸⁷⁷ Eisenhower, cited in Herberg (1960) p. 84

⁸⁷⁸ Boorstin (1953) p. 159

⁸⁷⁹ Boorstin (1953) p. 159

between” the two and located themselves in the grey area, the no-man’s-land, where they could politically benefit from either sphere of life. They cannot be labelled as mere politicians or preachers, but were able to blend the two roles into that of a prophetic politician. Herberg argues, using Eisenhower as an example that the fusion of political and spiritual leadership in the person of one national leader is not in accord with neither the Judeo-Christian tradition nor the tradition of the American democracy. At the same time he acknowledges that since religion is the spiritual side of being an American, “why should not the President of the United States be hailed as the spiritual leader of our times?”⁸⁸⁰

Eisenhower was a trailblazer in spiritual political leadership of the Americans. Reagan has more than occasionally been compared to President Dwight Eisenhower. This comparison is interesting, because Ira Chernus has tried to show a different side of “Ike” as a rhetorician and thinker in his study.⁸⁸¹ Like Reagan, Ike was not conventionally perceived as a thinker in his own times. Both men’s roots are in the Midwestern America and the roots were always close to surface. Something in the personalities of these two cold warriors seems to be shared. Besides the willingness to fight communism the men shared similar simple tastes, a “gee-whiz grin,” and a certain charm of the neighbourhood boy. Just as Chernus found guile underlying Eisenhower’s politics, it would be misleading to see Reagan’s policies as so straightforward, uncomplicated and naïve as they seem at first glance. Behind the naïveté lies an instinct for rapid political decision-making and the ability to communicate directly to the people over the heads of other politicians.⁸⁸² Eisenhower is indeed one Reagan’s favourite sources for presidential quotations and that is ample evidence of the value he held Eisenhower in. He was an important figure in Reagan’s civil religious story verse as well and there is no doubt that Eisenhower was one of Reagan’s personal heroes. Deaver asserts that Reagan had a photo of himself with Eisenhower in every office Reagan worked during the years Deaver knew him.⁸⁸³ One more connection between the two men is that

⁸⁸⁰ Herberg (1960) p. 265

⁸⁸¹ Chernus (2002)

⁸⁸² Smith (1981) p. 150-155

⁸⁸³ Deaver (2003) p. 11

Reagan was after all able to carry out the first successful two-term presidency since that of Eisenhower.⁸⁸⁴

It certainly looks like spiritual leadership has increasingly become a part of what the presidency is all about. Reagan was just one of the most effective spiritual leaders, but the essentially the path has been trodden by figures as unlike each other as George W. Bush and Bill Clinton. If America is indeed a nation with the soul of a church, there is a need for a “Pastor to the Nation”⁸⁸⁵ to reside in the oval office. Reagan slipped easily into this role and was entirely comfortable acting it. Since growing secularism has paradoxically lead to growing religiousness, a touch of religiosity, clothed in the robes of civil religion, and properly understood as preaching the American Way of Life, is able to make the leadership aspect of the presidency more effective.

2.2.4. SECULARISM AND CIVIL RELIGION

While religious and government institutions were intentionally separated from the beginning, it was nevertheless noted that religious morals and values were crucial to the upbringing of children into loyal citizens. While religious freedom allowed for great religious diversity the school system had to combat with the problem of teaching religion and at the same time appealing to all parents across the wide spectrum of denominations. A creative way out of this dilemma was invented in the form of what became called “nonsectarianism.” According to this view there were moral principles which could be shared in common by all Christian denominations regardless of their particular theological beliefs.⁸⁸⁶ As Reagan preached,

It is appropriate that Americans pause to reflect upon the ancient ethical principles and moral values which are the foundation of our character as a Nation.⁸⁸⁷

Perhaps the tradition of nonsectarianism in education still resonates in the field of civil religion as well. Since Americans have conformed to teaching religion-based values in a manner which does not offend the majority of the population or infringe

⁸⁸⁴ Pemberton (1997) p. xiii. Lyndon B Johnson served almost two complete terms, after becoming President when John Fitzgerald Kennedy was assassinated and winning the next election. He does not qualify, since the unpopularity of the Vietnam War among other things resulted in his decision not to post himself as a candidate in the second-term elections.

⁸⁸⁵ This is what Billy Graham called Reagan in National Prayer Breakfast of 1986. See Reagan (2007) p. 389 Diary entry for 6.2.1986

⁸⁸⁶ Feldman (2005) p. 61

⁸⁸⁷ Reagan (3.4.1982) Proclamation 4921. s. 425

on their respective religious beliefs it is easier to formulate a civil religion which would be quite inclusive by its nature. But there has for a long time existed a balancing counter-force in the form of secularism.

Secularism as a term entered the language in 1840's and in England where George Jacob, a young freethinker, who had been jailed for blasphemy when he spoke dismissively of God in a public lecture, coined and popularized the term to be a publicly palatable means to express deep scepticism about the nature of religious truth. For him secularism meant that religion should not be taken into account in public affairs. Therefore, to be a secularist is not synonymous to denying the existence of God, but merely to assert that individuals should focus on things of this world and not of the world to come.⁸⁸⁸ Secularism functioned as a comprehensive worldview that presented itself as an alternative to religious conceptions of the world.⁸⁸⁹ Secularism is in other words not opposed to religion as such, but insists that religion, or the lack of it, should be entirely a private matter. A secularist wants to diminish the role of religion in the profane and public realm. Civil religion is however, capable of ensnaring the secularists as well since the object of faith is the American Way of Life or the American Dream. If the story told is skilfully enough manipulated, its origins in religious faith can be blurred and distorted. Civil religion can be then packaged as nationalism, patriotism, and simple love of the country and culture one resides in, as I attempt to show. The most important thing to gain the support of secularists is to "hide" the religiosity of civil religion.

Even in our secular contemporary times, the overwhelming majority of Americans still say they believe in God, but there is no longer a common understanding how faith should inform nationhood and bring Americans together. Indeed this is one of the most fundamentally divisive questions in today's America among her citizens. Noah Feldman sees Americans as divided into "values evangelicals" and "legal secularists". Values evangelicals are not all evangelical or born-again Christians, but may include Jews, Catholics, or Muslims, as well as people who confess to none of the aforementioned religions, but nevertheless care primarily about identifying traditional moral values. What they all have in common is the goal of evangelizing for values and promoting a set of ideas about how best to live one's life and urging the government to adopt and encourage those values. For

⁸⁸⁸ Feldman (2005) p. 113

⁸⁸⁹ Feldman (2005) p. 129

them, values are what hold the United States together as a nation. Legal secularists on the other hand are not necessarily secular, but they believe in government being secular, and laws that should guarantee its secularity. For them religion is a matter of personal belief and largely irrelevant to government and perhaps even values derived from religion act as a divisive factor within the nation. The conflict between these two groups is a threat to a common national vision.⁸⁹⁰ But religion seems to hold its role in the realm on politics and despite all attempts to either banish it or increase its role it has not become more crucial, nor diminished in its importance. As Reagan described the relationship between secularism and religion in politics,

I'm only the head of a civil government, a secular authority. It's probably true that politics is the prose of a culture, but religion is its poetry. Governments are passing things in the long history of the world, but faith and belief endure forever.⁸⁹¹

I propose that the Western world has not secularized itself to such a degree as it might seem to have. Belief seems to truly endure; only the object occasionally gets altered. Perhaps the meaningfulness of public observances has diminished and at the same time religion has become a matter of the private sphere of life, but the Durkheimian argument of religion being the core of the society still stands true. Especially in the American context, the religious basis of many collective ceremonies is not visible to the casual eye, which tends to look for signs of pure Christian or at best Judeo-Christian faith, while religion tends to appear more in disguise and in connection with myths. Some observers, like Mika Aaltola, even argue that in today's world politics the normative power "revolves around beliefs in entities akin to religion or magic."⁸⁹² Secularism has not had such an impact of world politics as we often tend to believe. The sacred and the means of worshipping, or at the very least of revering it, are still in existence and continue to have a meaning. As Reagan argues, while policies and administrations change, the faith and belief remain and these can be exploited for political purposes.

Perhaps the combination of secularism and religiosity is not, after all, as paradoxical as it at first seems to be. Following Herberg, I argue that the growth of both factors at the same time is only a result of the wall of separation of church and state on individual scale. In the 1950's a majority of Americans asserted (as did

⁸⁹⁰ Feldman (2005) p. 5-9

⁸⁹¹ Reagan (26.7.1984) Remarks at the St. Ann's Festival in Hoboken, New Jersey
<http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1984/72684c.htm>

⁸⁹² Aaltola (2007) p. 7

President Kennedy later as well as presidential candidate John Kerry in the 21st century) that their religiosity has little to do with their politics or business affairs. This is just a repositioning of religion and church in the total scheme of things. It is an affirmation that mostly the growing religiosity is considered to be a matter of private faith, and not of the public sphere. But this is exactly the viewpoint of secularism.⁸⁹³ Indeed, secularism and religiosity can and in America do grow at the same time and this has been a reason for discussion for a long time, whether religion and religious values should play a larger role in the political, public realm of existence. Should one take an even more radical view towards secularism, Reinhold Niebuhr has claimed that, strictly speaking, there is no such thing as secularism, because “an explicit denial of the sacred always contains some implied affirmation of a holy sphere.” He even speaks of a “religion of secularism.”⁸⁹⁴ We can argue that while secularism is considered by many of the Religious Right to be a threat to religion, it actually is an asset in the creation of civil religion by allowing even the nonreligious an easier access into the civil religious story verse. Secularism is not against religion, it merely attempts to remove religion into the private sphere of a citizen’s existence but when religion is thus removed, even an atheist behaves similarly to a devout believer in the political world and the seemingly irreligious civil religion as belief in America can ensnare them all just as easily.

In his denial of secularism Niebuhr writes that our modern culture is not irreligious, but rather devoted to “the old religion of self-glorification. [...] Every form of modern secularism contains an implicit or explicit self-glorification and deification. [...] What begins as the deification of humanity in abstract terms ends at the deification of a particular type of man.”⁸⁹⁵ In this case, the type being deified is *homo americanus*. But, there is even in civil religion a strong sense of secularism embedded. Indeed, it may be the secular aspect, which makes the gospel of civil religion more acceptable to a larger group of individuals, but at the same time a good Christian is actually right in disavowing civil religion as almost heresy, because of the shift in the ultimate object of faith from God to oneself. If we follow Niebuhr’s argument, we can conclude that secularism can mean just the switch of the object of religious faith from divinity to humanity. Religiosity does not

⁸⁹³ Herberg (1960) p.270

⁸⁹⁴ Niebuhr (1986) p. 79

⁸⁹⁵ Niebuhr (1986) p. 80-81

necessarily diminish with the waning of belief in church religion, but tends to focus on self-worship. As in America, this self-worship can occur of the level of an entire people and not in individual narcissism.

2.2.5. AMERICAN WAY OF LIFE AS A RELIGION

There are many blessings in this good world, but surely the greatest is the one we all share: We're Americans.⁸⁹⁶

-Ronald Wilson Reagan

What then could be this “American civil religion?” Herberg offers the answer that a “common religion” for Americans, by and large, is the system familiarly known as the American Way of Life, which supplies the society in times of conflict with an “overarching sense of unity.” American Way of Life should not be dismissed as a “political formula or propagandist slogan” or an “expression of materialistic impulses.”⁸⁹⁷ There are naturally other opinions as well. Schurmann is one, who argues that there is no “American common religion” unless one wants to accept the argument of the fundamentalists that it is secular humanism. Schurmann argues that in secular humanism it is not God, but humans that constitute the source all values derive from. He claims that in America “laws are not only rules but values as well, a concept intrinsic to the three great western religions, Judaism, Christianity and Islam. The Book is the source of values, placed there by the representatives of the people, not as a revelation from God.”⁸⁹⁸

I argue that these two different views can be brought together and that this is precisely what Reagan attempted with his storytelling. Civil religion uses the Judeo-Christian faith and to some degree secularizes and Americanizes it as well. Furthermore, there is no intrinsic reason why other faiths, such as Islam, could not be included as well. Secular humanism seems to set the people, Americans as a unity, into the place of the object, perhaps of not worship as such, but the object of faith at least. People are the source of all authority in politics, and this authority is in turn depicted as sacred. Religious ideas then seep into secularist humanism as well, while religions are secularized. Reagan walked the middle path between these two

⁸⁹⁶ Reagan (5.4.1982) Remarks at the National Legislative Conference of the Building and Construction Trades Department, AFL-CIO. p. 432

⁸⁹⁷ Herberg (1960) p. 75

⁸⁹⁸ Schurmann (1995) p. 18

extremities. In his storytelling people and God are not actually blended into one concept but both serve as authorities. The will of one is just almost as important as that of the other, or at least a direct derivative of it. Again, it is the narratively created inner complexity of the entire combination of different stories told, which is able to mellow out differing options of the two opposite viewpoints and allow both religious and secular types of people to be drawn within the story world to at least some degree, and then get further ensnared with other storylines.

Will Herberg published in 1955 his famous book “Protestant, Catholic, Jew.” Religion was considered to be beneficial for both the individual and the community and consonant with a common overarching civil religion, which Herberg called the American Way of Life. This creed is composed of a “trinity” of its own. That is, political democracy, economic free enterprise and social egalitarianism. Herberg echoed Eisenhower in writing that religion means “not so much any particular religion, but religion as such, religion in general.”⁸⁹⁹ Mead claims that in a religiously pluralistic America, whenever one talks or writes about religion, it has to be precisely this “religion in general,” forced upon us by the American experience.⁹⁰⁰ An even earlier formulation of the same idea is found in de Tocqueville, who argued that while for an individual it is of utmost importance that his religion is “true,” for the society it does not matter, since it has nothing to fear or gain from the other life. It is the mores that matter and each sect practically teaches the same morality in the name of its respective conception of God. For a society the most important thing is then “not so much that all citizens profess the true religion but that they profess a religion. [...] the morality of Christianity is everywhere the same.”⁹⁰¹ Daniel J. Boorstin yet again echoed the same theme as Herberg and Eisenhower, when he claimed that “intellectually speaking, ‘religions’ are unimportant in American life; but Religion is of enormous importance. To conform in the United States, it is important to be a member of *a* church.”⁹⁰² The object of belief is not as important as the fact that the belief exists.

⁸⁹⁹ Herberg (1955) Cited in Eck (2001) p. 61

⁹⁰⁰ Mead (1975) p. 8

⁹⁰¹ de Tocqueville (2000) p. 278. Being a prisoner of his own times de Tocqueville could not have foreseen the future religious diversity if the United States with other than Christian religions being abundant. In a way his thesis still holds true, since mostly religions tend to teach their believers how to live a good life, which is one of the goals of politics in general.

⁹⁰² Boorstin (1953) p. 136

For approach to the theory of American civil religion the definition by Herberg is crucial, because of its functional nature. To decipher American civil religion as belief in the American Way of Life gives a politician the means to effectively turn it into his tool of leadership. The belief is essential, but its contents have to be manipulated so that instead of living a good Christian life, the believer should live the American Life and allow this to be a cornerstone of his entire belief-structure. A prophetic politician can try to use this belief for his benefit. From purely religious viewpoint this tendency of religious pluralism degenerating into consistent homogeneity of the lowest level of shared belief is disadvantageous, since the outcome hardly even deserves to be called a religion anymore, but from a cultural and especially political viewpoint it offers many benefits.⁹⁰³ Religion and politics can be blended in this form of civil religion to a degree where religion no longer is a purely spiritual belief but patriotic and national faith above all.

Herberg describes the American Way of life to be “a spiritual structure, a structure of ideas and ideals, of aspirations and values, of beliefs and standards; it synthesizes all that commends itself to the American as the right, the good, and the true in actual life.”⁹⁰⁴ He uses the term “way of life” to underline “its religious essence, for one’s ultimate, over-all way of life is religion.”⁹⁰⁵

Herberg writes that “the American Way of Life is the symbol by which Americans define themselves and establish their unity”⁹⁰⁶ Should it have to be defined in one word, it would be “democracy” since it “is obviously a synonym for the American Way of Life.”⁹⁰⁷ Still, he claims that one should not draw false conclusions by claiming that democracy would be a religion or a “super-faith” embracing Protestantism, Judaism and Catholicism. This conclusion is logical and even Herberg admits it, but this “common faith” works on a deeper level in the minds of Americans and from there affects thoughts and feelings and makes no attempt to supplant the recognized religions.⁹⁰⁸ The American Way of Life is supposed to work as a transcendental religious superstructure. It is occasionally even above the true religion of an American.

⁹⁰³ Niebuhr –Heimert (1963) p. 63

⁹⁰⁴ Herberg (1960) p. 75

⁹⁰⁵ Ibid. p. 75

⁹⁰⁶ Herberg (1960) p. 78

⁹⁰⁷ Herberg (1960) p. 87. But “democracy” has to be used in “the peculiar American sense” Herberg (1960) p 78

⁹⁰⁸ Herberg (1960) p. 88

Both Judaism and Christianity, for example, call for an unconditional love for the fellow man. Yet, especially in the case of members of “dangerous” political parties,⁹⁰⁹ hate is an actually sanctioned emotion. When the American Way of Life approves of one’s fellow man, the American is ready to love him, and where it disapproves, the Americans in a great majority do not hesitate to refrain from practicing their love.⁹¹⁰ This is interesting since as Reagan noted about Moses: “the Ten Commandments that Moses brought down from them mountains – and he didn’t just bring down 10 suggestions.”⁹¹¹ There are actual rules within the religion that a person should obey. In some cases then, the American Way of Life overrides the decrees of the religion itself, and thus has to occupy a somewhat higher prestige in the minds and hearts of Americans than their Judeo-Christian faith. The ideals of the American Way of life are not, as Herberg notes, scrupulously observed in practice. “But violated or not, they are felt to be normative and relevant to “business and politics” in a way that the formal tenets of “official” religion are not.”⁹¹² What Herberg in fact did, was to provide a more tangible content to the idea of “culture religion” or “religion in general.”⁹¹³ He gave the creed for the religion others speculated upon, and found it in the basic tenets of the American Way of Life as he saw it.

Robert Bellah saw things differently in his classic article in *Daedalus*. Not only is the American Way of Life a generalized religion of the churches, but that there indeed exists “clearly differentiated from the churches an elaborate and well-institutionalized civil religion in America.”⁹¹⁴ He quotes from the Kennedy Inaugural address to prove that God is mentioned by the presidents in places, which are more or less of only “ceremonial significance”, usually at the beginning and closing paragraphs. Besides, these references are according to Bellah most commonly to be found in “the pronouncements of presidents of solemn occasions” and not for example in his working messages to congress. “A cynical observer might even say that an American president has to mention God or risk losing

⁹⁰⁹ Here Herberg undoubtedly refers to communists.

⁹¹⁰ Herberg (1960) p. 76-77

⁹¹¹ Reagan (9.9.1982) Remarks at Kansas State University at the Alfred M. Landon Lecture Series on Public Issues. s. 1122 Actually interestingly enough Blenkinsopp refers to the content of Torah as “instructions.” They are more teachings than orders. Blenkinsopp (1995) p. 39

⁹¹² Herberg (1960) p. 77

⁹¹³ Mead (1975) p. 17

⁹¹⁴ Bellah (1967) p. 1-21

votes.”⁹¹⁵ Inaugural addresses are, according to Phillips, one of the venues where God is evoked and the idea of exceptionalism, the role of a chosen nation is proselytized and promoted.⁹¹⁶ Wilson is another scholar, who argues that while the inaugural address has since the days of Eisenhower been the *locus classicus*, where to search for things to analyze about the religious content of presidential language, along with the annual State of the Union address, they are too much of routine occasions, where the President is practically expected to make references to religion, and thus not all that helpful and not sufficient for study.⁹¹⁷

When one reads the Inaugural messages of the American presidents, one has to agree. It does not matter, whether the president in question is a democrat or a republican, a conservative or a liberal. The invocations of God’s name are omnipresent. The similarities in inaugural messages between as different kinds of politicians as Ronald Reagan and Bill Clinton are astonishing. It has been claimed that, ironically, Bill Clinton’s victory against the former Reagan vice president George H. W. Bush was largely due to the fact that Clinton accepted much of the political agenda as defined by Reagan. Along with other influences, like Roosevelt and Kennedy, Clinton’s style reflects certain elements of Ronald Reagan.⁹¹⁸ It is noteworthy that Clinton was able to use the master narrative of religion to his benefit, which is rare in Democratic politicians. Since he was more comfortable than George H.W. Bush in using the evangelical language he managed to portray himself as a more traditionally religious figure in the Christian meaning of the word than his rival.

There practically seems to be a “blueprint” that the inaugural addresses follow in terms of religiosity, or rather, in terms of invocations of religious topics and use of religious language. Even if mentions of God are highly ceremonial and ritual in nature, one should not count them as insignificant. What is said in presidential addresses on solemn occasions should not be taken at face value, but there often is a reflection of deep-set values and commitments, which are not

⁹¹⁵ Bellah (1967) p. 2

⁹¹⁶ Phillips (2006) p. 125. The concept of American exceptionalism relies on the myth of the chosen nation but by using this label the religious origins of being chosen can be obscured. See Hughes (2003) p. 19 See also Stout (2006) p. 458-459 who claims that the Civil War reaffirmed that America indeed is the chosen nation.

⁹¹⁷ Wilson (1979) 45, 48-49, 53

⁹¹⁸ Peterson (1997) p. 78

usually made explicit in daily life.⁹¹⁹ Rituals are highly meaningful. Many of the ceremonies involved in a working democracy are first and foremost rituals. The President of the United States of America would not actually in our information overloaded society have to give the State of the Union Address, but it is an important ritual of the governing process. At the inauguration, the new president demonstrates his worthiness. He proves that the “sacred deity of America itself” can be trusted on him. For Smith inaugurations are “rites of passage in which the new leader emerges from the ranks of the profane to the realms of the sacred.”⁹²⁰

A lot of the presidential leadership is just carrying out rituals. More than the chief executive, the modern president with his slowly diminishing powers, is a ritual leader, and his actual leadership is manifested to the general public primarily in the conduction of rituals and ceremonies. Carrying out the rituals does not mean that the prophetic politician should not try to alter the content or the form of those rituals. One good example of renewal of old rituals was the treatment Reagan gave to the State of the Union addresses he delivered. After Jefferson the habit of delivering the annual message in person became extinct until Woodrow Wilson. Reagan understood the possibilities of personal appearance and today it is almost inconceivable that the Union address would be presented only on paper. The personal appearance and the delivery of the speech is a ritual with heightened importance in its ceremonial form. Bellah also notes that most often the “God” presidents refer to, is a much generalized concept. It is not God, as He is seen by any particular denomination. The “God” of presidential addresses is almost “an empty sign,” because He is something almost every American can accept, but that at the same time means an unlimited number of different things to all of them.⁹²¹ The invocations of God’s name are not of as great importance as the religious mechanisms continuously at play underneath the highly formalized language, which reaches its summits at inaugural addresses. The connections of religion and politics need to be searched for elsewhere, in order to get a deeper understanding of these structures. Very often other, less formal speech events, tell more about the religious connections of the presidents and this is why I have chosen excerpts from many lesser known speeches of Reagan.

⁹¹⁹ Bellah (1967) p. 2

⁹²⁰ Smith (1997) p. 814

⁹²¹ Bellah (1967) p. 3

Bellah writes that the civil religion “at its best is a genuine apprehension of universal and transcendent religious reality as [...] revealed through the experience of the American people. Like all religions it has suffered various deformations and demonic distortions.”⁹²² This is important to grasp; at different times the civil religion has been more suited to describe the American experience or just as well been deformed into merely a political tool, which has not been consistent with the national collective thought. Reagan’s version was certainly political, he used it to improve America’s standing in the world and build it up to a superpower again. But the striking fact was his ability to connect with the mood of the nation. His prophetic message of the civil religion truly resonated with a majority of Americans. ”I believe that faith in God, love of freedom, family, work, and neighbourhood are what made America strong and will keep her free.”⁹²³ Soft values, such as family, are tightly connected in his story verse to other harder, even militaristic, factors such as the powerful army as components of the same plan to keep America free. The family needs to be as strong as the army and according to the story logic one cannot be strengthened without the other. The value of family is practically universally accepted norm and no-one would argue about enhancing its status but it is attached to the military strength as well. Reagan’s willingness to build up the arsenal of the country and increase its military might can be partially derived from his attempts to build a strong civil religion as well. Inbuilt into civil religion is the must to keep one’s nation strong and not allow it to decline, since, as Niebuhr wrote, “those who make a god of their nation must despair when the might of their nation crumbles, as every creaturely and sinful might must.”⁹²⁴

It can be argued, like Aaltola does, that in our contemporary world “the capitalist model of market democracy with its separation of powers, the separation of state and church, its definition of human rights and its model of parliamentary democracy and elections are actually probably held more universal in their appeal than Christianity today.”⁹²⁵ Therefore, to base civil religion upon Judeo-Christian values, is not universal enough as a foundation. Reagan’s version of the civil religion was not as far detached from the Christian tradition as Bellah seems to

⁹²² Bellah (1967) p. 12

⁹²³ Reagan (5.4.1982) Remarks at the National Legislative Conference of the Building and Construction Trades Department, AFL-CIO. s. 433

⁹²⁴ Niebuhr (1986) p. 84

⁹²⁵ Aaltola (2007) p. 62

suggest civil religion needs to be. However, he admits that civil religion borrows constantly but selectively from the religious tradition, so that “the average American saw no conflict between the two.”⁹²⁶ This process, according to Bellah, allows civil religion to build up “powerful symbols of national solidarity and to mobilize deep levels of personal motivation for the attainment of national goals.”⁹²⁷ I suggest that the personal touch Reagan added to the civil religion was to blend it with the more common religiosity in such a manner, that there only was no “conflict,” but actually even no difference between the two. The God of Reagan’s personal faith was added to the tenets of the civil religion and thus the civil religion and Christian religion in effect became practically the same religion.

It does my spirit good to be among thousands of Americans from our heartland, people with *faith in God, the United States, and themselves*. And despite the doomcriers that are abroad in the land, I believe that most of America shares your faith.⁹²⁸

In this quote Reagan reveals what the essence of his civil religious beliefs is. A new, more secular trinity emerges. One must believe in God, the United States and Americans as people. To believe in God means according to the story logic that one automatically believes in America as well, since it was created by a Divine Providence, and to believe in America necessitates that one must have faith in its constituents, that is, citizens. There is something divine in each and every American, due to America doing God’s work and performing the task of spreading freedom around the globe.

Herberg argues that there are dangers involved in the creation of a civil religion. In the worst case scenario the combining of religion and national purpose into an inseparable goal “generates a kind of national messianism which sees it as the vocation of America to bring the American Way of Life, compounded almost equally of democracy and free enterprise, to every corner of the globe.”⁹²⁹ [...] The ultimate result of this process would thus be “the direct exploitation of religion for economic and political ends.”⁹³⁰ Bellah sees this as a grave danger as well. America itself should not be worshipped and civil religion should be rather seen as a tool for interpreting the American experience. He denies explicitly that American civil

⁹²⁶ Bellah (1967) p. 13

⁹²⁷ Bellah (1967) p. 13

⁹²⁸ Reagan (2.8.1982) Remarks at the Annual Convention of the National Corn Growers Association in Des Moines, Iowa. s. 999 Italics mine.

⁹²⁹ Herberg (1960) p. 264

⁹³⁰ Herberg (1960) p. 264

religion is “not the worship of the American nation but an understanding of the American experience in the light of ultimate and universal reality.”⁹³¹ The approach of Herberg is rather Machiavellian in its nature, but Bellah saw the function of civil religion in a more rosy light. This led later to grave disappointment for him with the entire concept. In a sense both theorists are correct. Civil religion can be understood only as a means of grasping the meaning of being American and a guide into how an American should see his role in the greater scheme of things in the reality which encompasses him.

I stick to the definition of Herberg concerning civil religion because of its political potentiality. Bellah took Herberg’s claims about civil religion and used them in totally opposite way. But my definition of civil religion as a story web and a field of contesting stories, vying for more prominent positions in producing meanings, allows us and the prophetic politician the means to pick and choose characteristics of one of the numerous definitions and play with these meanings. Thus, it is possible to view the highly politicized version of civil religion not only as an interpretative tool of the American experience and its highest ideals in the sense Bellah calls for and a validation for the society and its politics without any judgement and Herberg argues. In a way Reagan in his narration continuously attempts to interpret the essentials of the American experience through terminology like “faith in God, patriotism, the love of freedom, family, work, neighbourhood – the heart and soul of America’s past and the promise of her future.”⁹³² Perhaps for some the American experience of transcendent reality can be expressed thus. But when setting down such definitions, Reagan does a deed that is political to the extreme. After these core values have been set in stone on the level of narration, there is no need to question the limits to patriotism or what America is ready to do to propagate the freedom that is depicted in narration as such a crucial element of the American experience. The light of “universal reality” is cast by story logic more than anything else and the civil religion can become the “demonic distortion” Bellah wrote about. The story web of interpretations that creates the story verse can bring the narratee from Bellah’s idealistic starting point into the realm of civil religion and end in unquestioning love of one’s own country with the burning heat of a zealot.

⁹³¹ Bellah (1967) p. 18

⁹³² Reagan (15.3.1982) Address Before a Joint Session of the Alabama State Legislature in Montgomery. s. 292

Herberg argues that civil religion can be turned into worshipping one's own country. A skilful prophetic politician can with his storytelling greatly influence the way his people perceive their reality to be; he is able to create the illusion that the object of worship is something else than it seems. Furthermore, if the American experience is narrated as "democracy,"⁹³³ the American civil religion can be used on a more global scale. The world civil religion of democracy and free markets would be a fulfilment of the American civil religion and not a denial of it. As Bellah argues, a world civil religion "has been the eschatological hope of American civil religion from the beginning. To deny such an outcome would be to deny the meaning of America itself."⁹³⁴ The spread of democracy, which began much earlier, was effectively carried out on the narrative level in the Reagan era. For Reagan, "The tide of history is a freedom tide. In the last 6 years, not 1 square inch of ground has been lost to communism, and a small nation -- Grenada -- has been liberated."⁹³⁵ According to the story logic, freedom and democracy were spreading everywhere and the best showcase was Latin America. It was not so much that democracy itself would have been spread but rather the idea of spreading it by the means of storytelling. Reagan argued that what had begun was

A new era of freedom: We see it throughout Central and South America -- the great democratic awakening that in the last 10 years has brought 90 percent of the people of Latin America into the family of democratic nations.⁹³⁶

While the level of story world argues on behalf of this argument, in the real world the Reagan administration provided massive support to numerous totalitarian regimes, especially in Latin America in both economic and military terms. This same process still continues, hidden between the strands of the story web as the past two decades of development in Iraq shows clearly. By spreading democracy, America is actually spreading American civil religion understood as the American Way of Life and influence as well. There are strong seeds of imperialism in the

⁹³³ Naturally there are numerous and occasionally even almost contradictory definitions of what "democracy" means but I ask the reader not to be offended by my use of it here, which follows the common usage in American political discourse with additional elements from Republican, Conservative and even Reaganesque interpretations.

⁹³⁴ Bellah (1967) p. 18

⁹³⁵ Reagan (29.6.1987) Remarks at a White House Briefing for Administration Supporters <http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1987/062987a.htm>

⁹³⁶ Reagan (9.11.1987) Remarks to Representatives of the Organization of American States <http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1987/110987c.htm>

eschatological vision of America to bring the salvation of democracy, or in other words, the American experience, to the grasp of all nations.

But what was the concept of America for Reagan? “In a very real sense all people who long for freedom are our countrymen.”⁹³⁷ This emphasises the idea of America being an imagined community. It cannot be clearly defined and the boundaries are artificial such as borders. For Reagan being an American is a state of mind or state of being instead of a state of being at. Being American and belonging to America is subscribing to a certain set of values, as they are defined and narrated by Reagan. The love of freedom is the most crucial of these values in the sense of defining America. Thus while nobody can become a German or Japanese everyone can become an American.⁹³⁸ De Tocqueville noted while studying the Constitution of the United States of America that “The Union is an ideal nation that exists only in minds, and whose extent and bounds intelligence alone discovers.”⁹³⁹ America has never been a fixed geographical concept. It is a state of mind, a utopia to be fulfilled. It is the paradise on earth to come once its potential is in full bloom. “To all who yearn to breathe free, who long for a better life, we think of you; we pray for you; we’re with you always.”⁹⁴⁰ Jari Rantapelkonen has noted that the United States of America is a part of the larger territorial and cultural area of “America.” Often this is depicted as specifically North America but sometimes as an idea that represents the free world.⁹⁴¹ Reagan used America in both of these senses but also when talking to South Americans he included them in the narration. The most crucial meaning for him and this study is America as an idea, aspiration and culture, which is imbued with a different and more patriotic meaning than the mere USA. USA one lives in, but America one aspires to live in and bring about – and also have faith in.

It is worth noticing that, at least on the level of story logic, Reagan recognized that America is not such a culturally united block as often it is believed to be or even as he sometimes himself described it.

It seems to me that America is constantly reinventing what “America” means. We adopt this country's phrases and that country's art, and I think it's

⁹³⁷ Reagan (1.1.1982) Remarks to the People of Foreign Nations on New Year’s Day. s.2

⁹³⁸ See Reagan (19.1.1989) Remarks at the Presentation Ceremony for the Presidential Medal of Freedom <http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1989/011989b.htm>

⁹³⁹ de Tocqueville (2000) p. 155

⁹⁴⁰ Reagan (1.1.1982) Remarks to the People of Foreign Nations on New Year’s Day. s.2

⁹⁴¹ Rantapelkonen (2006) p. 38

really closer to the truth to say that America has assimilated as much as her immigrants have. It's made for a delightful diversity, and it's made us a stronger and a more vital nation.⁹⁴²

Since America is reinventing itself, we cannot allow the American Way of Life to be any more stable. It has to assimilate new ideas and evolve continuously and allow for the true diversity which exists among Americans.

First of all, America is really many Americas. We call ourselves a nation of immigrants, and that's truly what we are. We have drawn people from every corner of the Earth. We're composed of virtually every race and religion, and not in small numbers, but large. [...] And this diversity has more than enriched us; it has literally shaped us.⁹⁴³

Reagan's America is pluralistic in its nature, but nevertheless is unified into a singular concept. Reagan's America was not bound by a geography, indeed, before his presidency he had characterized America as "less of a place than an idea."⁹⁴⁴ Everything the immigrants have brought and keep bringing into America supposedly recreates America anew. The diversity of cultures, customs, and ideas shape America, but in the actual process it is the American Way of Life or the Dream, which conforms itself to match these new requirements. The immigrants do not have to give up their beliefs. They can continue to think in the same way, but the civil religion as a metanarrative engulfs their narratives within it, and the "small stories" of immigrants' individual dreams are turned into minuscule particles of the great American Dream. The civic religious metastory is supposedly strong enough to contain the individual dreams and yet not transform itself in a remarkable manner.

Alan Wolfe has noted that American religious landscape had profoundly changed in the time leading to the new millennium. While some segments of America had become more religious and fundamentalist in their faith, other segments had become less religious. He argues that morality in America has "more to do with the sub communities to which one belongs than to the national community to which all belong."⁹⁴⁵ The construction of American Way of Life on the tenets of only the Judeo-Christian tradition is not inclusive enough in the changing religious atmosphere. Bellah raised an important question, which is even

⁹⁴² Reagan (1.10.1984) Remarks at Naturalization Ceremonies for New United States Citizens in Detroit, Michigan <http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1984/100184a.htm>

⁹⁴³ Reagan (30.4.1984) Remarks at Fudan University in Shanghai, China <http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1984/43084e.htm>

⁹⁴⁴ Reagan (1952) cited in Kengor p. 94

⁹⁴⁵ Wolfe (1991) p. 4

more pressing in contemporary America. God has been a central symbol in the civil religion and remains so to this day. Today, the concept of God or what is meant with the word “God,” has become more ambiguous. Kennedy was the first Catholic president. In the future there might be a Jewish, agnostic, atheist or just as well a Muslim president of the United States of America. The whole God symbolism requires reformulation.⁹⁴⁶

In contemporary America there is such a religious diversity that the God of the civil religion has to be rethought. How does the Judeo-Christian God-concept fit together with the concept of a multitude of deities that the Hindus have? There is no conceivable way these can be made to coexist and still talk about God. There is a pressing need to replace God with mere faith in something. Reagan was still able to relatively well unify the nation with Judeo-Christian tradition of God, but today new images have to be created. Perhaps there is still a need to return to the “Nature’s God” (or to include the Hindus; gods and deities) or then take a radically new turn, one which Reagan started to sound out. If the concept of God, or whatever one considers being “holy,” is fused together with America, there is a way to replace the God with America. If America is seen as a manifestation of everything that is good, moral, or worthy in the world it can supplant God.

Practically everyone who has tried to formulate a civil religion, starting from Herberg and continuing past Reagan into our contemporary times, fall into the same pit of seeing American civil religion as a unified concept that would suit everybody. They seem to think that in our pluralistic society, there could be one, unified way of life each citizen could and would vouch for. Herberg at least notes that the American way of life is “a middle-class way,”⁹⁴⁷ but fails to realize the exclusiveness that results from this. Herberg even goes so far as to ascertain that if one does not subscribe to the commonly accepted American Way of Life, he is not even an American. This exclusivity is the major problem of creating a truly unifying civil religion. The answer could lie either in finding such fundamental common denominators in all citizens, that the ideals resulting from them would be universally acceptable. “Life, liberty and pursuit of happiness” could be one civil religious trinity that all probably could agree with, but they are at the same time too universalistic concepts, at least in the American context, that building a way of life

⁹⁴⁶ Bellah (1967) p. 15

⁹⁴⁷ Herberg (1960) p. 81

entirely upon such abstractions could work. Thus I suggest that the only way of creating a truly inclusive civil religion is to narratively craft it.

We have to understand that civil religion is not a unified belief system. It should rather be understood as a cultural resource that can be activated by discourse for diverse, even contradictory political purposes.⁹⁴⁸ It is an encompassing phenomenon to such a degree, that practically anyone is able to insert practically anything within it. This makes the actual study of what form the civil religion takes, if not impossible, then at least fruitless. But if we see civil religion as a dynamic field of contesting stories, the narratives are used in the attempts to define it become politically interesting.

Based on all of this, I argue that Reagan wove a web of stories more or less loosely connected with American civil religion, but mostly about faith, values, and patriotism and allowed each story recipient to choose what they wanted to interpret and include in the story world they created. The academically educated could sympathize with universal values like liberty and likewise the most patriotic found in Reagan's stories the burning love they had for America. My argument is that Reagan did not want to provide a very binding concept of American civil religion, but rather narrated it so, that everyone could choose the storyline they found most pleasing and follow it deeper into "Reaganland." There was no unified civil religion, but this created an illusion of unity. The story of civil religious faith has to be told so, that its limits, contents, and boundaries cannot be determined, but are always communicated by rich storytelling. Then, and only then, each citizen could follow a particular storyline from a web of stories that should please him.

This is in accord with Richard Madsen who wrote about the "contentless consensus," meaning that in American context certain expressions like "community," "American Dream," or "common values" are not defined at all, and thus in political discourse there can be a conflict between two actors, who articulate their goals with the same terminology.⁹⁴⁹ The higher the office, the emptier the rhetoric of politicians becomes, and the myths and symbols become disassociated with their meanings.⁹⁵⁰ De Tocqueville writes fittingly about abstract words filling democratic languages. These words are used constantly without linking them to any

⁹⁴⁸ Aaltola (2007) p. 35

⁹⁴⁹ Madsen (1991) 451-456

⁹⁵⁰ Stuckey (1989) p. 3

particular fact to “render the expression more rapid and the idea less clear.”⁹⁵¹ As George Orwell wrote, all too often political language “is designed to make lies sound truthful and murder respectable, and to give an appearance of solidity to pure wind.”⁹⁵² The language itself is vague and filled with terminology, which is empty, once the citizen burrows deeper into the meanings of what has been said. Politics is a language game, where the “true” meaning of the words is elusive at best and mythical qualities are easy to attach to certain terms like “freedom” or “democracy” while their meanings vary from one story recipient to another.

Any text carries a denotation and several connotations. A denotation would be the primary signification of the text, such as could be found in dictionaries. To focus only on a denotation, is to ignore the way text can have several different meanings to several different people. Connotation is a feature, which has the power to relate itself to anterior, ulterior, or exterior mentions and other sites of the text along with other texts. Barthes claims that it is “an association made by the text-as-subject within its own system. [...] connotations are meanings which are neither in the dictionary nor in the grammar of the language in which a text is written. [...] the articulation of a voice which is woven into the text.”⁹⁵³

The use of both systems of denotation and connotation enables the text to operate like a game, where both systems refer to each other. For political narratives this play of meaning-making systems is important, since ideologically this game endows the text with an illusion of innocence. One system turns back to itself to indicate its existence so that the denotation is not the first meaning, but pretends to be just that, while it is no more than the last of the connotations which both seems to establish and simultaneously to close the reading. The text seems to return to the nature, and provide us with a simple, natural and primitive but mostly truthful meaning, above which everything else is literary.⁹⁵⁴ The political implications of the text are in this process disguised under the rather neutral denotation. Whatever else the text represents politically is carried along with connotations, which spring up in the mind of the reader.

If civil religion could be built entirely upon narratives of universally accepted myths, each citizen could construct a civil religious story world to his own

⁹⁵¹ De Tocqueville (2000) p. 457

⁹⁵² Orwell [www-document](#)

⁹⁵³ Barthes (1974) p. 8-9

⁹⁵⁴ Barthes (1974) p. 9-10

liking, and due to the ambiguousness involved in the storytelling imagine, that others actually think of the civil religion in the same terms as he does, while others, in fact, inhabit perhaps even fundamentally different story worlds than his. The civil religion, or the American Way of Life, should not be spelled out in detail, but its characteristics should only be narratively referred to in order to allow people to design them to their own liking. If storytelling gives birth to the civil religious story worlds, it would be possible to achieve this illusion of universality.

Narrative is an effective way to produce and articulate such meanings, as can be used to teach individual citizens “to live a distinctively imaginary relation to their conditions of existence,”⁹⁵⁵ so that they will gain a meaningful relation to the social order, in which they have to live out their lives. But this relation is nevertheless unreal. The entire social reality a citizen lives in can be both “lived and realistically comprehended as a story.”⁹⁵⁶ Dominant social groups can produce and control authoritative myths and ideologies based on these myths. There needs to be an adequate supply of stories to represent the reality to reveal its “true meaning.” This helps to avoid the society entering a crisis caused by the loss of belief in the social system, and the erosion of the possibility to lead meaningful lives within the social culture.⁹⁵⁷ Stories become the vessels of transmitting meaning into the everyday lives of the citizenry. While these stories tell of something the citizenry should believe in, in the case of my dissertation the American Dream and Way of Life, they simultaneously become objects of belief themselves. Stories produce meanings in a society and the society becomes something an individual needs to believe in, in order for the social order to be stable and the individual to be a citizen or a social subject. This relationship to the social formation is unreal, but nevertheless seems plausible. A society, a state, or a federal system are objects of belief, since they produce meanings for the lives of individuals, but are never concretely present for direct observation. For a society to remain functional, the majority of inhabitants need to believe in its existence. Reagan was elected during one of these crises of belief in America and he started to rebuild the faith people had lost. This time the crisis was multifaceted. The economic situation was threatening and inflation was running amuck. The image of USA had deteriorated abroad and for example its

⁹⁵⁵ White (1987) p. x

⁹⁵⁶ White (1987) p. x

⁹⁵⁷ White (1987) p. x

European allies were looking for alternative means of providing security independently of the US. Even the self-image of a “can-do nation” had suffered because of the inability to free the hostages in Teheran. While the society itself was intact, there was a dire need to recreate the faith of the people in the society.

Reagan’s society constructing stories were different and unusual, because he chose to strengthen the people’s faith in an imaginary concept of America as a formation consisting of small communities. Families formed social circles, and they joined to create cities and other communities, and these communities formed states, which were only joined under the flag of the United States of America. Reagan sought to portray in his stories the relationships of people in small communities joined together, and not people as part of the enormous machinery of the federation. Instead of resurrecting people’s faith in government, Reagan attempted to get them to believe in themselves as a people.

Reagan substituted the American reality with an idealized fantasy America, teeming with opportunity and equality. Godfrey Hodgson called it a “philosophical quasi-religion of Americanism.” This concept can be clarified as the “need to reassert American nationalism or patriotism or “Americanism” or “American exceptionalism”: the idea that American society, however flawed, is not only essentially good but somehow morally superior to other societies.”⁹⁵⁸ Richard Falk talks about the “self-glorifying American epic narrative” and notes that “no dose of historical objectivity has been able to weaken this self-redeeming and seemingly endlessly self-renewing sense of American moral exceptionalism and innocence.”⁹⁵⁹ This type of thinking simplifies both national motives and character. Molly Andrews sees American political story as belonging to the genre of morality plays, where there is no doubt who is good, who is bad and what constitutes the conflict and how it should be resolved.⁹⁶⁰ Northrop Frye argued that, “In every age the ruling social or intellectual class tends to project its ideas in some form of romance.”⁹⁶¹ Reagan’s entire metanarrative is in accordance with the worldview of romance, since in it presents, the words of Frye again, “an idealized world: in romance heroes are brave, heroines beautiful, villains villainous, and the frustrations

⁹⁵⁸ Hodgson, cited in Chernus (2006) p. 34

⁹⁵⁹ Falk. Cited in Andrews (2007) p. 109

⁹⁶⁰ Andrews (2007) p. 179-180

⁹⁶¹ Frye (1957) p. 186

of ordinary life are made little of.”⁹⁶² This is a good definition of the mythical America Reagan narrated into existence. And Reagan himself is was a necessary part of that America since political heroes are crucial to romantic democracy because they represent mythical symbols and Reagan became a symbol for his age⁹⁶³ and his mythical America as well.

Our mission stretches far beyond our borders; God's family knows no borders. In your life you face daily trials, but millions of believers in other lands face far worse. They are mocked and persecuted for the crime of loving God. To every religious dissident trapped in that cold, cruel existence, we send our love and support. Our message? You are not alone; you are not forgotten; do not lose your faith and hope because someday you, too, will be free.⁹⁶⁴

While Reagan often assures foreign audiences that American mission is not imperialistic or threatening by nature, he still claims here that there are no borders which could stop this mission, since God’s family knows no borders. If the mission were carried out in purely Christian terms, this might not seem threatening, since all Reagan seems to do is to advocate spreading the message of God to each and every inhabitant of this globe without artificial man-made restrictions such as borders.

However, since the message of God is about freedom, and America is the essence of concentrated freedom on earth, there is the imminent threat of spreading American values at the same time. This is a version of imperialism, whether only cultural, or even militarily aided. Hughes argues that the American myths can be used and indeed are used as a powerful force for good. The problem with them only arises when the myths become absolutes, and then they can create an irresponsible empire within our global culture.⁹⁶⁵ It is when the interpretation of the myths is absolutized, that they become metanarratives. They dominate the storytelling so that the voices of dissent and the suffering minorities cannot be heard. Naturally this type of dominant narrative is what prophetic politics tries to create, but a certain sense of morality should be included in the story logic to avoid exploitation of the ones who cannot produce counter-narratives.

⁹⁶² Frye (1957) p. 151

⁹⁶³ Combs (1993) p. 9

⁹⁶⁴ Reagan (30.1.1984) Remarks at the Annual Convention of the National Religious Broadcasters
<http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1984/13084b.htm>

⁹⁶⁵ Hughes (2003) p. 193

We have the power and the challenge to expand freedom in all areas of life; freedom of inquiry and thought, freedom for the practice of religion, freedom in commerce.⁹⁶⁶

Reagan's America sought to expand freedom domestically and globally. The problem is that many Americans believe in the universality of Americanism. As Prestowitz notes, it is like a super church that everyone can join and, indeed, Americans believe that every human being is a potential American. Thus, expanding freedom means expanding Americanism.⁹⁶⁷ To understand Reagan better, he believed that it is only propaganda, that depicts Americans as militaristic, while they are the "most moral & generous people on earth. We should be appealing to the world on the basis of morality."⁹⁶⁸

The morality Reagan speaks of is grounded in the historic faiths of Christianity and Judaism. As I wrote earlier, the faiths themselves have been shaped in the American context as stated earlier. These religions have become "Americanized" under the pervasive American environment by converging with the totality of the American experience.⁹⁶⁹ It is the way of life, being American, and living in America, which reformulates the old religions and blends them together. While these "official" religions shape the American Way of Life, they are simultaneously being shaped by it into a more secular and ecumenical direction.

Could this same process apply outside the Judeo-Christian context? The future of American civil religion may depend upon it. But at least concerning the Judeo-Christian religions I argue that they are "Americanized," that is, they lose many of their particular characteristics and lose some faith in the essential dogmas as they were earlier envisioned. Earlier I wrote about religions being Americanized. In Americanization there is another force at play. The religions do not only lose some of their dogmas to be filled in with aspects of American culture, but actually some of the faith itself becomes misplaced into believing in America. In some cases this might manifest itself as excessive patriotism, in some others an ideological rift, or even a breach with the mainstream of that particular religion. It is not only that some of the aspects of any given religion, which do not fit into the American Way of Life mellow down, but actually America itself takes a bigger role in the religion

⁹⁶⁶ Reagan (4.7.1984) Remarks at a Spirit of America Festival in Decatur, Alabama
<http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1984/70484e.htm>

⁹⁶⁷ Prestowitz (2003) p. 36-37

⁹⁶⁸ Reagan (2007) p. 44. Diary entry for 16.10.1981

⁹⁶⁹ Herberg (1960) p. 82-83

as something to believe in as well. With this process of Americanization we cannot talk about religion any more but rather about religiously grounded myths. The dogmas of faith turn into Americanized myths; they no longer belong to the realm of established religion but rather a form of political faith which is communicated in storytelling by the political leader.

There might not be a qualitative difference in religious stories and mythical stories but the difference exists to some degree in the mechanisms of belief itself. As part of his proposal for the shape of future civil religion Wilson argues that the entire phenomenon should not be seen as much as a religious movement but rather as a latent political revitalization movement.⁹⁷⁰ The manifestly religious side of civil religion is not that important, but the political purpose of rejuvenating the society is. The need for prophetic politics arises in the context of civil religion as its support, and at the same time as something that only exploits the religious belief, whether in the nation or in a deity, for its earthly purposes. Prophetic politics is by no means tied to the boundaries of civil religion, but rather exists in a much wider field of politics. It is just that in civil religion and identity politics it gains good initial momentum and justification. Political beliefs allow people to live within their political worlds and with themselves without strain. When one accepts a belief, whether it is mythical or not, one automatically defines one's own identity in the process.⁹⁷¹ While religion is second in importance to political beliefs in the profane realm of politics, it is still not something that should be cast aside, since the mechanism of belief is a powerful motivator. And in the context of this study, it was essentially from the realm of civil religion and almost religious love of America, where Reagan's prophetic politics sprung to other segments of polity as well.

2.2.6. WAY OF LIFE OR A DREAM

Is a dream a lie if it don't come true, or is it something worse?
-Bruce Springsteen, the River⁹⁷²

⁹⁷⁰ Wilson (1979) p. 172-174

⁹⁷¹ Edelman (1977) p. 150-151

⁹⁷² Lyrics by Springsteen, Bruce. Available at www.brucespringsteen.net Rather surprisingly during the 1984 campaign Reagan and his associates wanted to get the rock singer Bruce Springsteen to support the campaign but Springsteen politely declined. (White (1998) p. 131-134) One could claim that Springsteen in his songs rather portrayed the dark side of the American dream, the nightmare, if you will. In 1980 after Reagan's electoral win Springsteen had said to his audience that what happened last night was "pretty terrifying." White (1998) p. 134

I don't see an American Dream, I see an American Nightmare
 -Malcolm X⁹⁷³

I have chosen to focus on the interpretation of American civil religion as belief in the American Way of Life, and for the purposes of prophetic politics I argue that it can be transformed into the belief that the American Dream can actualize itself in the Way of Life of any citizen. I argue that the American Dream can be best transmitted in the form of stories and initiate a discussion on how this narratively constructed civil religion might be able to escape the traps set by the inbuilt exclusivity of the "American Way of Life." It is my argument that the importance of the attempt to "get Americans to dream again" was a result of Reagan's personal interpretation of civil religion as the "American Dream" which simmered just over the horizon for each citizen. The dream is easier to use as an object of belief since unlike the American Way of Life, it has not actualized as yet but always beckons one forward. Reagan's version of civil religion was about turning the American Dream into reality or Way of Life.

What is the essence of the American Dream? It is certainly more that the argument of Schurmann. He claims that the American Dream is nothing but the nationally spread Californian Dream of the house, the car, and the perfect individual.⁹⁷⁴ That is only the materialistic, capitalist and secular aspect of the dream. It is only a single moment of REM sleep, so to say. But in essence Reagan seems to agree to this by claiming that "Someone has said California isn't a place – it's a way of life. We'll that is true, and it's a good way."⁹⁷⁵ Since Reagan had been the Governor of California, he could narrate himself to be at the zenith of the materialistic American Dream.⁹⁷⁶ The American dream as a whole includes a spiritual side as well and this side is the more dominant and able to pervade people of all walks of life better than just material aspect can. Certainly the idea of "rags to riches" is a part of the American Dream, but the dream itself is wider.

⁹⁷³ Malcolm X (1964)

⁹⁷⁴ Schurmann (1995) p. 32-33

⁹⁷⁵ Speech, "A Plan for Action: Announcement of Candidacy", January 4 1966, Folder: 1966 Campaign: RR speeches and statements, Book I, Box C30, Research Unit, Ronald Reagan Governor's papers, Ronald Reagan Library. Indeed, Reagan goes further to argue that "We can demonstrate to our sister states – to the entire nation- that government should be of and by as well as for the people. That this way of ours is still the greatest adventure, the newest experiment in man's relation to man"

⁹⁷⁶ Stuckey (1989) p. 46

The dream we share is a great dream -- perhaps the greatest dream in all history. It's a dream of broad and open land that offers opportunity to all. It's a dream of a magnificent country that represents a force for peace and good will among nations.⁹⁷⁷

In Frye's words "the union of ritual and dream in a form of verbal communication is myth."⁹⁷⁸ A dream by itself is not communicable. It is only a system of cryptic allusions to the dreamer's own life, but in a dream there is always a mythical element which has a power of independent communication as is obvious in for example folk tales. Myth gives meaning to ritual and narrative to dream and acts also as identification of ritual and dream. Ritual is the archetypal aspect of *mythos*, and dream is the archetypal aspect of *dianoia*. In other words ritual is a dream in movement and dream a ritual is stasis.⁹⁷⁹ Myth unites the ritual and the dream and in this unification dream gets limited and thus plausible and acceptable to the waking consciousness.

Frye goes further in his description of the dream and points out three things about it; firstly that the limits of the dream are not the real but the conceivable. Secondly the conceivable is the entire world of fulfilled desire liberated from all anxieties and frustrations. Thirdly and most importantly, the universe of the dream is entirely within the mind of the dreamer.⁹⁸⁰ These characteristics of the dream help us to understand why they have to be communicated and narrative is an effective means to free the dream from its confinement within one mind and spread it further in the social consciousness.

The notion of Christendom referred clearly to an empire and the word empire has always been very hard to swallow in the American context. It has only lately begun to lose its pejorative status, since it represents the antithesis of the ideals on which America was founded. The United States has always wanted to portray itself as a reluctant superpower that does not seek power or territory. In the words of Hughes it is an "Innocent Nation."⁹⁸¹ Supposedly America asserts its power only under duress and for the noble purposes of peace and the spread of democracy.⁹⁸² This reluctance is to be found in Reagan's narration, but to cite

⁹⁷⁷ Reagan (20.1.1984) Remarks to the Reagan Administration Executive Forum
<http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1984/12084a.htm>

⁹⁷⁸ Frye (1957) p. 106

⁹⁷⁹ Frye (1957) p. 83, 107

⁹⁸⁰ Frye (1957) p. 118-119

⁹⁸¹ Hughes (2003)

⁹⁸² Prestowitz (2003) p. 21

Prestowitz, “Nevertheless, if it looks, walks, and quacks like a duck, chances are it’s a duck.”⁹⁸³ The American Dream initially was about freedom and an empire rather stifles the dreams of aspiring nations, such as the United States of America once was.

Some critics argue that the American Dream has ended and America has woken up. The American Revolution led to American civilization, which in turn gave life to the American Dream, but with the aid of the Dream, the United States of America has become more America, than the USA it once was. America has become an empire and this state of being is a causal stage of development, since the civilization still had the revolution in it. USA has outgrown its nationalistic period, in which the Dream originated and become a global empire.⁹⁸⁴ Perhaps there is some truth to this. But empires dream just as aspiring nations do. At the time of the American Revolution the Dream was different than it was in the Reagan era, which is again different from our contemporary conjunction. But dream by a definition is not even supposed to be stable and unchanging. Dreams, like stories, need to be retold, and recreated anew when the need to alter them arises. It is the task of prophetic politics to rearticulate dreams and identities to fit the changing times.

As John Kenneth White has noted, in many aspects the American dream has assumed religious trappings, with the president acting out the role of the high priest. Voters have huge expectations that the President should make the dream come true for them, just as it has come true for the president himself.⁹⁸⁵ Seen in this manner, it is the sacred task of the president to turn the American Dream as the people dream it, into the American Way of Life for them to live it out. Reagan sought to turn the American Dream into reality by using the same concept which arguably had given birth to the entire notion of the American Dream. That was the American Revolution, which in a renarrated form would enhance the society.

Well, my fellow citizens, today we come together on historic ground to write a new chapter in the American Revolution. We represent men and women of different faiths, backgrounds and political parties from every region of our country – the people who live in Mainstreet, U.S.A, and they are saying “we love this land, and we will not give up our American dream.”⁹⁸⁶

⁹⁸³ Prestowitz (2003) p. 25

⁹⁸⁴ Schurmann (1995) p. 216

⁹⁸⁵ White (1998) p. 33

⁹⁸⁶ Reagan (19.7.1982) Remarks at a Rally Supporting the Proposed Constitutional Amendment for a Balanced Federal Budget <http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1982/71982d.htm>

Revolution changes form, but is essentially the same underneath. New chapters are continuously added to the saga of American Revolution, and what the whole revolution is about, is the actions people must take to better follow the American Dream. Since this is the core of Reagan's prophecy and vision, participating in the American Revolution is working for the American Dream. Thus, all revolutionary work (naturally only in the American context and within Reagan's story world boundaries) is a practical way to worship and toil for the American Dream, and actively participate in the building of the civil religion on it. In Reagan's story world the concept of revolution has a modified meaning. It is no longer a process of "the King is dead, God bless the King" where one set of rulers is changed forcefully into another, as was the meaning of revolution in Machiavellian times. Reagan's revolution follows the storyline of the French Revolution, in which revolution is a way for progress and changing the future for the better. Only Reagan's version is more suitable for the children, since there is limited, if any, violence and the American idea of revolution does not devour its own children. For Reagan, revolution is a teleological process that aims at, and gradually makes accomplishments in making the American Dream come true. For Franz Schurmann as well the American Revolution originates in "the teachings that dreams are more potent than reality. [...] There has always been a strong dose of mysticism, of reaching for and toward a higher plane, in the American revolutionary process."⁹⁸⁷

It is even more important to know the power, the glory, and the beauty of the real, the spiritual, the American Revolution. It is essential that we – the real revolutionaries – recognize that our freedom and our spiritual inheritance are inseparable – that only where the spirit of the Lord is, "there is liberty."⁹⁸⁸

In Reagan's America it was the Revolution, which freed the Americans to live, and yes, to dream as well. The "American Way of Life" and the "American Dream" are tightly connected to each other. Of course the Dream is more intangible, but so it has to be to better serve as something to believe in. We could say that it is the

⁹⁸⁷ Schurmann (1995) p. 146 The irony inbuilt into Reagan's vision of the continuous American Revolution through the ages has to be noted since before his presidency he commented on the "perpetual revolution" that Mao Tse-tung kept China in for 27 years and how this may sweep the revolutionaries away and cause hindrance to getting a stable leadership established. Communist revolution just is not as good as the American revolution while both are in a sense just as perpetual. For this see Radio address, Folder Speeches and Writings – Radio Broadcast, Taping date – 1976, September "Mao's China" Edited typescript, Box 2, Reagan, Ronald: Pre-presidential papers, Series I Speeches and writings, Ronald Reagan Library

⁹⁸⁸ Speech: Men of All Saints Episcopal Church Dinner, Los Angeles, 3/21/69. Box 44 Subseries E, Reagan, Ronald: Pre-presidential papers, Series I Speeches and writings, Ronald Reagan Library

ultimate fulfilment of the Way of Life. Life turns into a dream and that is the promise America gives. Dreams give birth to ideas and ideas become reality. There is practically a sense of almost magical transformation. And why not, since Reagan's mythical America had him as the head illusionist. The relationship works both ways. Since the Dream and the Way of Life enforce and support each other, a cyclical process. While it is the purpose of the prophetic politician to turn the Way of Life into the Dream on the level of the narrative, if not in the real world, simultaneously the Dream becomes the Way of Life. It is within the Dream an American should live in Reagan's story verse, and the Dream responds by turning into something. With dreaming the Dream can be actualized. The Dream is solidified and turns into the Way of Life and the Way of Life as each citizen actually experiences it, gets turned into the Dream come true.

Our system, tried and tempered by war and every kind of adversity, has been preserved by men and women of uncommon stature and common devotion to a dream. So dream your dreams and dream your ideas for this is truly Camelot.⁹⁸⁹

The original vision of America as a promised land where dreams would come true was spelled out by John Winthrop to the Puritans of Massachusetts, who fused Christianity with civic doctrine.

John Winthrop, who would later become the first Governor of Massachusetts, reminded his fellow Puritans there on that tiny deck that they must keep faith with their God, that the eyes of all the world were upon them, and that they must not forsake the mission that God had sent them on, and they must be a light unto the nations of all the world -- a shining city upon a hill.⁹⁹⁰

Even after the most overtly religious overtones of Puritanism had faded, the idea of America as New Israel, a country with economic, moral, and political blessings persisted. While many visionaries in different times have told new versions of the American Dream, changing with circumstances and taking different forms of appearance, the story itself will not vanish. Different creeds and interpretations of the American Dream "are the several denominations of the American civil religion, [...] a potent set of convictions and visions that *translates history into mythology*

⁹⁸⁹ Speech: Marlborough College Preparatory School for Girls Commencement Exercises 6/6/74. Box 44 Subseries E, Reagan, Ronald: Pre-presidential papers, Series I Speeches and writings, Ronald Reagan Library

⁹⁹⁰ Reagan (3.7.1986) Remarks at the Opening Ceremonies of the Statue of Liberty Centennial Celebration in New York, New York
<http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1986/70386d.htm>

and life into a dream.”⁹⁹¹ Erickson makes a crucial mistake in his claim. It is rather a reversed process where mythological past replaces the real history and the dream turn into a lifestyle. It is part of the American Way of Life that dreams are fulfilled and the act of dreaming itself is crucial to being American.

The poet Carl Sandburg wrote, “the Republic is a dream. Nothing happens unless first a dream.” And that’s what makes us Americans different. We’ve always reached for a new spirit and aimed at a higher goal. We’ve been courageous and determined, unafraid and bold. [...] As Carl Sandburg said, all we need to begin with is a dream that we can do better than before. All we need to have is faith and that dream will come true. All we need to do is act and the time for action is now.⁹⁹²

Interestingly enough, what the American Dream needs for its fulfilment, is not intellect or sceptical analysis or even individual action like hard work. What it requires first and foremost is belief; Faith that it will indeed be actualized. Such faith and belief is passionate and religious and explains why the American Dream can act as the object of faith and move out of the realm of civil religion and be turned into a powerful Americanized myth. As Reagan put it, “All my life, I’ve believed in miracles. I believe that if you truly have faith, your dream will come true.”⁹⁹³

One of the reasons why Reagan was compelled to use the American Dream instead of the Way of Life as a basis of his political storytelling lies in the fact that a society, which becomes the substrate of religious life, cannot be the real society, which is full of flaws and imperfections. The real society is too mediocre, too base to inspire willing self-sacrifice from the faithful. The only society which could inspire such feelings would be a perfect society, in which justice and truth reign, and from which all evil was banished, or in other words the mythical story world of America and the American Dream which Reagan recreated. In the words of Durkheim,

This society is not an empirical fact, well-defined and observable; it is a fancy, a dream with which men have lulled the miseries but never expressed in reality. It is a mere idea that expresses in consciousness our more or less obscure aspirations toward the good, the beautiful, and the ideal. [...] The society can neither create nor recreate itself without creating some kind of ideal by the same stroke. This creation is [...] the act by which society makes itself, and remakes itself, periodically. Thus, when we see the ideal society

⁹⁹¹ Erickson (1985) p. 3. Italics mine.

⁹⁹² Reagan (28.4.1981) Address before a Joint Session of the Congress on the Program for Economic Recovery. <http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1981/42881c.htm>

⁹⁹³ Reagan (5.9.1984) Remarks and a Question-and-Answer Session at the “Choosing a Future” Conference in Chicago, Illinois <http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1984/90584a.htm>

in opposition to the real society [...] we are reifying and opposing abstraction. The ideal society is not outside the real society but a part of it. [...] A society is not constituted simply by the mass of individuals who comprise it, the ground they occupy, the things they use, or the movements that they make, but above all the idea it has of itself. And there is no doubt that society sometimes hesitates over the manner in which it must conceive itself. It feels pulled in all directions. When such conflicts break out, they are not between the ideal and the reality, but between different ideals, between the ideal of yesterday and that of today, between the ideal that has the authority of tradition and one that is only coming into being.⁹⁹⁴

To be the object of belief of the citizenry, the mythical imagined community of America has to be perfected. The “real America” or the USA is too mundane to inspire. The society must create an idealized version of itself, and the prophetic politician can act as the spokesperson in this process. By turning the society into a story world, it is easier to avoid the real and the ideal to fall into conflict, and it indeed is politically beneficial for the society not to even attempt to create itself as “real,” but rather aim for the ideal community, the mythical dream of America.

Boorstin contrasts dreams as visions, to which we can compare reality, with illusion as images we have mistaken for reality. A dream, especially a vivid one, reminds us of how different the real world is, but because illusion is what we would live in, we cannot reach for it or aspire to it.⁹⁹⁵ The American Dream embodied the hopes of men in America and was inspiring and exhilarating just because it was able to symbolize the disparity between the American possibilities and the hard facts of life. America has always been the land of dreams come true, but that was because “generations suffered to discover that the dream was here to be reached for and not to be lived in.”⁹⁹⁶ There is a danger in replacing American Dreams by American illusions politically. An illusion may be powerful enough to be lived in, but the Dream should always be there to aspire to. The fulfilment of dreams should in prophetic politics be a source of inspiration, and not a fact of life.

Simultaneously the dialectical relationship of the Way of Life and the Dream blurs dreams and illusions. The American Dream is the aspiration of the people and in order to get the people to believe it has come true or is about to come true in their lives the Way of Life enjoins the illusion and the reality. For the majority only an illusory Way of Life can become the American Dream fulfilled. The Way of Life is an illusion, because one of the reasons for creating a mythical America through

⁹⁹⁴ Durkheim (1995) p. 425

⁹⁹⁵ Boorstin (1962) p. 239

⁹⁹⁶ Boorstin (1962) p. 240

storytelling was to make the citizens feel better about themselves and their nation. Reagan narrated his America in such a manner that the people could feel proud of living in that illusion and the American Dream was used to make people strive forward and not remain content within the illusion. Reagan's mythical America tended to turn both the Way of Life and the Dream into illusions, because then one becoming the other was easier to narrate. It is an illusion that the Dream is attainable, since in harsh reality outside the story logic the narrative is constructed in such a way, as to ensure that the fulfilment of the Dream stays out of reach. Within the story, however, there was nothing which could limit the actualization of the American Dream.

The world's hope is still America's future. America's future is in your dreams. Make them come true. The only limits are your imagination and your determination.⁹⁹⁷

An essentially true expression coined by Richard Nixon, is that it is the "great majority of Americans, the forgotten Americans" who "give lift to the American dream."⁹⁹⁸ One has to believe in the American Dream to raise oneself with enough diligence and energy from poverty. The same idea essentially applies to the poor inner-city black and the rich suburban white as well, but it is a question of packaging the dream invitingly enough for both types. Aggressive equalitarianism is an aspect of the Dream, but one has to ask, whether in real life all Americans are in fact "created equal." Believing in the possibility of the Dream coming true for everyone is a religious emotion and certainly an act of faith. In Reagan's narration, only limits to the dream are given by lack of imagination and determination.

Mike Wallace has written that at the same time Reagan truckled to the basic instinct of most Americans he still paid too little heed to those left behind in America. According to Wallace Reagan's failure was in being the president of all the people, that "perhaps he never fully understood *all* of America."⁹⁹⁹ This deduction can be made because the Reagan years were insensitive to the yearnings of the minorities. That is why the American Dream Reagan spoke about was not able to win over the majority of the inner-city black population. Reagan was occasionally accused of discriminating against blacks but close associates deny this.

⁹⁹⁷ Reagan (22.2.1982) remarks at a Mount Vernon, Virginia, Ceremony Commemorating the 250th Anniversary of the Birth of George Washington. s.200

⁹⁹⁸ Nixon (1968) Acceptance speech for the Republican Presidential candidate nomination. Cited in White (1988) p. 26

⁹⁹⁹ Wallace (1997) p. 8. Italics in the original.

“Not that he was against them, but that he did not understand their problems, their hopes, their dreams, and could get no feel for what an inner-city black must experience,” argued Speakes.¹⁰⁰⁰ Reagan’s exposure to blacks was relatively slight and as a whole he did not think at any point in his life that the colour of the skin would be any kind of issue. Indeed he went sometimes so far as to argue that there was no racism in the Midwest he grew up in.¹⁰⁰¹ But the fact that Reagan could not understand the black experience led to the involuntary exclusion of blacks from his American Dream. Since Reagan could not understand that the black dream of America was fundamentally different than his own, he was not able to tell such stories about the American Way of Life that would have included the blacks. Without intention to do so, Reagan ended up telling a colour-blind story of civil religion and this was precisely the problem. While the colour of skin did not matter to Reagan, it mattered to many others, who saw the colours and reacted to them. While Reagan certainly was no bigot, his colour-blindness did more harm than good by restricting the ability of his political storytelling to entice and convince the black population. In Reagan’s narration there was something special, usually the love of freedom and love of America itself that was the unifying factor of all Americans.

There must have been a Divine plan that brought to this blessed land people from every corner of the Earth. And here, those people kept their love for the land of their origin at the same time that they pledged their love and loyalty to this new land, this great melting pot.¹⁰⁰²

Reagan fails to see that the metaphor of the “great melting pot” does not work for all Americans because not everybody can have the dream fulfilled in their lives. For a

¹⁰⁰⁰ Speakes-Pack (1988) p. 70

¹⁰⁰¹ At the same time he often told a story of his friend Franklin Burghardt who played in the same football team and the racist encounter with a player from the other team who finally confessed that Burgie was the “whitest man he ever knew.” During the presidency the story had been changed so that Burghardt was “the greatest human being,” but otherwise the anecdote was the same. Reagan (15.1.1986) Remarks to the Students and Faculty at Martin Luther King, Jr. Elementary School <http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1986/11586b.htm>. Another story concerning Burghardt was that once when the team could not get a hotel for because of him and two other blacks on the team Reagan took them to overnight at his parents’ house. Burhardt himself confirmed this latter anecdote to be true. Thus, it is just another example of Reagan perfecting his America that he chose not to take these two incidents as proof of the racism in his youth.

¹⁰⁰² Reagan (6.11.1981) remarks in New York, New York, at the 84th Annual Dinner of the Irish American Historical Society. s. 1024.

The concept of “melting pot” to describe America was first concocted, at least in a manner which attracted attention, by the Jewish writer Israel Zangwill in his 1908 play thus named. He saw America as “God’s crucible” where the “feuds and vendettas” of Europe’s religious strife would be burnt away and the races of Europe melted and reformed. Theodore Roosevelt saw the play on its opening night and agreed that “We Americans are the children of the crucible.” Ever since the idea of a melting pot has been central to the way the popular image of creating *unum* out of *pluribus* has been expressed. Zangwill and Roosevelt. Cited in Eck (2001) p. 55

singular version of the civil religion to exist the melting pot metaphor would need to work. If America is closer to a “salad bowl”, where the ingredients are mixed together, but do not blend in a manner as not to be distinguishable from each other, the concept of civil religion needs to be reassessed as well. It cannot be seen as a unified whole which would be suitable to any and every citizen. Reagan’s makes this assumption by trying to prove that his vision of the American dream is fitting for all cases. He tries to find common denominators among all citizens and to some degree succeeds in his efforts. He portrays Americans as “special people from every corner of the world who had that extra love for freedom”¹⁰⁰³ or emphasises the “shared values”. During his presidency Reagan enjoyed considerable popularity, but his opposition seemed to share hatred on an equal scale to his popularity. There was no neutral stance towards Reagan. I argue that this derives partially from his inability to get his vision of the American dream universally accepted. The thoughts and values that form the basis of his version of the American Dream were so far from those of his opponents that it bred strong dissentment towards him instead of indifference. Nevertheless the complexity and plausibility of Reagan’s multiple story worlds were able to draw support from the majority of Americans and these story worlds, or should I say “story verse,” gained acceptance on large scale.

Reagan was skilled in finding the smallest common denominator among Americans, but even he should have burrowed deeper into the national consciousness. A dream is after all a figment of imagination. Reagan’s intention was to set the Americans dreaming again but the imaginations of all Americans were not equally free to roam. In a nation as diverse as the United States of America, it may not be possible to create a dream which each and everyone could use to reorient themselves. Instead of a dream, one should speak of a dreaming as a whole. It is a challenge for prophetic political narration to create an entire story verse of dreaming, such a constellation of story worlds that each and everyone could be able to find a narrated version of American Dream they particularly could subscribe to. Thus one cannot and should not spell out the American Dream explicitly, but allow everyone to create story worlds of their own liking from a vast amount of protostories. Prophetic politics needs to at the same time emphasize the importance of having an American Dream and using it to create a sense of belonging but also to

¹⁰⁰³ Reagan (15.8.1988) Remarks at the Republican National Convention in New Orleans, Louisiana
<http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1988/081588b.htm>

keep it ambiguous enough to allow practically every version an American might choose for him to fit in. Prophetic politics ought to offer only a multitude of narrative building blocks for the citizenry. The task of the citizen is to build a story world from these blocks like Lego toys. Using some, discarding most, the dream would eventually emerge and if the dream advocated by the political leader is ambiguous enough, no one will be forced to question the legitimacy of their own construction. It is the most demanding task of the prophetic politician to attempt to create such a story web that could give birth to a story verse multifaceted enough to assimilate and accommodate all the story worlds of the Dream.

The power of Reagan's elusive dreams and visions was the fact that he so fully believed in dreams coming true for other Americans, as they had come true to him. This was an aspect of both his narration and the view of Reagan as a person that all of his closest aids shared. In the story verse of Reagan,

Americans have shown the world that we not only dream great dreams, we dare to live those great dreams.¹⁰⁰⁴

A close aide, Michael Deaver wrote that sometimes Reagan's "simple belief that Americans can become whatever they aspire to be absolutely drove me crazy. Then I would remember where he came from and how inexplicable it is that someone like Reagan could become president."¹⁰⁰⁵ Reagan was the incarnation of the American Dream, and since he could do it, any good American could. Reagan spoke of dreams, but in his mythical America, the American Way of Life meant dreams coming true. Reagan, as an ex-actor, was clearly fascinated with theatre and acting. I argue that is partially his past in the world of theatrics, which made dreaming so central to his politics. Some of this is explained by Lyotard's conception of the theatre as a dream. In his words it "it fascinates and comprises a hallucination giving rise to identification. [...] it is dream intensified, the scene of the dream set on *its* own state, the figural space of fantasy installed in its figural space of representation."¹⁰⁰⁶

Dreaming is central to Reagan's view of the world political and the world in general. Dreams have power for him and can change the world, like he tells that the

¹⁰⁰⁴ Reagan (19.5.1981) Remarks at the White House Luncheon Honoring the Astronauts of the Space Shuttle Columbia. s.441

¹⁰⁰⁵ Deaver (2003) p. 5

¹⁰⁰⁶ Lyotard (1993b) p.29, Italics in the original.

American dream can. “We have it in our power to start the world over again.”¹⁰⁰⁷ Lyotard elsewhere argues further that both art and politics function “to make people dream, to fulfil their desires (but not to allow their realization), to transform the world, to change life, to offer a stage on which desire (the director) plays out its fantasmatical theatrics.”¹⁰⁰⁸ This quotation could be Reagan’s thoughts written down. During his Hollywood years he continuously wanted to enhance and make the script better, almost taking over the role of the director. In politics, he was able to direct his own “plays” and the similar nature of the theatre and his dream-centred politics allowed him to use his theatrical experience. At least partially statecraft was turned into stagecraft. Like theatre, his politics made the Americans dream again. Like in theatre, the wishes were fulfilled, but not really and concretely realized. This aspect is crucial to prophetic politics, once again. The dream has to be elusive, the people must be led to dream of things either unattainable, or of such oblique nature, that their fulfilment cannot concretely be measured.

I’ve never felt more strongly that America’s best days and democracy’s best days lie ahead. We’re a powerful force for good. With faith and courage, we can perform great deeds and take freedom’s next step. And we will. We will carry on the tradition of a good and worthy people who have brought light where there was darkness, warmth where there was cold, medicine where there was disease, food where there was hunger and peace where there was only bloodshed. Let us be sure that those who come after will say of us in our time, that in our time we did everything that could be done. We finished the race; we kept them free; we kept the faith.¹⁰⁰⁹

By setting the goals of the policy that should be clear and concrete in such an oblique manner and by creating illusions and dreams, Reagan’s politics were able to change the world by changing the story world it had been replaced with. The story world is, after all, just a dream or an illusion crafted and spun out of words. Politics was the field in which Reagan was able to combine his skills as a storyteller and an actor in creating a fantasmatical stage used to create further dreams and illusions.

But we are a people known for dreaming with our eyes open. We live our dreams. We make them come true. Our ideas and energies combine in a dynamic force [...] And that force has always enabled America to overcome great odds, and it always will. We just refer to it as the American spirit.¹⁰¹⁰

¹⁰⁰⁷ Reagan (3.6.1984) Toasts of the President and Prime Minister Garret FitzGerald of Ireland at a Dinner Honoring the President in Dublin

<http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1984/60384b.htm>

¹⁰⁰⁸ Lyotard (1993b) p. 41

¹⁰⁰⁹ Reagan (25.1.1984) State of the Union Address s. 356

¹⁰¹⁰ Reagan (1.5.1982) Remarks at Dedication Ceremonies for the U.S. Pavilion at the Knoxville International Energy Exposition (World’s Fair) in Tennessee. s. 549

As Niebuhr argues, the American Dream is not particularly unique and every nation dreams similar dreams. But the big dilemma is what kind of political or other power could subject all individual dreams to the American Messianic Dream, which is informed by “true vision.”¹⁰¹¹

We had a vision to pass forward a nation as nearly perfect as we could, where there's decency, tolerance, generosity, honesty, courage, common sense, fairness, and piety. This is my vision.¹⁰¹²

Reagan's own standing within the narrative discourse of the entire vision of the American Dream was in the role of the narrator or the visionary. The president embodies the Dream in a way no other public official can.¹⁰¹³ Thus it is of utmost importance that it is him, who uses the “bully pulpit” to reshape, renarrate, and communicate the American Dream. Naturally every great athlete or rock star can be even better embodiments of the Dream, but for prophetic politics and narrative leadership in politics, the “figure up front” needs to be a politician in order to advance the national interests.

We must preserve the noble promise of the American dream for every man, woman, and child in this land. And, make no mistake, we can preserve it, and we will. This promise was not created by America. It was given to America as a gift from a loving God.¹⁰¹⁴

God created the American Dream as a gift for his special people, the Americans, and here Reagan assumes the type of role Jim Wallis calls for. He acts only as a “humble messenger of God” in advancing ‘God's politics.’¹⁰¹⁵ Reagan, Republicans, or the American people have no part of the authorship, but they are all prophets who communicate the blessing of the Divine gift for everyone. Reagan is a dreamer, but not the original dreamer. The dream is God's plan and Reagan tries to interpret it for the Americans. Reagan was not even the first to bring the aspect of dreaming into American politics.

Once, when Franklin Delano Roosevelt was President [...] he too spoke about dreams. He said one of the reasons the world gets better so slowly is that too many young people lose their dreams as they get older. In growing up, he said, they throw away their enthusiasms and grow away from their ideals. And he said, “You ought to thank God ... if regardless of your years,

¹⁰¹¹ Niebuhr (1954) p. 72

¹⁰¹² Reagan (15.8.1988) Remarks at the Republican National Convention in New Orleans, Louisiana
<http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1988/081588b.htm>

¹⁰¹³ White (1988) p. 34-35

¹⁰¹⁴ Reagan (1.8.1983) Address to the American Bar Association s. 159-160

¹⁰¹⁵ Wallis (2004)

you are young enough in spirit to dream dreams and see visions” Hold fast to your dreams, he said, America needs them.¹⁰¹⁶ As a former New Deal Democrat, Reagan admired the politics and ideas of Franklin Delano Roosevelt, and this is where he brought the concept of dreaming into his own narrative. The American dream consists of millions of individual dreams and visions. America needs to be recreated and renewed by dreaming. A citizen dreams of a brighter and better future and achieving that dream in his own life. These dreams, big or small, join together to create a more unified American Dream, where the objects to achieve are freedom on a global scale and a greater America by realization of the American dream in the society at large. The dreams of individual success are turned into the great American Dream where the individual characteristics disappear.

The American Dream itself is not a fixed and stable story. It is a prophecy which yearns to be fulfilled and, if not renewed, then at least refreshed from time to time. It is at least partially recreated by the attachment of new individual dreams to it. As is the case with a story verse, so it is with the American dream as well. It is not a creation of a single individual and even Reagan is only the narrator, who initiates its construction and lays a partial blueprint down. Story recipients are guided to dream along certain guidelines, and they themselves are responsible of many attachments into this story verse or the collective dream comprised of innumerable story worlds of individuals. Reagan, or any other president, just outlines the superstructure, and individuals add their own infrastructure. The superstructure consists of living right in freedom and succeeding in life, and the individual dreams are more elaborate plans for success, where the minutiae are included. New dreams can and need to be added to the American Dream, because only by filling in the minuscule individual dreams and hopes the collective dream, or the story world constructed from the Americanized myth about that dream, can be used in creation of the civil religion so that it is capable of evolving with the changing times. While the superstructure of the American Dream is told in the same manner today as during the Reagan or even Wilson presidency, the infrastructure of that dream world is much different, because of the different hopes of people at different times and their ideas of how to make the American dream come true to themselves. “We’re a nation of dreamers who’ve come here, as you have, in search

¹⁰¹⁶ Reagan (22.7.1982) Remarks at the Mathews-Dickey Boys’ Club in St. Louis, Missouri. s. 963

of an ideal: respect for the liberty and dignity of man.”¹⁰¹⁷ For Reagan all Americans are dreamers, optimists, and idealists. That is the core of being a member of his mythical American society.

¹⁰¹⁷ Reagan (17.9.1982) Remarks at the Swearing-In Ceremony for United States Citizens in White House Station, New Jersey. s. 1178

3. NARRATIVES OF POLITICAL JUSTIFICATION

Here it is time to change direction somewhat. I have provided you a glimpse into the religiosity built into being American and how religion and political or civil religion interact in the society and sacralise what it means to be a part of the imagined community of America. It can be argued that religious factors ground any story written about what America is and what it means to be an American. I shall prove this by showing how religious matters and topics are turned into a dreamlike myth. In this chapter it is my aim to burrow yet deeper to those narratives that play on the people's beliefs. The name of the chapter describes that the different types of narratives I shall discuss; religious, mythical, ideological, and cultural, are tightly bound together and to political narratives to provide politics with justification. Political, ideological, cultural, and mytho-religious narratives are like four leaves of the clover. They are tied together into a unified whole, which acts as a complete library of metatexts the prophetic politician can use. This chapter has been very hard to put together so that it would read logically, but this is a consequence of the relations of the types of narratives under discussion. In each case I shall show how religion, culture, myth and ideology need narratives as the vessel of their communication and even articulation. Then I shall proceed to show how all of them can be used to legitimize politics, either separately, or in an interconnected manner. I ask the reader to bear with me through this process of showing how these types of stories blur the differences between each respective type and blend together into stories of political justification.

I shall in the first section start by discussing the connection of religion and narrative and point out that the relationship is complex. There is an aspect of religion inbuilt into all stories, even political ones. Religion needs stories as well. Only by the means of a story can religious experience be transmitted and the foundations of our religion in the Occidental world rest on sacred texts and stories. I shall show the connection between religious stories and myths and towards the end of the section I shall shed light on some religious story types and myths employed in American politics and how they connect faith and politics.

3.1. RELIGIOUS NARRATIVES

Fifty-six percent of Americans believe that religion can answer all or most of today's problems. In fact, only one in five doubts the relevance of religion in the modern world. And we'll get them, too.¹⁰¹⁸

-Ronald Wilson Reagan

Vladimir Propp claimed that there was a natural connection between religion and everyday life and a similar connection between religion and the tales or stories told. “*A way of life and religion die out, while their contents turn into tales [...]* the tale has still been studied very little on the plane of its parallel with religion and its further penetration into the cultural and economic aspects of daily living.”¹⁰¹⁹ Since his days the situation has not changed. If this notion is correct, then tales and storytelling are things that will outlast religion both in its sacred and profane versions. Even if there is no longer such a unifying American civil religion as Herberg described, it still lives on and is resurrected by the means of storytelling. The civil religion may have perished, but still stories are told about it and these stories, independent of their subject's existence, are able to penetrate “those cultural and economic aspects,” which I am tempted to label as all matters political. Even if the civil religion cannot be resurrected, it does not matter, because tales of it can be used. Just as a myth of Gods degenerates into an epic story with time, it still has power to move the hearts and minds of some people, but in a different manner. The story is still left behind and it still has power to be exploited politically.

There is religiosity inbuilt to the structure and the very heart of every tale told. Vladimir Propp argues that “The tale at its core preserves traces of very ancient paganism, of ancient customs and rituals.”¹⁰²⁰ Elsewhere Propp argues that the fairy tale in “its morphological bases represents a myth” and that the tale must be “studied in regard to religious notions.”¹⁰²¹ The main focus of Propp's study was the Russian folktale, and we do not often tend to see these tales told to children as religious by their nature. But since there is something inherently religious in the tale itself, and religion is one of the factors able to metamorphose it, the multiple roles of religious beliefs in storytelling should not be excluded from analysis of other tales

¹⁰¹⁸ Reagan (4.2.1985) Remarks at the Annual Convention of the National Religious Broadcasters
<http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1985/20485d.htm>

¹⁰¹⁹ Propp (1968) p. 106. Italics mine.

¹⁰²⁰ Propp (1968) p. 87

¹⁰²¹ Propp (1968) p. 90

either, whether they at surface appear religious or not. Nevertheless, the tale itself is never sacred enough or so well set in stone that it could not metamorphose, and this gradual altering of the tale is the signature of the great storyteller, whether he is telling a children's bedtime story or a political story for consenting adults.

Religiosity is involved in the creation of narratives as almost their backbone, if we adhere to Propp, but narratives often have an influence on religion itself. Their relationship goes both ways. The Judeo-Christian religious tradition that strongly affects the entire Occidental world, and especially America, is well adapted to the notion of the centrality of the concepts of language and narrative. This is because early Judaism itself established, in the second of the Ten Commandments, the preference of words and language over images as the realm, where imagination and desires may play.¹⁰²² In Christian theology it was also "word," which was in the beginning, and that word was God. In addition the factor which unites Islam, Christianity and Judaism is that we are all religions of "the book". Written work, be it the Holy Bible or Quran, lays down the foundations of our faith, and these literary works that establish our faith are central in spreading or communicating it as well. The prominent religious scholar Martin E. Marty follows the classification of Judaism, Christianity and Islam into the "People of the Book," because of the importance these religions lay on their respective (sometimes overlapping) texts. "They all became religions of "the Word." God, perhaps through leaders like priests or prophets, could speak to the believer."¹⁰²³ In fact, as Alexander Campbell, the founder of Reagan's church has argued, "words are signs of ideas or thoughts. Unless words are understood, ideas and sentiments can neither be communicated nor received."¹⁰²⁴ It is no wonder that the use of words and stories comes naturally to Reagan, a deeply religious man, in whose early life the Disciples of Christ played a central role.

But narratives are crucial to religious faith in another way as well. For William James, the most important thing in religion is the religious experience itself, which unremittingly gives birth to myths, superstitions, dogmas, and confessions among other things.¹⁰²⁵ It cannot be denied, that a personal experience is crucial to religion, but this experience needs to be communicated. While some of

¹⁰²² For this idea I'm indebted to Lyotard (1993b) p. 19

¹⁰²³ Marty (1984) p. 12

¹⁰²⁴ Campbell (1988) p. 36

¹⁰²⁵ James (1981) p. 13

the things experience gives birth to work as conduits for the experiences to spread, the importance of narrative form as a means of this communicative process cannot be cast aside. To transmit the religious experience to another person one needs to use narrative as a medium. Paul Ricoeur argues essentially the same point by stating that religious faith may be identified through language for inquiry, because whatever is the ultimate nature of religious experience, “it comes to language, it is articulated in language and the most appropriate place to interpret it on its own terms is to inquire into its linguistic expression.”¹⁰²⁶

Narratives that combine politics and religion often try to teach the way of interpreting, and to give a sense of belonging to a community, that can understand such narratives. They draw from the religious element to make the narrative persuasive, and the religious language contains an authoritative instruction of how to interpret it as well.¹⁰²⁷ The hermeneutical constitution of the biblical faith, according to Ricoeur, can then be summarized by saying that faith is never an independent experience, but always mediated by the language it is articulated in. He links faith to self-understanding in the face of a text, so that faith is an attitude of one who “accepts being interpreted at the same time that he or she interprets the world of the text.”¹⁰²⁸ Faith needs language as its medium to be communicated, or in any manner articulated, and while reading a text, the relation between the reader and the text is two-directional, so that both are under the scrutiny of interpretation.

Ira Chernus repeats the well known maxim that no one can ever know anything certain about the inner religious life of someone else, since religious matters are never dealt with *per se*, but only as expressions and performances, written, oral, literal, or just acted out and all these things may be entirely done, or done in just that particular manner for many purposes, some of which can be purely political. Religious faith turns into a story about that faith. That is why even the creed of the president, or rather the denomination he belongs officially, does not give us anything especially interesting. As Chernus claims, creeds do not matter for most conservative Christians, but the story does.¹⁰²⁹ Being “born-again” relies heavily on the story itself and the power this story has. To be born-again one joins “a narrative tradition to which you willingly submit your past, your present and

¹⁰²⁶ Ricoeur (1995) p. 1

¹⁰²⁷ Aaltola (2007) p. 17

¹⁰²⁸ Ricoeur (1995) p. 46

¹⁰²⁹ Chernus (2006) p. 70

future as a speaker. [the truths of Christianity create] a world that is not merely evoked, but actually constructed by the story.”¹⁰³⁰ The shape of the religious belief becomes secondary to the story told about the belief and thus the story told has a great power in shaping the story worlds of faith, whether political or religious or both combined, that join together to form a story verse. Storied faith becomes more crucial than the faith experienced by the people.

For Durkheim there is another, often overlooked element of religion, which is its recreational and aesthetic element. Religious dramatic performances use the same techniques as drama and “they make men forget the real world *so as to transport them into another where imagination is more at home.*”¹⁰³¹ Durkheim seems to assert that there are story worlds which can be entered by the means of religion. Thus religious or even religiously grounded mythical storytelling opens up new vistas in the form of story worlds. These story worlds combine into a story verse where imagination allows the American Dream to exist without restrictions to its scope or probabilities for it coming true. A prophetic politician needs to be aware of this, and consciously create story worlds with the help of civil religion to allow his people to escape the harsh realities of the everyday life into these worlds. The escape may not be intentional on behalf of the story recipient, but since the American Dream may not turn into the Way of Life for everybody in the real world, the story recipient is more than willing to enter a story verse that presents examples of it coming true. It is hope and our belief which makes us more willing to allow the real world to blur with the story verse created for civil religious purposes. Unlike our real world, imagination allows us to populate this story verse with unlimited possibilities and yet it is so close to our real world that the mental relocation may happen unnoticed. It is well-known that mythology has connections with poetry, and for this reason mythology has often been situated outside religion. But there is beautiful poetry in the Bible as well, and poetry can be seen as part of religion. For Durkheim, “the truth is that there is poetry inherent in all religion.”¹⁰³²

What I am in fact claiming here is that there is poetry involved in religion and religion in the construction of stories as well. The powerful stories often derive some of their power from religious beliefs or religious proto-stories, even in the case

¹⁰³⁰ Harding, cited in Chernus (2006) p. 70

¹⁰³¹ Durkheim (1995) p. 384. Italics mine.

¹⁰³² Durkheim (1995) p. 386

that these have been distorted into mythical material and “common sense.” In the same manner as myths and other stories, religious experience can be communicated to another person only through telling, whether in writing like the Bible, or orally as a narrative. Religion has to be tied down in words in order to communicate it from one generation to another. We do not know enough today of for example Zoroastrianism, because there is no written word, no literary product which would have been passed through the ages. Literature specifically and language in general are vessels for transporting the highly personal experience of religious phenomena, but also vessels for distancing belief from religion and creating myths with practically a sacred status.

In the context of Christianity there is, according to Ricoeur, no sacred text, because “it is not the text that is sacred but the one about which it is spoken.”¹⁰³³ The canon was put together, edited as one might say, from separate texts, and the text that was produced is no longer sacred in the Ricoeurian sense of the word. Since the text is already altered, there is no blasphemy in altering it further, for example by such innocent means as translation, or even reading it, as a Finnish proverb says, “as the Devil reads the Bible.” That means reading intentionally and trying to find citations that back up one’s political pursuits. The text becomes fundamental, but no longer so sacred that one could not touch it or change it. Ricoeur’s use of sacred implies to something so absolute in its unchangeable nature that he proposes the term “authoritative text” to refer to those texts which are fundamental to a community but yet can be re-interpreted and shaped.¹⁰³⁴ A sacred text is the one that constitutes the founding act of the community, and authoritative texts are excluded from this function, while they may have a very close kinship. While an authoritative text may talk about the same founding function, it “does not belong to the story of the way in which the community interpreted itself in terms of those [sacred] texts.”¹⁰³⁵

In this Ricoeurian view the stories Reagan told were initially authoritative texts, because they discussed the founding of mythical America, but one of the accomplishments of “Reagan Revolution” was to elevate these authoritative stories into sacred ones even in the Ricoeurian sense of the word of becoming unalterable.

¹⁰³³ Ricoeur (1995) p. 68

¹⁰³⁴ The preference for this term may be cause of the fact that Ricoeur was in his own words “frightened by this word “sacred.”” Ricoeur (1995) p. 72

¹⁰³⁵ Ricoeur (1995) p. 69

Reagan's stories complemented the older ones and resacralized them while giving new form to the ways, in which the Americans saw and felt themselves and their society. Reagan's storytelling took the authoritative texts of the foundational myths and attempted to bestow such an aura of sacrality on them, that they could no longer be altered or used in any other manner to confront his interpretation of them. For Smith texts become canon in a society with "arbitrary fixing of limited number of "texts" as immutable and authoritative."¹⁰³⁶ For him, sacredness persists in the persistence of the community to apply its body of tradition.¹⁰³⁷ But one of the objectives of prophetic politics is to alter the canon and tradition by narrative means by altering the amount of sacredness bestowed to the texts of the canon. Some occasionally need to be more sacred than the others for political purposes.

Ricoeur writes about the sacred texts not only becoming canon, but in addition becoming "frozen." With this he implies that because of the fight against heresies, the interpretation of sacred texts was stopped, and with the rise of Protestantism, the text itself became sacred against the Augustinian tradition of free interpretation. The text was frozen and became immutable, and the process of changing it in the slightest manner, was a threat to both the text and the community.¹⁰³⁸ There is a crisis of community because

its own identity relies on the identity of the text, as distinct from both nonsacred and other sacred texts. [...] Preaching is the permanent reinterpretation of the text that is regarded as grounding the community; therefore, for the community to address itself to another text would be to make a decision concerning its social identity. A community that does that becomes another kind of community.¹⁰³⁹

The whole concept of identity in the context of a community relies on its "capacity to situate itself as being this and not that, but also as having this past and not that past."¹⁰⁴⁰ While Ricoeur is concerned with religious texts as distanced as possible from their political implications, I argue that Reagan's civic religious story can be included in this context because of its clear attachment to purely religious values alongside with the more mythical elements. This Ricoeurian idea interpreted means that the Reagan Revolution can be said to have been successful, if it is considered primarily to be a revolution of ideas above anything else. New texts such as

¹⁰³⁶ Smith (1982) p. 44

¹⁰³⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰³⁸ Ricoeur (1995) p. 69-70

¹⁰³⁹ Ricoeur (1995) p. 70

¹⁰⁴⁰ Ricoeur (1995) p. 70

abolishment of all nuclear weapons as the ultimate goal of politics or supply-side economics to get the economy into recovery were included into the political “sermon.” Additionally as the texts about the American identity got a very typically Reaganesque twist, the identity of the community itself transformed into something closer to the vision Reagan preached and prophesied. Reagan’s interpretation of Winthrop’s “city upon a hill” might serve as an example of this. For Reagan there was no doubt that America as this city would succeed in everything. His “shining city” would forever be the focus of human aspirations anywhere without a chance of it turning into a byword for the peoples because it failed in its mission. The change in the contemporary perception of identity changed the history retrospectively as well. Reagan’s vision of America extended also backwards in time, and thus the stories of the American past got altered as well. Maybe there never had been a golden past to precede the “time of choosing” today to enter the glorious future, but it was resurrected or given birth to for the first time in the same process, where the way Americans saw their nation was changed.

One can no longer construct theologies that would understand narrative category as alien to the context it carries. As an example Ricoeur uses the stories of Yahweh’s relations with the people of Israel, because there seems to be something unique in them, precisely because they are told in the form of a narrative. Once faith is confessed in a story, nothing can be said about God and His relations to the humankind, that does not “first of all reassemble legends and sagas and rearrange them in meaningful sequences so as to constitute a unique story.”¹⁰⁴¹ Here Ricoeur seems to say that theologies need to be articulated in narratives, and that once religious narrative is being created, it uses intertextually other stories and sagas as sacred texts, and with their help creates a new story. A saga is not simply a story, but a story that at some time has had a particular base of believers.¹⁰⁴² A saga is one sort of a sacred story itself, because it has been an object of faith at some particular time for a set of particular people. Grottanelli argues that biblical narratives are neither mythification of historical events, nor historization of mythical traditions, but they produced a “*sacred* narrative similar in function to mythology.”¹⁰⁴³

¹⁰⁴¹ Ricoeur (1995) p. 40

¹⁰⁴² Czarniawska (2004) p. 36

¹⁰⁴³ Grottanelli (1999) p. 68. Italics in the original.

But when it comes to the analysis of this sacred narrative, Ricoeur argues, that biblical hermeneutics does not credit the reader with the power to decide, but only to “allow the world of being that is the “issue” of the biblical text to unfold. Thus above and beyond emotions, disposition, belief, or nonbelief, is the proposition of a world that in the biblical language is called a new world, a new covenant, the kingdom of God, a new birth.”¹⁰⁴⁴ As the world of the text unfolds, so does the story world it gives birth to.

If Reagan’s narrative resonates with the biblical scripts in the story recipients’ memories, it is possible to directly interconnect the story told with biblical narratives in such a manner that it gets its interpretative techniques from hermeneutics as well. As J. Cheryl Exum writes, by telling and re-telling stories instead of attempting to create a philosophical system, “the biblical authors bequeathed to us a multivalent, inexhaustible narrative world.”¹⁰⁴⁵ The Bible offers a rich bundle of storylines to follow. As examples might suffice the tale of Exodus, the parable of the Good Samaritan, the city on a hill, battle of good and evil, or numerous others as well, some of which I shall later discuss in detail. By taking these storylines and drafting new stories in new contexts based on the old storylines Reagan creates Americanized versions of the old stories. I shall later on elaborate the situation of these stories on the shifting boundary between religion and myth but here it needs to be said that by using the biblical scripts, the narrator is able to use the authority of the Bible to back up his political stories. This allowed Reagan a more dominant role in the interactive construction process of story worlds in cooperation with the biblical stories and less with the story recipient. This was because supposedly all the elements of story world would be derivative from the biblical text itself and the prestige attached upon it. Thus diminishing the freedom of the story recipient to produce meanings himself. He is still very much in control of the process of attaching meanings to these stories and filling in the details of the story worlds that spring up, but the authority of the Bible for Jews and Christians alike enable the narrator to not only seduce the story recipient but use the authority of the Bible to add a coercive force. Furthermore, a story world created in such a manner would automatically in its very essence be the type of “new promised land” Reagan portrays America to be. This may well be the case why Reagan’s stories

¹⁰⁴⁴ Ricoeur (1995) p. 44

¹⁰⁴⁵ Exum (1996) p. 9

managed to communicate the feeling of “Divine America” among the religious type of story recipients, and thus the story world created would be what Ricoeur calls “biblical world,”¹⁰⁴⁶ where revelation is an essential characteristic.

But there are people who do not consider the Bible to be an authoritative text in any manner. The more secular type of listener, or those for whom the Bible has no special meaning demand more than the “issue of the text” to create a “sacred world and here a more convincing form of storytelling is required. Mere interconnectedness to biblical text does not suffice, but the story must be linked to other types of foundational myths, for example patriotic ones. MacIntyre claims that “morality can find no basis in our desires; but it can find no basis either in our religious beliefs.”¹⁰⁴⁷ Here lies a challenge for prophetic politics. The politician must be able to tell such stories, that they disguise the morality advanced in politics from its origins in certain political desires. The American context adds the extra dimension of having to be able to narratively connect religious beliefs and morality as well. But when there are enough storylines from different texts to be held “sacred” by the people to tie together into a story web it is possible to escape the restrictions only one sacred story would allow by offering a story verse instead of one story world the story recipient would either have to accept or reject.

Jonathan Z. Smith has argued that there are two ways to study religion: to either view it as an exotic category of human experience or as an ordinary one.¹⁰⁴⁸ I have chosen the latter approach, and thus one must view religious materials, such as myths, as “common stories” to take them as objects of the study.¹⁰⁴⁹ Grottanelli agrees when he argues that the books of the Old Testament should be studied just as any other text, and to apply to them “every new methodological approach that would clarify its entire semantic sense, its ideological intent, and its social and political value.”¹⁰⁵⁰ For him “the biblical narratives are sacred texts; as such, they should be compared to myths (e.g. to Greek myths) for they share with mythical narratives the function of providing sacred warrants and perennial charters for behaviors, beliefs and institutions.”¹⁰⁵¹ He argues that the Greek culture, just like the Hebrew, produced desacralized history along with mere fiction, but for some reason

¹⁰⁴⁶ Ricoeur (1995) p. 44

¹⁰⁴⁷ MacIntyre (1984) p. 44

¹⁰⁴⁸ Smith (1982) p. xii

¹⁰⁴⁹ Smith (1982) p. xiii

¹⁰⁵⁰ Grottanelli (1999) p. 88

¹⁰⁵¹ Grottanelli (1999) p. 161

in the Hebrew context the stories about their ancestors and founding heroes they demythicized and rationalized never became desacralized history or fiction.¹⁰⁵² Genette sees myth as a “type of narrative situated on an unsettled and shifting frontier of fiction.”¹⁰⁵³ If one chooses to accept a narrative that is religious in nature as a myth, that also means to “accept it more or less by the same token as a literary text.”¹⁰⁵⁴ What is evident here is that once religious texts or dogmas are considered to be myths, they can be treated in analysis like any text. I argue that this holds true with the elements related to the founding of America as well. Some of the stories or myths still keep their sacred quality, and function as foundational myths that provide an example to follow.

Max Weber admits that faith is an element always present in politics. A politician serves a cause while using his power. Naturally this cause may be a national goal, just as well as freedom and democracy for all people in the world. The politician “may claim to be the servant of an “idea” or [...] he may claim to serve external goals of everyday life – but some kind of belief must always be *present*.”¹⁰⁵⁵ Religion simultaneously causes a tension in politics. No-one is safe against the temptation of claiming God as the sanctifier of what we desire individually or collectively in politics.¹⁰⁵⁶ McLoughlin notes that all great awakenings in America have led to wars instead of resulting from them. All America’s wars have been holy crusades, whether in the case of the first awakening against the French and Indians, or fighting the “Hun” in Europe. Writing in 1978, McLoughlin noted that the fourth awakening, beginning in the sixties, could expect a similar crusade, “unless the new light of this revitalization drastically alters the millenarian concept of manifest destiny.”¹⁰⁵⁷

Religion causes a lot of stir in the political world, since with an awakening of religious feelings it is indirectly able to cause a war to break out. There is a risk involved when America is portrayed as God’s chosen, since this can offer automatic justification for every political decision the U.S. makes, including a start of a war.¹⁰⁵⁸ By definition, the Innocent Nation or the Redeemer Nation cannot behave

¹⁰⁵² Grotanelli (1999) p. 161

¹⁰⁵³ Genette (1993) p. 24

¹⁰⁵⁴ Genette (1993) p. 24

¹⁰⁵⁵ Weber (1994) p. 355. Italics in the original.

¹⁰⁵⁶ Niebuhr (1954) p. 173

¹⁰⁵⁷ McLoughlin (1978) p. 23

¹⁰⁵⁸ Meacham (2006) p. 27

in an immoral way, but beliefs can justify even warfare. It is no wonder the liberal thinkers were afraid of the Reagan presidency. Reagan was one of the most visible prophets of the fourth awakening, and it was his storytelling, which was able to alter partially the metanarrative of manifest destiny. There was a crusade, but it was not such as people feared, due to their perception of Reagan's bellicosity. This crusade was first about revitalizing America and then achieving "peace through strength," but the actual warfare remained on the level of rhetoric.

And that is why we must now summon all the nations of the world to a crusade for freedom and a global campaign for the rights of the individual, and you are in the forefront of this campaign. You must be the cutting edge of freedom in peace and war, and in the shadowy world between.¹⁰⁵⁹

This must surely be one of the only instances in his entire political life when Reagan admits that there exists anything between light and darkness, good and evil, peace and war. The Presidential persona of Reagan was composed of two different personalities; one is the rhetorical right-winger, who pursued hawkish policies in his rhetoric, and the other a very careful practitioner of power. Excluding Grenada Reagan was reluctant to enter American military into an open confrontation of forces but rather chose to fight his wars as covert operations, especially in Central America. If the world at the era of Reagan was bipolar, so was the president himself. In Reagan's story verse everything is either or. Here he momentarily confesses that there does exist something in between. There usually is no "shadowy world between," and there are no grey areas. The bipolarity of Reagan's story verse makes its construction process easier. Everything is either this or that, and there is no gradual shifting from one end of the spectrum to the other. There is no need for the story logic to explain something ambivalent, since everything belongs to one or the other.

America is too great for small dreams. There is a hunger in the land for a spiritual revival, if you will, a crusade for renewal.¹⁰⁶⁰

In this citation, which is almost archetypical to Reagan's visions, there are many notable points. First, Reagan narratively connects dreaming to renewal. Just because America is so great, no small reforms in politics are acceptable. America's dreams must be gigantic, and they can only be reached with the help of God, and remaining true to the spiritual values. This scope of the dream and vision, and its profound nature as practically divine, calls for total renewal instead of just making changes

¹⁰⁵⁹ Reagan (23.6.1982) Remarks on Signing the Intelligence Identities Protection Act of 1982. s. 808

¹⁰⁶⁰ Reagan (25.1.1984) State of the Union Address s. 345

here and the in the policies. This enables Reagan to use words like “revival” and “crusade” with all their religious connotations. Reagan seeks to evoke these connotations in his listeners. These words bring up strong images besides being religious. “Revivals all share a sense of acute dissatisfaction with the current social and political order, and all rely on a common set of biblical stories.”¹⁰⁶¹ It is a revival of old, faith-based and time-tested values, crusading and fighting for the “right”, for a Divine agenda.

Here lies part of the strength of Reagan’s story. He brings forth visions and narrates the way to fulfilling his visions with words imbued with meanings that cue listeners to their respective storylines. The idea of crusading for this and that is so embedded into the American culture, that it can be considered another Americanized myth. It has almost nothing to do with the original crusades, full of violence and bloodbath. “Between us, we can wage a moral crusade – a crusade that we must wage, not for political victory, but because freedom itself is at stake.”¹⁰⁶² A crusade means purely standing up proudly and doing God’s work. It is fighting, but in this Americanized myth it is so far removed from killing the non-believers that the story is like the one of St. George slaying the dragon. American crusading is fighting against a force of nature, or a source of evil, that lacks all human characteristics.¹⁰⁶³ Crusading is an idea of noble fighting on the side of God for the right values that has no evil intentions and no evil outcomes.

¹⁰⁶¹ Gutterman (2005) p. 9 He also notes that revival can differ widely in their descriptions of the crises facing the society and in the development of of concomitant paths to the resolutions for them.

¹⁰⁶² Speech, ”Dinner Speech, Hollywood Palladium, April 20, 1966” p. 242 Folder: 1966 Campaign: RR speeches and statements, Book II (1), Box C30, Research Unit, Ronald Reagan Governor’s papers, Ronald Reagan Library

¹⁰⁶³ I have developed this idea further in my study of American enemy images of the Reagan era, see Hanska (2007) 103-119 For Reagan “the Russians” are good and decent people just like the Americans but they are misled by the “Soviet” system which crushes initiative, efficiency and spiritual values. A citizen is not the source of evil but totalitarian Communist system itself that removes the freedom of the citizen with the tight control it exerts. The meaning of an individual diminishes within the Communist system, which itself is the focus of evil. With a deeper analysis of Reagan’s speeches we can note that he even refers in negative terms to only a few communist leaders, Qaddafi and Castro in the forefront, with their name and usually chooses to talk of “Soviet leaders.” These leaders, just as the system itself, are stripped of human characteristics. In the case of the Ayatollah “Now, I think he’s as big a Satan as he thinks I am.” Reagan (3.12.1987) Interview With Television Network Broadcasters

<http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1987/120387d.htm>. What Reagan does with the Soviet Union is directly comparable to what Christianity did to the notion of evil itself; it invented Satan. In a similar manner Reagan “invented” Soviet Union as the “focus of evil.” To combat fear of evil Christianity personified evil and condensed it into one force, Satan. Thirdly, certain ambiguity is involved in this construction., Whether Satan (or Soviet Union) is an independent force or a tool of God, his (its) mere existence generates a driving force for action and gives a

We founded our society on the belief that the rights of men were ours by grace of God. That vision of our Founding Father revolutionized the world. Those principles must be reaffirmed by every generation of Americans, for freedom is never more than one generation away from extinction. It can only be passed on to a new generation if it has been preserved by the old. And that's what I meant [...] when I spoke of an American renewal, a rededication of those first principles.¹⁰⁶⁴

Reagan communicated effectively those first principles to the nation. The origin of the expression is in the Latin word *communicare*, which means sharing or bringing together. Some tones of this are still evident in English, as in community or communion. Just like in a sermon, the religious element is a part of Reagan's narrative, and it ties together the realm of the political and the realm of the spiritual. Reagan's talent was not only in rhetorical skills, but in his ability to create a powerful vision and spread it effectively among people as political sermon in the guise of storytelling. The word "vision" has a strong religious connotation and, indeed, there was a strong religious and even priestly overtone in many of the stories Reagan told.

Mythology and religion go together, according to Durkheim. Mythology is not only important to the aesthetics and science of religion, but "one of the essentials of religious life. If myth is withdrawn from religion, ritual must also be withdrawn. [...] Indeed the rite is often nothing other than the myth in action."¹⁰⁶⁵ Myth has to be enacted. This is the purpose behind ceremonies, whether Thanksgiving, Veterans' Day, Presidential Inauguration, or any ritual hallowed by the nation. But the myth has to be articulated as well, so that the symbolism of rituals does not disappear. When the myth is narrated, what happens is, as Northrop Frye asserts, "Mythology projects itself as theology; that is, a mythological poet usually accepts some myths as "true" and shapes his poetic structure accordingly."¹⁰⁶⁶ When one writes about myth, he chooses to believe in some myths and discard others, and these choices are politically interesting. Some myths have a position which are "considered self-evident," as the Declaration of Independence reads. But when the "self-evident" character needs to be spelled out, it automatically means that there are dissidents we try to convince. This is easy to discern in most of

higher motive for it. In a way, it is this powerful antagonist that makes one strong. However powerful evil is depicted to be, once it has been personified, it can be confronted. See. Hall (2006) p. 187-188

¹⁰⁶⁴ Reagan (20.11.1981) Remarks at the dedication of the James Madison Memorial Building of the Library of Congress. s. 1074

¹⁰⁶⁵ Durkheim (1995) p. 79

¹⁰⁶⁶ Frye (1957) p. 64

religiously oriented literature, which assumes the existence of God as one of the basic building blocks of the story world in creation. The text of the Declaration of Independence has become mythical. Michael J. Shapiro uses the writings of Jacques Derrida to point out that to “hold these truths to be self-evident” is not just finding a warrant for them but to constitute those truths themselves so that the truths mentioned in the Declarations are produced and brought about in the production of the statement. The Declaration of Independence bases the entire concept of American democracy on fiction and commits a “founding violence” by instituting a very exclusive “we, the people.” The “we” in the declaration consists of only the free, white men and violates the plurality of the American society from its very beginnings.¹⁰⁶⁷ Since Reagan’s politics are to a large degree founded on this textual basis, it is hard to escape from the limits set by such a founding metatext. While Reagan tries, or narrates that he does, to include each and everyone within his mythical vision of the American Dream, some cannot avoid exclusion as discussed earlier.

Roland Barthes claims that “myth is speech stolen and restored. Only, speech which is restored is no longer quite what was stolen, when it was brought back, it was not put exactly in its place.”¹⁰⁶⁸ When Reagan picks quotes from the Bible, or former presidents, or from any other utterances, what gets inserted into his story, becomes a myth. It is stolen, but put back, only to a slightly different location in a different story world. The words stolen might seem to be put back into the same context, but the act of stealing them to be rooted again transforms their meaning. They turn into parts of Reagan’s storytelling, but with the beneficial addition of additional mythical status. Everything quoted is stolen, and before being restored, it is turned into something else. It no longer is supported only by its original context, but instead is forced to accept new contexts, new texts and new connotations and denotations to attach to it. On the other hand, there is no text that one could confront immediately as something new and complete-in itself. As Frederic Jameson argues, “texts come before us, as the always-already-read; we apprehend them through sedimented layers of previous interpretations, or -- if the text is brand-new – through

¹⁰⁶⁷ Shapiro (2006) p. 168-169

¹⁰⁶⁸ Barthes (1991) p. 125

the commonly accepted reading habits and categories developed by those inherited interpretive traditions.”¹⁰⁶⁹

E. M Forster stressed the transformation of religious material into poetry as time passes, but also the crucial role of god as a poetic character.¹⁰⁷⁰ For him the boundary between poetry and scripture is difficult to define.

The god, whether traditional deity, glorified hero, or apotheosized poet, is the central image that poetry uses in trying to convey the sense of unlimited power in human form. Many of these scriptures are documents of religion as well, and hence the mixture of the imaginative and existential. When they lose their existential content they become purely imaginative, as classical mythology did after the rise of Christianity.¹⁰⁷¹

This is what happened to Reagan’s mythical America during the presidency of Bill Clinton. When he, as a democrat was replaced later by George W. Bush, the message of Reagan began to regain some of its political religiosity, and resurfaced as almost complete Americanized myth. In a similar manner the same applies to any president. When the presidency is won by a candidate from the other party, the established myths and stories of the party previously in control, are turned into profane stories and they in general lose their dominance in the political culture.

What is important to keep in mind, is the idea of Propp that even when religion dies out or disappears, the stories told about it and the stories it has told often remain in existence. While I do not argue that God is either dead or in existence, the Judeo-Christian religion itself keeps on going. In the case of American civil religion, it does not matter if it has perished or indeed existed at all in any point of time. The crucial thing is that it has left us the stories. Religion has been turned into tales and the tales remain shaping factors of our contemporary identity and politics.

3.2. FROM RELIGIOUS BELIEFS TO MYTHICAL NARRATIVES

Myths reveal that the World, man, and life have a supernatural origin and history, and that this history is significant, precious, and exemplary.¹⁰⁷²
-Mircea Eliade

¹⁰⁶⁹ Jameson (2002) p. ix-x

¹⁰⁷⁰ It has to be noted that here as elsewhere Forster uses the word “poetry” to refer to a wider variety of literature, including fiction under the same concept.

¹⁰⁷¹ Frye (1957) p. 120

¹⁰⁷² Eliade (1963) p. 19

In this second section I shall argue that our entire world lives by so many myths, that these have to be studied for a better understanding of our world of politics. It is not only American political life which is shrouded in myths, but the entire realm of politics. Literary theory, narratology, and mythology can offer political science new tools for this purpose. After all, my claim is that myth is comparable to any metanarrative that shapes our existence. I shall point out the specifics of myths as a special type of narrative and connect them to religious narratives. My argument is that the main difference between them is a matter of choice, that is, what one chooses to accept as “true”. Stories are evaluated by the story recipient and ultimately from the narrative perspective it is this evaluation, which makes the distinction between what is a myth and what is a religious story. I shall show how religious stories are turned into myths or by losing their special sacred status become myths in the course of time without intentional action for that purpose. The dividing line between religious and mythical material is a line drawn with a finger on the surface of water.

I shall discuss myth more in length than religious narratives, since in essence the latter can be viewed as part of the former. After extrapolating in length the role mythic narratives have and how they in general manipulate temporality and are in turn manipulated but it, I shall initiate a discussion of the role of myths in the realm of politics. In the end of this section I shall discuss specific types of myths which have their origins in biblical storylines but by their interaction with American culture have been turned into what I label “Americanized myths.”

3.2.1. MYTH AS A NARRATIVE

In this dissertation I put a lot of emphasis on religious stories and myths and there seems to be mythical material of two different kinds. On one hand, there are disconnected stories that are put one after another without any clear relationship, and on the other hand, there are very coherent mythological wholes that sequence stories in a logical order. It remains to be questioned if myths have fragmented into disconnected elements by deterioration, or if the disconnected state was the original and myths were later organized into coherent wholes by “wise men and philosophers” such as was case of the Bible.¹⁰⁷³

¹⁰⁷³ Lévi-Strauss (1978) p. 34-35

According to Paul Valery, “myth is the name for everything that exists, or subsists, only to the extent that speech is its cause.” Talk was the essence of myth for him, and in Homer and the Greeks poets' works *mythos* is used to mean “word” or “speech”. These were differentiated from *logos*, which meant “tale” or “story,” and later became a term of literary criticism signifying “plot”.¹⁰⁷⁴ Lincoln argues that in Hesiod’s work *mythos* was associated with truth, and *logos* as lies and masquerade, and thus the situation now seems rather reversed from the ancient times.¹⁰⁷⁵ Frye’s interpretation claims that it was *mythos* or “myth” which was equivalent to “plot.” He equates myth as the verbal imitation of ritual and typical action of poetry, which is the plot.¹⁰⁷⁶ When the two are combined to create the science of myth, mythology, we get “story of words,” or “word of word,” which is suitable to study using narrative techniques. Jerome Bruner argues that we should not all too readily accept the “oppositional contrast between *logos* and *mythos*, the grammar of experience and the grammar of myth. For each complements the other.”¹⁰⁷⁷ Levin argues that myth may be “unwritten literature” or, at all events “raw material, which can be the stuff of literature. Insofar as this implies a collective fantasy, it must be shared.”¹⁰⁷⁸

Lévi-Strauss was a structuralist, and that is why he places so much emphasis on the structure of everything. “For the myth *form* takes precedence over the *content* of the narrative.”¹⁰⁷⁹ The interplay of the form and the content is much more complicated than he asserts. In order for any given myth or a narrative to be recognized as a story, there certainly needs to be the structure, that can be identified as a story, but in order for the narrative to be recognized to be a great story, the content has to be great as well. In the content lies the reason why “Romeo and Juliet” by Shakespeare is recognized as a great story, but that label is seldom given to Hollywood’s boy-meets-girl-boy-loses-girl stories. But not many of us would call either one a myth. There seems to be a need for something more in the content of a story before it can be called a myth. Lévi-Strauss argues that while poetry can be

¹⁰⁷⁴ Levin (1969) p. 103-104

¹⁰⁷⁵ Lincoln (1999) p. 4

¹⁰⁷⁶ Frye (1969) p. 117

¹⁰⁷⁷ Bruner (1969) p. 276 About *logos* it is worth noticing that as Heraclitus saw it, it never makes claim to supernatural origin or inspiration, does not insist on its own truth but tries to make itself persuasive and above all is particularly associated with for example figures of limited political strength who manage to overcome stronger adversaries by their shrewd speech. Lincoln (1999) p. 27

¹⁰⁷⁸ Levin (1969) p. 111

¹⁰⁷⁹ Lévi-Strauss (1969) p. 204. Italics in the original.

translated only with the cost of serious distortions, even the worst translation preserves the mythical value of the myth intact. Even if we knew nothing of the language or the culture where the myth originated, we can still recognize it as a myth, and so can anybody, since “Its substance does not lie in its style, its original music, or its syntax, but in the *story* which it tells.”¹⁰⁸⁰ Even here we can see the complexity of the relationship between the content and the form of a myth (or any story, if it comes to that). Translation mostly alters only the content of the myth, but the form stays similar. When the nuances of the skilful use of language are thus somewhat eradicated, the myth may not be as enjoyable as it was in the original language, but it is still recognizable for what it is. It still gets identified, while probably as a cruder version of the original. And why does it remain recognizable? Just because it tells a story. The idea of the story itself is even more important than its form or its content. The narrativity of the myth, or its qualities as a story, are in the heart of every myth, and thus the myth is not dependent upon the medium used to communicate it. Myths are, at bottom, stories, albeit more meaningful than some other stories.

The story of Oedipus with all its different versions can be used to argue that in a myth (or a story) there actually is “no single “true” version of which all the others are but copies or distortions. Every version belongs to the myth.”¹⁰⁸¹ The importance of this is that there exists a metanarrative or a sacred story, which acts as the ultimately “original” version of the story or a protomyth. This story shapes the tellings related to it. It is not anything that could be identified as the “whole truth and nothing but the truth” of the myth, but rather as a framework, which guides the telling. It is not solid and impregably bounded, nor easily defined, but nevertheless it exists, and every story and every version told about its constituent matter becomes part of the metanarrative as well. Just as the “ultimate” Oedipus story is a combination of all the versions, so it is with every sacred story. Each telling has at least the potential to alter the “original.”

The first try to differentiate between myth and narrative was made in the second century by Aelius Theon in his *Progymnasmata*, which defined myth as “a false account portraying truth,” and narrative as “an account descriptive of events

¹⁰⁸⁰ Lévi-Strauss (1969) p. 210

¹⁰⁸¹ Lévi-Strauss (1969) p. 219

which took place or might have taken place.”¹⁰⁸² Another important early thinker on narratives was Origen. He used words like “enigma” and “parable”, but they can be seen to mean essentially the same things as for example “myth” and “fiction.” Origen wrote that where spiritual truths did not correspond to historical events, “the Scripture wove into the historical narrative what did not take place –at some points what cannot take place and at other what can take place but did not.”¹⁰⁸³ Origen then admitted that Gospels contain episodes that are not “authentic” in the historical sense, but at the same time “true” on the spiritual plane.¹⁰⁸⁴ This idea provides even more legitimation for the prophetic politician to narrate the story world as it “should have been,” because on a level of higher truth some things “rightfully” ought to have occurred.

If we cast Origen aside as a more or less isolated example of a theologian, who admits some mythical elements are inbuilt into Christian religion, it is a well established tradition within Christianity to discredit myths and mythology and abolish them into a separate space of their own. There is a refusal to see a mythical figure in Jesus, and myth in messianic drama. Most of the Christian churches want to separate themselves totally from all things mythical, but it is beyond doubt that mythological elements abound in the Gospels and other early documents of Christianity.¹⁰⁸⁵ This has caused a deep divide between mythology and religion so that both “should” not be talked about at the same time in the Western context. Instead they should be given such treatment, as if they were totally different things, with myth holding a position of lesser value than religion. Naturally this idea was applicable only to Christianity, while other religions were commonly treated in the same category as other “myths.” So, within Christianity the division into myths and “true” religion was a thin red line determined by belief in the truthfulness of one’s own religion. Otherwise righteous eyes could see nothing in common with myths and religion.

One scholar who wanted to bridge this divide again was Mircea Eliade. Eliade notes that during the 19th century Western scholars have approached the study of myth from the viewpoint, that they are not only “fables”, “inventions” and

¹⁰⁸² Cited in Eliade (1963) p. 165

¹⁰⁸³ Origen, *De principiis* 4,2, 9. Cited in Eliade (1963) p. 166. Origen was an original thinker in other aspects as well as the story about his self-castration to avoid the sin of lust exemplifies.

¹⁰⁸⁴ Eliade (1963) p. 166

¹⁰⁸⁵ Eliade (1963) p. 163

“fiction,” but rather were in the archaic societies understood to mean a “true story.” He defines myth as “a story that is a most precious possession because it is sacred, exemplary, significant.”¹⁰⁸⁶ Lincoln shows us that in its pejorative usage myth signifies “a story that members of some other social group (or past era) regard(ed) as true and authoritative, but that the speaker and members of her or his group regard as false.”¹⁰⁸⁷ I choose to use “myth” in this text without evaluations of its falsity but concentrate on the meanings it created and perhaps still creates.

The ancient Greeks steadily emptied the *mythos* of all religious and metaphysical value, but it was finally Judeo-Christianity, which labelled everything not validated or justified by the two Testaments as “falsehood”, something that really cannot exist. Eliade was interested in those societies in which myth is ““living”, in the sense that *it supplies models for human behaviour and, by that very fact, gives meaning and value to life.*”¹⁰⁸⁸ In that sense Reagan was able to define America in the terms of an archaic society, since the myth of the American Dream as he depicted it supplied Americans with a model, and gave meaning to their lives as well. Societies, which keep myths alive, carefully distinguish them from fables or tales, which are “false stories.” In general, according to Eliade, the “true” stories or myths deal with the holy or supernatural, and the “false” stories are of profane content. This distinction is important, since essentially both categories of narratives present histories, or, as Eliade writes, “relate a series of events that took place in a distant and fabulous past,” but the difference is that myths concern the people directly, and fables have not altered the human condition itself.¹⁰⁸⁹ ““Living a myth, then, implies a genuinely “religious” experience, since it differs from the ordinary experience of everyday life.”¹⁰⁹⁰ Again, I want to use the example of Thanksgiving. The myth is enacted, Indians and Puritans are both idealistic illustrations of people, and these grateful people offer their thanks to God. Mythic and religious parts blend together in the ritual.

Jonathan Culler argues that when one chooses to study myths, the mechanisms used should be somewhat different from the more conventional literature and it takes a lot of effort to put together

¹⁰⁸⁶ Eliade (1963) p. 1

¹⁰⁸⁷ Lincoln (1989) p. 24

¹⁰⁸⁸ Eliade (1963) p. 2

¹⁰⁸⁹ Eliade (1963) p. 8-11

¹⁰⁹⁰ Eliade (1963) p. 19

The cultural context that provides clues to the nature of possible codes, and we start without a firm sense of meaning which would enable us to evaluate the description of myths. This requirement produces a spiral movement, in which one myth is used to elucidate another, and this leads on to a third which, in turn, can only be interpreted when read in the light of the first, etc.¹⁰⁹¹

This structure is clearly apparent in Reagan's web of interconnected stories, where a certain storyline cannot be followed logically unless other storylines have previously been accepted, or shall get accepted in the process of reading. The idea of "Manifest Destiny" is absurd at a first glance, but when one delves deeper into the structures of Reagan's story world and the foundational myths America lives by, and discovers the criss-crossing storylines which give support to each other, can one begin to understand the concept. At the same time the spiral movement takes us on a mythical time travel through American history –mythified, of course. One has to travel back to the days when the *Arabella* landed on American shores, and start following the creation and elucidation of the myth towards the present to understand how America can see itself as exceptional. One myth is built on top of another, and only by mythifying the entire American history and following that spiral, can one unravel the elaborately interwoven mythical story web. Just creating a story world version of America is not enough, but rather America has to be understood as a story verse where this spiral elucidation of myths takes place with separate stories under the same story web, creating multiple Americas fused into a story verse.

Lévi-Strauss wrote that the same mythical elements can be combined over and over again and rearranged. He argues that myths are composed of "mythical cells" and "explanatory cells." The structure of each cell is the same, but the contents can vary and each mythical cell becomes a "mini-myth," which is short and condensed but contains all the essential elements of the myth. It can even transform to something else, as long as the other cells undergo similar transformations accordingly. The same mythical material can be used to produce multiple similar myths, which nevertheless have their own characteristic and unique aspects.¹⁰⁹² This bears a very close resemblance to what Vladimir Propp argued in his study of Russian folk tales. Both claim that a story or a myth can be broken into individual units and their recombination used as a product for the creation of new ones.¹⁰⁹³

¹⁰⁹¹ Culler (1975) p. 43

¹⁰⁹² Lévi-Strauss (1978) p. 39-41

¹⁰⁹³ Propp (1978)

While mythology is a closed system, it can become a part of history, which is naturally an open system. The transformation of a myth to a part of history is made possible by the innumerable ways to combine mythical cells, or those explanatory cells which were originally mythical. Same material can be used to achieve different types of accounts or stories. As mythical cells become gradually explanatory, the mythical quality of the story fades and transformation into history moves toward its completion.¹⁰⁹⁴ Myths can fade in time and lose their importance. They may become bed-time stories for children, or blend in with historical “facts.” And ultimately now we “know” the importance of Paul Revere’s ride, or that Washington confessed to cutting down his father’s apple tree, just like we know that America is the “last, best hope of man.” Myths create their own story worlds as well as any other story. But there is a slight difference which Boer points out: “myth constructs or postulates world(s) whose truth will have been upon its completion.”¹⁰⁹⁵ He argues that such a world created by myth is a “powerful fiction of a completed truth.”¹⁰⁹⁶ For explicitly political myths this is important, because myth forces events to take place by creating the types of worlds, where the events will have occurred.¹⁰⁹⁷ Thus, when myths are used in politics, the power of the story itself aids in the fulfilment of the myth. For Boer, history creates myth, but the linguistic labyrinth of myth generates history.¹⁰⁹⁸

3.2.2. MYTH AND THE FLOW OF TIME

Harry Levin writes about the lost work of ancient mythoclast Euhemerus, which supposedly was devoted to exposing the Greek gods as deified men. According to Levin, euhemerism reduces myth to legend, and legend is easy to reduce to exaggerated history.¹⁰⁹⁹ Since myth can be only exaggerated history, history can be mythified as well. History can be turned into a legend with enough time passing, and with use of adequate narrative techniques. History has to be separated from time, that is, the timelines have to evaporate so that historic events are seen to paradoxically have happened outside time, and thus outside history as well. For the

¹⁰⁹⁴ Lévi-Strauss (1978) p. 39-41

¹⁰⁹⁵ Boer (2009) p. 22

¹⁰⁹⁶ Boer (2009)p.22

¹⁰⁹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹⁸ Boer (2009) p. 31

¹⁰⁹⁹ Levin (1969) p. 107

purposes of prophetic politics, time has to be mythified and the historical events turned into stories.

Hayden White tried in his “Metahistory” to make the point that historical narrative is best understood as the construction of a story about reality, rather than as a direct representation of it. There is not, nor ever was, a way to actually know the past as it was, unless one lived in it, and even then the limits of human perception and memory create hindrances.¹¹⁰⁰ Any historical narrative differs from more paradigmatic discourses in producing a coherence of events ordered by story logic. Historical narrative is for Polkinghorne only one of three narrative discourses. Two others that produce meanings through plot structures are literature and myth. They are all results of cultural attempts to

impose a satisfactory, graspable, humanizing shape on experience. The historical narrative [and myth] takes the types of plot developed by literature and subjects them to the test of endowing real events with meaning. The knowledge provided by narrative history is what results from the application of the systems of meaning originally elaborated by cultures in their myths and (in some cultures) later defined by their literatures. Historical narratives are a test of the capacity of a culture’s fictions to endow real events with the kinds of meaning patterns that its stories have fashioned from imagined meanings.¹¹⁰¹

In other words, myths, literature, and narrative history are deeply connected. Myths often are refined in literature to more elaborate stories, and these stories are used in creating history. Reagan’s process of creating narratively a new history for America is essentially using myths to create and emplot a version of a historical narrative. Mythical narratives provide us with an alternative means of knowing, that resonates with community and identity. They also form a connection with religion as everyday experience providing certainty in a manner Aaltola describes as “politico-religious.”¹¹⁰² Eliade chose to define myth as something that “narrates a sacred history; it relates an event that took place in primordial Time, the fabled time of the “beginnings.” [...] Myth, then, is always an account of “creation”; it relates how something was produced, began to *be*.”¹¹⁰³

But while myths are used for the perfection of the beginnings, they are at the same time projected into the timeless future. Myths about the End of the World have played an important role in the history of the mankind and have shown that the

¹¹⁰⁰ White (1973)

¹¹⁰¹ Polkinghorne (1988) p. 63

¹¹⁰² Aaltola (2007) p. 9-10

¹¹⁰³ Eliade (1963) p. 5-6

“origin is movable.” As Eliade writes, “the “origin” is no longer found only in the mythical past but also in a fabulous future [...] it is in conceptions of eschatology understood as a cosmogony of the future that we find the sources of all beliefs that proclaim the Age of Gold to be not merely (or no longer) in the past but also (or only) in the future.”¹¹⁰⁴ Myth fuzzes temporality and blends all time periods into one, mythical time instead of separate periods, some of which are still yet to occur. The millennium has not yet happened, but it just as well could have, since it is taken as a certainty. Lévi-Strauss goes further to argue that in our times and societies “history has replaced mythology and fulfils the same function.”¹¹⁰⁵ He claims that in those societies, which emphasize the importance of myths, and are without written history, the future is faithful to the present and the past, but in our times “the future should always be different, and ever more different, from the present, some difference depending, of course on our political preferences.”¹¹⁰⁶

This is why Reagan’s concept of an ever better future cannot be denied. Prophetic politics is based on a past and a future that, despite their differences, are similar in their myth-like qualities. The “sinlessness” of the society remains unaltered but progress as a force turns the future into something different from the past.¹¹⁰⁷ The United States of America certainly has a history, which has been written down and researched thoroughly, but Reagan replaces the USA with his America through the manipulation of a story verse. The story recipient is transported within the story verse through the membranes between story worlds into the America where history is the stuff of myths, and not of scholarly studies. Reagan’s mythical America exists out of historical time flow. It is contained in its own bubble of *kairos* time. Barthes gives one plausible explanation why Reagan is able to use

¹¹⁰⁴ Eliade (1963) p. 52-53

¹¹⁰⁵ Lévi-Strauss (1978) p. 43

¹¹⁰⁶ Lévi-Strauss (1978) p. 43

¹¹⁰⁷ This point will be argued further in the fourth chapter, and here it is enough to say that the mythical past can be remembered as a “golden age.” The mythical future is based on the values and lessons learned from the past but the main difference comes from the teleological view within the story logic which asserts that progress is continuous and will never stop. In this process the mythical future is turned into something far better than has ever existed before. In a way all the things one values in the past golden age will become magnified and qualitatively better. While we look at the past with nostalgic longing, we can simultaneously look in the future with anticipation of all the things further improving and progress in the fields of science and human freedom adding their value into the equation. To use a religious allegory, while the Eideic time may lurk in the past, the future will create the Kingdom of God on Earth.

such fuzzy temporality in his narration. For Barthes “mythical history [has] a time-scale different to that of political history.”¹¹⁰⁸

Reagan’s narration distances itself rhetorically from politics, while being extremely political in its purpose. He mythifies the past and even those times, which are depicted as political, are turned into myths. This concept of a mythical time allowed Reagan, and would allow any other prophetic politicians as well, to blend all time into one unified sphere of experience. With the creation of the mythical America the mythical time is given birth as well as the locus in which it exists, and thus the Founding Fathers can be treated as if they still were giving advice to the nation, or that the American Revolution never ended, but continues in a political form.

The impossible dream of those patriots was about to be transformed into the reality of a bright new Nation. The King’s troops came slowly down the road to the surrender field; legend has it that they struck up the tune “The World Turned Upside Down”. And, indeed, the old order was to be turned upside down, for the creative powers of Democracy were about to be released on an unsuspecting world.¹¹⁰⁹

The world is turned upside down, old history has ended, the slate has been wiped clean and America makes a new beginning, starting history all over again. Ordinary time has been replaced with mythical time.

While every myth refers to events that allegedly have taken place in the distant past, “what gives the myth operational value is that the specific pattern described is timeless; it *explains the present and the past as well as the future.*”¹¹¹⁰ Myths and narratives are commonly seen to concern themselves only about the past, but this is a cross misunderstanding. For Lévi-Strauss, “any myth represents a guest for the remembrance of things past.”¹¹¹¹ Creating and telling myths works toward trying to remember things long forgotten, or even creating a past which has never existed, and remembering that past as if it had once taken place. It can also aim to recreate this past. A myth needs not be only a eulogy of past greatness, but a political tool to bring about that greatness again. While each tick or tock of a clock irreversibly turns the present into the past or history, the mythical narrative is able to work in nonlinear and reversible time, and blur the distinctions between what has happened, what is happening, and what will happen. The use of storytelling allows

¹¹⁰⁸ Barthes (1977) p. 166

¹¹⁰⁹ Reagan (14.9.1981) Proclamation 4857 – Yorktown Bicentennial. s. 785

¹¹¹⁰ Lévi-Strauss (1969) p. 209. Italics mine.

¹¹¹¹ Lévi-Strauss (1969) p. 204

the narrator to present things in the future as if they had already happened, and the timelessness in this allows a skilful narrator to explain the past with as relative ease as the future. This is the benefit of entering the mythical time, where every moment has special significance, and at the same time every moment is one and the same. Things will happen as narrated, since in mythical time they are so connected with the past, that there is no way for them not to happen.

Myths are widely interpreted in very conflicting ways. The two perhaps most interesting interpretations from my perspective is myth as a “collective dream” or a “basis for ritual.”¹¹¹² These interpretations allow us to grasp the meaning of narratively constructed myths in politics. Politics is eschatological and strives towards a Utopia, which is the collective dream of a society as it wishes itself to be some time in the future (or as it envisions itself to have been in the past.) Myth as a basis of ritual is at the very centre of political religion. Myths of national greatness of goodness are what enable the society to idolize itself. But, most important of all is the form of the myth, because “myth *is* language: to be known, myth has to be told; it is a part of human speech [...] it is both the same thing as language, and also something different from it.”¹¹¹³ Lévi-Strauss uses the distinction of *langue* and *parole* to describe the difference. They use different time referents so that *langue* belongs to a reversible time while *parole* is nonreversible. It is crucial that in a society which embraces living myths the time has to be considered reversible. The transcendent world of Heroes and Ancestors (or the Founding Fathers) has to remain accessible by the means of ritual, which abolishes chronological time, and recovers the sacred time. According to Eliade, this revolt against the irreversibility of time allows the society to both construct reality and assure that the past can be abolished, and life began anew with the recreation of the world.¹¹¹⁴ This does not, again, demand an apocalyptic worldview, but only the inbuilt timelessness and ahistoricity of the myth. Like any narrative, a myth can begin *in medias res* since mythical time is unconnected to historical time. At any moment the slate can be wiped clean, and it is the task of the prophetic politician to keep offering citizens the choices, that can wipe the history away and turn the tide toward the future glory.

History's verdict will depend on us -- on our courage and our faith, on our wisdom and our love. It'll depend on what we do or fail to do for the cause of

¹¹¹² Lévi-Strauss (1969) p. 207

¹¹¹³ Lévi-Strauss (1969) p. 209

¹¹¹⁴ Eliade (1963) p. 140

millions who carry just one dream in their hearts: to live lives like ours, in this special land between the seas, where each day a new adventure begins in a revolution of hope that never ends.¹¹¹⁵

Jerome Bruner writes that a “mythologically instructed community provides its members with a library of scripts upon which the individual may judge the internal drama of his multiple identities.”¹¹¹⁶ If myths are alive in a society, they serve as something the members of the society can build their identities upon. If the society wishes to see itself as heroic, as America often likes to do, there is a “library of scripts” to guide the identity construction. In this case it is not the society that “patterns itself on the idealizing myths, but unconsciously it is the individual man as well who is able to structure his internal clamour of identities in terms of the prevailing myth. Life then produces myth and finally imitates it.”¹¹¹⁷ The society with Reagan as its spokesperson uses myth to reconstruct itself, and the myth is carried on into the lives of the individuals, while they try to fit into the society, by fitting into the mythical pattern. Myth becomes a living reality. From a story of the American Way of Life, it becomes the way of life as it is lived by the Americans, or as they aspire to live their lives.

When it comes to defining the possible meanings myths may have on our society, one must notice that myths work and act on many different levels. Stories with mythical themes are told for only for light entertainment, but the same themes appear in religious contexts “where they are accepted not only as factually true but even as revelations of the verities to which the whole culture is a living witness and from which it derives both its spiritual authority and its temporal power,” writes Joseph Campbell and adds, “No human society has yet been found in which such mythological motifs have not been rehearsed in liturgies; interpreted by seers, poets, theologians, or philosophers; presented in art; magnified in song; and ecstatically experienced in life-empowering visions.”¹¹¹⁸ Myth, therefore, is not confined necessarily to the sidelines of society. Nor does it have to create the backbone of society. It can be put to use in anything, but does not need to have to be on any value by necessity. Why could it not be removed from the realm of purely aesthetic and used in the realm of politics? The stories of politics are fictional, and the

¹¹¹⁵ Reagan (18.3.1985) Toast at a Luncheon With Provincial and Community Leaders in Quebec City, Canada <http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1985/31885b.htm>

¹¹¹⁶ Bruner (1969) p. 281

¹¹¹⁷ Bruner (1969) p. 282-283

¹¹¹⁸ Campbell (1969) p. 19

politician can just well act as the interpreter or the seer, who gives it a new form in his vision.

Georges Sorel placed myth in its ideological context. He saw that social movements gained popularity and supporters by envisioning a struggle on behalf of an ultimately triumphant cause. The cause could just as well be the *Endlösung* the world revolution of the proletariat, or the global spreading of the American Way of Life. The ultimately triumphant cause could be utopian or millennial, just as long as it was placed in the future. But Sorel claims that “myths should be judged as means of acting upon the present.”¹¹¹⁹ To make a crude interpretation, what is important in myths as political narratives, is their propaganda function in the present of their telling. It is that effect which determines whether they have been politically important, since they might have been used to attain completely different goals and purposes than the ones explicitly spelled out in the telling. The triumphant cause and even the struggle can be mere pies in the sky, as long as desired action takes place in the short run. The citizenry must be won over at the spur of the moment by the immediate impression the myth imposes on it. The myth acts in the moment for the benefit of winning a politically desirable future. It does not matter after Reagan’s important address on radio or television, that some journalist days later finds a fault in logic, or even an untruism. What is politically important is that the impression had been made, and the action intended got initiated. As Barthes claims, no matter how much attention one pays to the reading of the myth, this “will in no way increase its power or its ineffectiveness: a myth is at the same time imperfectible and unquestionable; time or knowledge will not make it better or worse.”¹¹²⁰ This brings us to the question how myths indeed are put to use in politics and what is the role they play in political world. One of the great benefits of mythifying politics is that “it simply does not compute to say that fable of myth may be verified or falsified. Myth is simply not of this realm.”¹¹²¹

3.2.3. MYTHS OF DOMESTIC AND INTERNATIONAL POLITICS

In the poststructuralist tradition of sociology scholars have emphasized the extent to which power is always central to the construction of stories and myths. In this

¹¹¹⁹ Sorel, cited in Levin (1969) p. 109

¹¹²⁰ Barthes (1991) p. 130

¹¹²¹ Boer (2009) p. 15

viewpoint those who produce a myth or a story also have the power to make it “true.” That is, to enforce a particular reading of an event that defines people and groups. They tend to understand myth and scholarship of myth as ideology put into the form of stories.¹¹²² While there is at least a partial truth to this claim, it has to be emphasized in turn that it is not automatic that the producer of myth could make it “true,” or even force a certain interpretation of his or her own story to become the accepted one. After all, storytelling is pluralistic in its nature, and it requires specific skills from the creator of the myth to get it accepted. Rather than enforcing, the term should be enticing. While certain people, like the President of the United States of America, have due to their authority status more power in shaping public opinion and collective understanding, this power is not wholly coercive, but rather persuasive. And to wield this power, the politician has to be able to entice with narratives which, as discussed before, create their own logic, rather than trying to use argumentation based on traditional logic. He cannot force an interpretation; he can only seduce the people to follow his interpretation.

Martin Hall uses the taxonomy of stories developed by Bruce Lincoln, which classifies stories in terms of claims of the storytellers and receptions of these claims by story recipients. Hall and Lincoln divide stories into four types: fable, legend, history, and myth. Out of these fable is the only one, which does not even claim to be true, and history and myth are the only two, which are credible to the story recipients. Lincoln and Hall do no search for the “true truth,” but only what is believed to be true by groups of people to that extent, that the belief has some control over their lives. Myth is the only one of the story types which exerts authority over the story recipients. It is able to elevate itself into the status of paradigmatic truth.¹¹²³ Reagan’s stories were not untrue as such, because they taught “a deeper truth.” Reagan enhanced reality, and often the first person he convinced of the truth of his narratives was himself. Michael Deaver said that Reagan was a romantic, not an impostor.¹¹²⁴

Cynthia Weber notes that the entire field of international relations is based on myths about the way the world is. She makes many interesting contributions. First and foremost is her idea that as new ideologies are created by combining old

¹¹²² Hall (2006) p. 179

¹¹²³ Hall (2006) p. 179-181

¹¹²⁴ Pemberton (1997) p. 19

ideologies, new myths make their way into the international area. To understand these new myths, we have to “pay close attention to their ideological roots, however *passé* we might have thought they were.”¹¹²⁵ Weber sees IR theories essentially as a collection of stories about international politics, which tend to make organizing generalizations, and impose a vision of what the world supposedly looks like. In turn these theories depend upon what she calls “IR myths,” which are “apparent truths,” that we tend to take for granted, out of which the theory-stories are constructed, and which then in turn make the IR theories appear true. They can be called myths, because of their mythologizing function in making stories of the theories appear to be true.¹¹²⁶

Hayward Alker claims that political, social, and economic functions are based on myths and stories to such a degree that he wonders if all research in the field of social sciences could not be seen as study of myths.¹¹²⁷ Cynthia Weber agrees at least to some degree, when she argues that international relations’ theories are only stories told, and their credibility is based on myths, which have in turn become accepted and perceived as universal knowledge by the process mythologizing stories. All IR theories are therefore myth-based. She further divides these myths into conscious and unconscious, based on their appearance in the cognition of people. Conscious myths are those, that are written down somewhere as ways of making sense of the world. An example could be the realist assumption of the prevalence of anarchy in international relations. Unconscious myths exist on the level of attitudes and impressions, and form there a common sensical view of the world.¹¹²⁸ Reagan attempted to influence both kinds of myths. Conscious myths he attempted to alter by making history in the long run, by both portraying his actions in a particular manner, but also trying to affect the way history is written about his contemporary and past times. His influence on unconscious myths is at the centre of my dissertation, because his entire political communication aims at creating anew the way Americans see the world and their role in it. According to Bruce Lincoln, when authoritative stories are reconstructed and myths modified, ultimately the society itself can be reformulated.¹¹²⁹ To change the way people see themselves and

¹¹²⁵ Weber (2005) p. xvi

¹¹²⁶ Weber (2005) p. 2

¹¹²⁷ Alker (1996) p. 34.

¹¹²⁸ Weber (2001) p. 2-5

¹¹²⁹ Lincoln (1989) p. 32

their country, is paradoxically the same as to change the people and the country, since they end up being changed in the process of changing the perceptions.

To create political myths one has to connect a mythical schema into a general history, and to explain how it corresponds to the precise interests of the society. Myth has to pass from semiology into ideology, and I suggest that story can offer the vessel for this crossing. The mythical elements have to be injected into politics in such a manner that “The reader lives the myth as a story at once true and unreal.”¹¹³⁰ There are different ways to read and decipher myths, and I suppose practically everyone, who has read my dissertation this far, does not belong to the category of innocent myth-readers. Anyone, who has knowledge of the world of politics, is able to “see through” the mythical structure of a story depending on depth of his knowledge.

All this being said one must acknowledge that Barthes tends to see myth as depoliticized speech, because the world supplies myth with a historical reality and myth gives the world in return a naturalized image of this reality. In filling reality with naturality myth purifies and makes things more innocent by abolishing the complexity of human affairs and giving it the simplicity of essences. Myth organizes a world devoid of contradictions.¹¹³¹ In this process supposedly the object of the myth is relieved from its political load and filled with hollowness. Some myths are considered politically insignificant only because they are not meant for us.¹¹³² But to naturalize the world, and to make seem as if it was utterly devoid of contradictions, was of the main tools of Reagan’s policies. The myth function turns a cultural interpretation into a natural fact, and this transformation of cultural into natural is highly political practice. Weber claims that political power works through myths by appearing to take the political out of the ideological, which explains Barthes’s idea of myths as depoliticized speech. When something seems natural it also seems apolitical, but “natural facts” are the most intensely political stories of all, not because they tell myths, but because they remove themselves from political debate.¹¹³³ But by seemingly naturalizing politics with the myth function, in other words turning anything into myth, so as to avoid that idea’s political implications, a

¹¹³⁰ Barthes (1991) p. 127

¹¹³¹ Barthes (1991) 144

¹¹³² Barthes (1991) P. 144-145

¹¹³³ Weber (2005) p. 6-7

politician is able to turn his policies into such naturalized facts, that their political purposes get hidden.

Barthes argues that myths have survived in existence to our modern day and age. For him myth is first and foremost “a system of communication, that it is a message. [...] Myth is not defined by the object of its message but by the way in which it utters this message.”¹¹³⁴ There are no eternal myths, because myths are reality turned into speech by human history. A myth can be ancient, but nevertheless has a historical foundation, because “myth is a type of speech chosen by history” and history is determinant of the lifespan of mythical language.¹¹³⁵ Any object can become mythologized, and any material be used in the construction of the myth, because “myth can be defined neither by its object nor its material, for any material can arbitrarily be endowed with meaning.”¹¹³⁶ Mythical concepts are not fixed. They can come into being, change, disintegrate, or disappear completely just because they are historical in their nature. History can rise or suppress them at will.¹¹³⁷

Myths and other metanarratives are slaves of history. There are moments in the flux of history when these concepts do have an unquestionable, even a sacred status that no-one argues against with their counter-narratives. These myths can be found anywhere. The sun revolved around the Earth for a long time. Atom was the smallest unit of matter, which could not be split for ages. Thunder used to be caused by Thor rumbling in his chariot across the sky. These are just a few examples but from them we can make deductions. First of all, they were bound by the cultural context of their appearance. Indians had other explanations for thunder than this Scandinavian myth. Chinese astrologers not bound down by the Catholic Church could claim that the Earth was the body that did the revolving.

Secondly, they only existed for a certain period of time. New knowledge about the nature made possible the debunking of the story of primal nature of the atom. New stories supplanted older explanations for thunder. No sacred story, myth, or master narrative is eternal. They will always be replaced by new ones, but there is a time, place and context, where they are the only “true” stories about the way things really are. Times change, *tempus fugit*, and the stories used to communicate

¹¹³⁴ Barthes (1991) p. 109

¹¹³⁵ Barthes (1991) p.110

¹¹³⁶ Barthes (1991) p. 110-111

¹¹³⁷ Barthes (1991) p. 120

the true essence of those times change, but one thing remains constant; the existence of some myth or another. “The mythical is present everywhere *sentences are tuned, stories told* [...] from inner speech to conversation, from newspaper article to political sermon.”¹¹³⁸ The myths that have survived the pressures of history to the present day have to be placed under academic scrutiny to understand our political world better. But since they are to a large degree already naturalized, what is the way to do it? I argue that the means of narratology and literary theory could offer an answer and a toolkit to dismantle our “common sensical” beliefs and prove their mythic origin.

Northrop Frye writes that one major source of order in society is an “*established pattern of words.*”¹¹³⁹ In religion this may be a scripture such as the Bible; in politics it may be the constitution, but the important thing is to understand that while these patterns may remain unchanged for long periods of time, the meanings attached to them may change out of all recognition with the passing of the time. But it is the “feeling that the verbal structure must remain unchanged, and the consequent necessity of reinterpreting it to suit the changes of history, bring the operations of criticism into the centre of society.”¹¹⁴⁰ What else could this established pattern of words be than an Americanized myth about the society? Frye even allows it the chance to change its meanings and leave itself open for reinterpretations. This is what Reagan does most effectively; he chooses the Constitution and other stories from the American history and reshapes these mythical stories in such a way that their verbal structure *seems* unchanged, but manages to modify the original stories into new ones, which are occasionally drastically different from the original ones. Nevertheless, it has to be stated that in order to cloak policies under the guide of rationality, the prophetic politician needs to distance himself from myths. To openly admit that any policy is based on a myth, no matter how “true” the myth is deemed to be, is to open one to ridicule in the world of politics. The myth has to be denarrated. In the vocabulary of Reagan who was a great exploiter of the myth function the word “myth” carries a very negative meaning.

¹¹³⁸ Barthes (1977) p. 169 Italics in the original.

¹¹³⁹ Frye (1957) p. 349. Italics mine.

¹¹⁴⁰ Frye (1957) p. 349.

We're seeing a rebirth of these values, not to return to some mythical past, but to build on strengths for a creative future as we renew the quest for excellence at all levels of our society.¹¹⁴¹

So, paradoxically while myths may be a guiding factor for politics, they have to be kept outside the narration to such a degree, that the entire term cannot be allowed to pop up to describe the goal of politics. Rather politics have to rely on the *meaning* of myth, as it was articulated in the beginning of this subchapter; an essentially true story. Myth has to be demythified and accepted as a part of the common knowledge that “everyone” shares. Then, its true origin hidden, can the myth be a powerful motivator and catalyst for politics.

Myths cannot be extracted from the political world, since they have an important function as a shroud. According to Jameson, if everything would be transparent, “then no ideology would be possible, and no domination either.”¹¹⁴² The concept of domination is crucial to political leadership, but in terms of dominating the political storytelling itself and being able to produce the dominant narrative. The prophetic politician needs to be able to put together a story, which is of such heightened importance that it gains mythic value as the “true” representation and severely restricts the opportunities of drafting a powerful and plausible narrative to contest its dominance. Contrary to Barthes, Jameson claims that our society is more mythified than any previous one, and any notion of unity presupposes a mechanism of mythification, which would make sense to seek latent meanings and interpretations of texts.¹¹⁴³ To understand American political myths we have to consciously adopt the viewpoint to “not aim to show how men think in myths but how myths think in men, unbeknownst to them.”¹¹⁴⁴ Such a viewpoint is beneficial when one wants to study the political implications of the use of myths. The way people in a given society react to the myths in that society or brought into that society has its political consequences and myths can enable us to understand human behaviour by seeing it as myth-guided in those cases, when clear rational logic offers no solutions. In the next section I shall take a closer look on how myths shape politics specifically within the American context.

¹¹⁴¹ Reagan (3.9.1984) Remarks at a Reagan-Bush Rally in Cupertino, California
<http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1984/90384c.htm>

¹¹⁴² Jameson (2002) p. 46

¹¹⁴³ Jameson (2002) p. 45-46

¹¹⁴⁴ Culler (1975) p. 50

3.2.4. SACRED STORIES AND AMERICANIZED MYTHS OF US POLITICS

Success in politics is about issues, ideas, and the vision we have for our country and the world¹¹⁴⁵

-Ronald Wilson Reagan

In this subsection using the concept of sacred stories by David Gutterman I shall present some examples of stories which clearly have their origins in the biblical protostories and show how they have been put to use in the American context and have become “Americanized”. The new ways they are used somewhat distance them from the Bible and the added elements of the American Experience they are endowed with turn them into Americanized myths. They are no longer purely religious to the citizen and neither are they purely mythical material for a person of Judeo-Christian religion, since they are so involved with both the sacred stories of the Bible and full of references to religion. I shall start by defining that the sacred story does not need to be religious in its origin, but can be practically any culturally dominant narrative. I shall show that these sacred stories are subject to change and that other types of sacred stories exist than those directly connected with religion, but religious ones are the main focus of this subchapter. The sacred stories here are originally religious material, but since they have been “stolen” from their original context and replaced within the American context, the myth function has altered them. They are no longer religious stories but mythical. They have been mythified by their association with America, its culture, values and ideology. Even the most “sacred” stories are subject to change. They can be renarrated in an altered form and Americanized even further and this possibility to change their meanings with new tellings is an important factor for a prophetic politician.

Richard T. Hughes writes about “American myths” and defines them as “stories that explain why we love our country and why we have faith in the nation’s purposes. Put another way, our national myths are the means by which we affirm the meaning of the United States.”¹¹⁴⁶ Many of these have a religious foundation, but twisted practically out of shape and no longer connected with the faith itself. According to Hughes there are five monomyths that have given birth to other

¹¹⁴⁵ Reagan (3.10.1983) Remarks at a Dinner Marking the 10th Anniversary of the Heritage Foundation <http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1983/100383h.htm>

¹¹⁴⁶ Hughes (2003) p. 2

secondary myths like “Manifest Destiny.” The central myths are that of the Chosen People, of Nature’s Nation, of Christian Nation, of Millennial Nation, and finally of the Innocent Nation which draws its strength from the other myths.¹¹⁴⁷

One of the original purposes of Robert Bellah to write his influential article on American civil religion, was to call for “new American myths,” that would lead America into “a new balance of impulse and control, energy and discipline”¹¹⁴⁸ These new myths should be the ones that indeed are considered self-evident by all Americans. There was even a promise that these new myths could be applied worldwide as well. While the project was doomed hopeless due to inner contradictions, Reagan took the rather more “shallow substitute for genuine religion”¹¹⁴⁹ that Herberg had argued to be the American Way of Life and built his mythical structure on this instead.

Mary E. Stuckey has noticed that the constant evocation of national myths is at least part of the legacy or imprint Reagan left into American politics. After his campaigning; with the increased role of the national media coverage, the national candidates must “increasingly reflect the national culture. They attempt to accomplish this through the articulation of national myths.”¹¹⁵⁰ Mika Aaltola agrees by arguing that political power and legitimacy are highly dependent on the ability of politico-religious figures to draw from the cultural resources of the sacred.¹¹⁵¹ This is increasingly true in our contemporary world, where myths seem to gain more and more power as legitimizers of policies. There is an entire “National Mythology,” where historical experience of the nation provides metaphors and stories, which assume mythic proportions and the resultant myth exercises a reciprocal pressure on succeeding generations.¹¹⁵² Which myths to choose and which to discard? Frye claims that every civilization has a stock of traditional myths, but within these there still exists a subgroup of myths, that are considered to be

more serious, more authoritative, more educational and closer to the fact and truth than the rest. For most poets who have used both the Bible and the Classical literature, the latter has not stood on the same plane of authority as

¹¹⁴⁷ Huhges (2003) p. 6-8

¹¹⁴⁸ Bellah (1975) p. 159.

¹¹⁴⁹ Chernus (2009)

¹¹⁵⁰ Stuckey (1989) p. 3

¹¹⁵¹ Aaltola (2007) p. 44

¹¹⁵² Jewett – Lawrence (1977) p. 7

the former, although they are equally mythological as far as literary criticism in concerned.¹¹⁵³

Frye illustrates that even those Biblical stories we often consider sacred in the literary meaning of the word, are only myths among others when studied by a literary critic. They are sanctified only in the context of the civilization itself, and as stories of literary works have nothing sacrosanct in them to begin with. Any story can be sacred or profane. Any story can rise to be dominant or become obsolete. Frye notes that in our Occidental culture the central sacred book is the Christian Bible, a scripture in the mythical mode, which carries with it some “analogy of revelation” into other modes as well.¹¹⁵⁴ Elements both mythical and sacred should be blended. This is even more evident in US politics. Interestingly the “original faith” of the Founding Fathers, their deism, would be able to provide another type of culturally dominant story all by itself. The myth of “self-evident” truths, men “endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights” points out a moral course of history and works as an attempt to emplot and moralize it. The trinity of “life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness” could work even independently as a powerful motivator in American culture but the most common use, Reagan included, is to tie it together with biblical themes. The traditions of Judeo-Christian blend in harmoniously with the deist thought lines. John Locke and God are both used to craft the story of America.

Story or narrative creates the connection between the sacred and the mythical. “The function of the myth is to fix the paradigms of the ritual that sacralize the action,” argues Ricoeur, and adds that “speech is part of the ritual [...and] in this way myth as recited and inserted in the ritual of renewal makes *homo religious* participate in the efficacy of the sacred.”¹¹⁵⁵ Today myths are read and transformed into literature but “we have previously uprooted them from the act of recitation.”¹¹⁵⁶ What is argued here is that speech or recitation is the actual process where a myth is turned into part of the ritual. The mere existence of a story somewhere as a myth is no good for the construction of civil religion. Only by articulating it in form of a story, and thus *performing* it in a form of a ritual, and thus giving birth to a story verse, can a politician fulfil his goal of communicating

¹¹⁵³ Frye (1957) p. 54

¹¹⁵⁴ Frye (1957) p. 315

¹¹⁵⁵ Ricoeur (1995) p. 51

¹¹⁵⁶ Ricoeur (1995) p. 51

and promoting civil religion. Reagan tells constantly the creation stories of America involving the Puritan pilgrims and the Founding Fathers. These stories do not necessarily always get recreated in rituals. But speech itself is a ritual. It is a performance where the myth can be solidified, and this is what Reagan often does by renarrating over and over again the exceptionality of America so that ultimately it does become what everyone “knows.”

We stand for freedom in the world. We see the gulags and the prisons, those places where man is not free to do work of his choosing and profit from his labor, places where the freedom to worship God has been extinguished and where souls have withered. But we're blessed by God with the right to say of our country: This is where freedom is. This is the land of limitless possibilities. And you don't have to travel too far in the world to realize that we stand as a beacon, that America is today what it was two centuries ago, a place that dreamers dream of, that it is what Winthrop said standing on the deck of the tiny *Arabella* off the Massachusetts coast, with a little group of Pilgrims gathered around him, and he said, “We shall be as a shining city for all the world upon the hill.”¹¹⁵⁷

In the course of time stories tend to change all by themselves. The modes of literature have a tendency to move from the mythical to low mimetic or ironic and at the same time approach a point of extreme realism meaning here a likeness to life.

It is a tendency to tell a story which is in origin about characters who can do anything, and only gradually becomes attracted to toward a tendency to tell a plausible or credible story. Myths of gods merge into legends of heroes; legends of heroes merge into plots of tragedies and comedies [...]. But these are changes of social context, and the constructive principles of storytelling remain constant through them.¹¹⁵⁸

In the mythical mode where the stories are about gods who have the greatest possible power of action, there is at the same time present the greatest abstraction and conventionalization. Mythical fiction is therefore more stylized and less realistic of all modes of fiction. Frye notes that the structural principles of literature are related just as closely to mythology and comparative religion as those of painting are to geometry.¹¹⁵⁹ In other words, stories lose their connection with divinity or sacred in as time passes. What once was told as “truth” about the gods became first a myth, then it was told of the achievements of almost superhuman men, then about heroes, and at the end becomes the stuff of humour. Bruce Lincoln writes about the same tendency occurring already in the times of the Greeks and Romans who treated

¹¹⁵⁷ Reagan (4.7.1984) Remarks at a Spirit of America Festival in Decatur, Alabama
<http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1984/70484e.htm>

¹¹⁵⁸ Frye (1957) p. 51

¹¹⁵⁹ Frye (1957) p. 134-135

mythic material of the antiquity as amusing and unserious *mythoi* and *fabulae*. Christians, on the other hand, set them in stark contrast with the one story they deemed authoritative and nonmythic: the Bible and above all, the story of Christ's passion.¹¹⁶⁰ If this slipping from sacredness to amusing fables happens to a story about civil religion or the nation in general, there exists the need to rejuvenate the story and elevate it back into its sacred status. This happens through new and slightly altered tellings. There is always a certain sense of slippage, and thus the heroic mythical past has to be rejuvenated with new tellings and in the optimal case by trying to exaggerate the sacredness and sheer extraordinariness of the beginning.

David Gutterman uses a concept of "sacred story," which is practically synonymous to the concept of "master narrative," that is, according to one of its critics, something that the speakers constantly invoke and the "master narrative structures how the world is intelligible, and therefore permeates the *petit* narratives of our everyday talk."¹¹⁶¹ Just as well we could talk about a "myth." To call these stories sacred is to attempt to escape the pejorative connotations of the word "myth" and to emphasize the heightened importance they have in producing authoritative meanings and creating a system of belief around them. There is a distinction between "sacred" and "mundane" stories, and it can be best expressed by saying that mundane stories are set within the bounds of a particular context, while sacred stories are those, which define, establish, and shape that context. There is always a sense of a creation story involved with sacred stories; not because they might name the creation of the world or some other entity such as America as their theme, but because they create a context and a world of consciousness along with the self that is oriented to it. In the words of David Gutterman

The sacred story provides the identity and vision of the teller of the story (be it nation, community, organization or individual) and mundane stories offer models of political practice often aimed at meeting the vision set forth by the sacred story. Sacred stories thus provide a sense of meaning and order that make particular mundane stories possible. Mundane stories [...] enable the progress toward, if not the final attainment of, the vision set forth in the sacred story.¹¹⁶²

While I do not see a lot of difference whether one calls such stories metanarratives, myths, or sacred stories, I must admit that the connotations raised by the expression "sacred" are particularly fitting for discussing prophetic narratives in the realm of

¹¹⁶⁰ Lincoln (1999) p. 47

¹¹⁶¹ Bamberg (2004) p. 361

¹¹⁶² Gutterman (2005) p. 31

politics. Since sacred stories are defined as those that “set forth a vision,” almost the entirety of Reagan’s policymaking and leadership can be considered to be composed of sacred storytelling. As numerous White House aides have complained, Reagan set forth a vague vision, and they had to try to interpret it and act accordingly. Thus, in Reagan era politics the vision is expressed in the sacred stories told by Reagan, and the actual content of policies is expressed in the mundane stories told by the rest of the staff in his administration, who had the burden of implementing such decisions, as would enable the eventual fulfilment of the vision provided.

Calling these stories sacred does not imply that they are actually divinely authored or inspired, but rather held sacred by a nation and thus serve as such fundamental narratives, that they *seem* to be divinely inspired, by being invested with special meanings. The nation becomes an interpretive community and the sacred story conveys a particularly resonant meaning within it.¹¹⁶³ Despite the fact that these stories are fundamental, and they often express traditions and the origin-myths of the nation, the sacred stories need not be concerned with only the past in retrospective recreation, but the future as well. The sacred stories are not the like word of God, which was set in stone as commandments, but can be reshaped and even new ones given birth to. Lincoln argues that myths, however foundational, are not stable taxonomies, since the relationship between social order and stories told about it is loose and dynamic, and this loose fit creates possibilities for rival narrators and counter-narratives that modify aspects of the established orders.¹¹⁶⁴ This enables not only counter-narratives which the prophetic politician will attempt to silence anyway, but for his narration to alter the foundational myths to better suit his political purposes.

Propp seems to allow some ambiguousness for mythical material such as sacred stories and grants that they indeed can change shape, when he writes about the tale that it “gradually undergoes a metamorphosis since real life, epos of neighbouring peoples, written literature, local beliefs and religion transform the tale.”¹¹⁶⁵ The narrator has some leeway in reshaping the story. Even a sacred story can change, but this is “very rarely the product of personal or artistic creation. It can be established that the creator of a fairy tale rarely invents; he receives his material

¹¹⁶³ Gutterman (2005) p. 31

¹¹⁶⁴ Lincoln (1999) p. 150

¹¹⁶⁵ Propp (1968) p. 86-76

from his surroundings of from current realities and adapts them to a tale.”¹¹⁶⁶ The elements that cause a sacred story to change its shape are extra textual. They originate in the world outside the story world. In political stories they are the rapidly changing aspects of political situations and realities, and the narrator reacts to these alterations, and shapes his stories to better conform to them. In religious stories our present prophetic books are a fitting example, since “there are countless examples of additions, enlargements and comments, *which show that the text was not regarded as in any way sacrosanct*, but was subjected to alterations in accordance with the *taste and the needs of later times.*”¹¹⁶⁷

There is no reason to exclude the sacred stories or metanarratives from this possibility of change, albeit this process can be very slow indeed. Tales change, nevertheless. Even the most sacred of all sacred stories in our western conception, the Holy Bible, has changed in the flow of time. Translations and retranslations from one language to another may alter the meaning of the story as well.¹¹⁶⁸ Stories are at least updated in order to make them easier for the new generations to decipher. Time often erodes the sacred nature of a story. We no longer strictly abide by the conception that world was created in six days, it has turned into a myth for us, albeit a myth, that we still consider to be “essentially true,” and see the form as artistic misrepresentation. While some stories gradually turn more and more profane in the due course of time the process can be reversible as well.

This is certainly a problem one can associate with sacred stories. Tzvetan Todorov points this out with the example of *Poetics* by Aristotle. Todorov claims that this text was “exhumed and made to play the role comparable to that of holy

¹¹⁶⁶ Propp (1968) p. 113

¹¹⁶⁷ Lindblom (1962) p. 279. Italics mine.

¹¹⁶⁸ Within narratology there are various viewpoints on this issue. Almost everyone has his or her own version whether the meaning changes with translation. Polkinghorne (1986) p. 1. Argues that the basic outline of the story can be recognized whether the story is written, spoken, acted out as drama or presented in a movie. Claude Bremond was the earliest theorist to argue this in the 1960’s and has gained support even in Ryan (2004) Barthes (1977) p. 102 wrote that there is a “narrative language within us” (*la langue du récit*) which is argued to transcend the meaning of the story and communicate it on a higher level than mere language. Instead of English, the meaning of the story would remain unchanged on the level of “mentalese” See. Palmer (2005) p. 95. Barthes (1996) argues that nothing essential is lost in a translation of the story. This might be true, but since stories are essentially style-, language- and even medium-dependent, I agree with Tzvetan Todorov and Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan (1983) p. 8 who argue that since meaning exists only when it is first articulated and perceived, there cannot be two utterances of identical meanings, if their articulation has followed a different course, such as using two different languages. Thus, it may be true that when the translator is competent enough, the story itself might not change on the level of its essentials, but there is no escaping the minute alterations even in the best cases.

writ.”¹¹⁶⁹ This text is a prisoner of its own elevated status. Because it is so celebrated, nobody dares to contest it, or even bother reading it. It is essentially a source of quotations and clichés that, removed from their context, betray the author’s thought.¹¹⁷⁰ Even scientific works can become sacred stories in time. In this process the text is not treated as a completed utterance, which awaits the following utterance by some other scholar or thinker, but chopped into parts suited to fit the users’ purposes. The text no longer exists in its original form, but only as “stories” that are told and circulated about it. Thus the sacred story is no longer the same thing as the literary work itself. It has been created and will be recreated in numerous tellings into something utterly different, which begins a life of its own, and this is the story that gets sedimented into general knowledge. On the other hand, this makes the acceptance of political narratives easier, since by picking out fragments of Reagan’s narratives, such as the concept of “Peace through Strength,” and creating a new story about them, one is able to exclude from the emerging story unwanted particulars. Reagan’s blunders and incoherencies can be left out of this story of “one of America’s greatest presidents.” The story of the Reagan era can be turned into a glorious epoch in American history and to some degree this process is already going on.

The power of stories has always been an important factor in shaping American self. Especially the story of Christian America is so deeply accepted, that it rarely is questioned. The mythical America, then, is Christian. Diana L. Eck argues that the

narrative of Christian America has always had a hold on the collective imagination of Americans. This narrative moves through every chapter in American history, and it is a story deeply embedded in the subsoil of American consciousness. A narrative so deeply held that it is virtually taken for granted is [...] a myth. By this we mean not a false story but a deeply true story, so much so that we think of it not as “our” story but as “the” story.¹¹⁷¹

Now we shall take a look into how this story functions in the process of providing legitimation for politics. For Reagan the view of Christian America ever since Puritan era laid the foundation for everything Americans still are hundreds of years later.

¹¹⁶⁹ Todorov (1981) p. xxiv It is noteworthy that Todorov refers to Aristotle’s treatment during the Renaissance, but the general principle is more universal in nature.

¹¹⁷⁰ Todorov (1981) p. xxiv

¹¹⁷¹ Eck (2001) p. 42

I think American conservatives are uniquely equipped to present to the world this vision of the future -- a vision worthy of the American past. I've always had a great affection for the words of John Winthrop, delivered to a small band of Pilgrims on the tiny ship *Arabella* off the coast of Massachusetts in 1630: "We shall be a city upon a hill. The eyes of all people are upon us, so that if we shall deal falsely with our God in this work we have undertaken and so cause Him to withdraw His present help from us, we shall be made a story and a byword throughout the world." Well, America has not been a story or a byword. That small community of Pilgrims prospered and, driven by the dreams and, yes, by the ideas of the Founding Fathers, went on to become a beacon to all the oppressed and poor of the world.¹¹⁷²

It is ironic, that a man as centred and fixated on the power of stories as Reagan denies that America has been made a story. He himself has taken the story and worked on it for his entire life, adding, editing and elaborating. The words of Winthrop tell that either America will become a fulfilment of America's divine mission, or a shameful tale of the failure and inadequacy of God's chosen people. Winthrop himself made the Puritans a story by a narrative act, and Reagan was another narrator who re-made the story again in a very political act or performance. As Gutterman writes, the retelling of the Exodus narrative by the Puritans has "become the story of the nation's founding that reigns as the text of a nearly hegemonic national autobiography. It is the story taught to generations of schoolchildren and preached by each president."¹¹⁷³ The Puritans are used as an example of people, who left the old world behind to seek freedom, but their idea of freedom was quite different to what America proclaims to stand for today. "The Puritans sought freedom for themselves but for no one else."¹¹⁷⁴ But they have been storied to be the forefathers of all the freedom-loving Americans so that they have become a myth themselves. The Puritans, however, were themselves very adept at using stories. They managed to create an inclusive story about the America and American identity which came to surpass all other attempts. As Hughes writes, "The Puritans told a focused, compelling, and convincing story that no other immigrant group could match. Nevertheless, it was a story with which many immigrant groups could identify."¹¹⁷⁵

The sacred story of Exodus was first adopted in America by the 17th and 18th-century puritans in New England as their foundational story. After that

¹¹⁷² Reagan (3.10.1983) Remarks at a Dinner Marking the 10th Anniversary of the Heritage Foundation <http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1983/100383h.htm>

¹¹⁷³ Gutterman (2005) p. 26

¹¹⁷⁴ Hughes (2003) p. 28

¹¹⁷⁵ See Hughes (2003) p. 33

storytellers who have used the same proto-story have varied from Jefferson and Franklin via Abraham Lincoln to Ronald Reagan. America has been portrayed in these narratives most often as Canaan, a new Promised Land. Even today immigrants to the United States from outside the Judeo-Christian tradition are portrayed in a very Reaganesque manner as wanderers or sojourners searching for the new Israel.¹¹⁷⁶ In the beginning of the story of the American experience, the entire old continent was portrayed as Egypt. When America began to struggle for its independence England was given the role of Egypt – this is most strikingly evident in a 1776 painting of George III as Pharaoh in his chariot. Finally during the Civil War America began to find Egypt within itself. This time the Northern states were seen by the South as the oppressors and likewise the North depicted the South as oppressors because of their slaveholding.¹¹⁷⁷ In that sense both sides became the Egypt for the other side. The sacred story of Egyptian oppression has been used in the context of internal politics ever since as well. Naturally this has never been as self-evident as the case of King George III. The theme of Egypt just lies there, ready for connotations and denotations but rarely spelled out to support partisan politics. More often it occurs in foreign policy and all totalitarian states can be depicted as Egypts of their age.

Gutterman focuses on the multiple different ways in which the story of Exodus can be twisted for use in religious politics, but to limit oneself to only one religious narrative is setting too tight restrictions on one. There is indeed good basis for Gutterman to choose the Exodus narrative as his point of study, since as he notes, it is fundamentally a political story and an ideological telling of a people's history which defined and created the identity for a particular people, the Israelites.¹¹⁷⁸ There is heightened political and rhetorical quality into this narrative and all the essentials of portraying a people as "chosen." The Exodus narrative resonates relatively well with the American political reality. It is easy to cast such a prophetic politician as Ronald Reagan into the character of "God's humble servant" Moses, but several other political leaders could be given the same role. Moses liberated the people from bondage, crossed the Red Sea, and made a foundational and conditional covenant between the God and the people at Mount Sinai. He led his

¹¹⁷⁶ Gutterman (2005) p. 6

¹¹⁷⁷ Phillips (2006) p. 129

¹¹⁷⁸ Gutterman (2005) p. 11

grumbling and unthankful people, which continuously disobeyed God's will for a generation through the wilderness acting as a mediator of God's will. He had to die first, and only then Joshua could reap the rewards and lead the "chosen people" into the Promised Land. The basic plot is simple, but it can be elaborated and twisted to fit numerous different versions even to such a degree that completely opposing stories can be told.¹¹⁷⁹

The Exodus narrative can be used just as well as a master narrative than its counter-narrative. As an example, one could portray the collapse on Soviet Union as an event leading into the realization of the Promised Land on a global scale. Reagan would fit the character of Moses by not being able to see the Promised Land himself, since it was finally his vice-president, who took over the role of the leader and ultimately led the chosen people, Americans, into this land of milk and honey. As Gutterman notes, the most common interpretation or adaptation of the story is the version where Americans are the chosen people living in the Promised Land, and the notion that God continues to bless America is difficult to exorcise from the national mind-set. Partially the history of America with its colonization from Europe, and the abundance of natural resources, has helped to depict it as a land of opportunity and of "milk and honey" as well. This national self-perception continues to justify both American glory and national shame. Occasionally the "mission" of spreading freedom and democracy has been beneficial on the world stage, but at other times the "manifest destiny" has caused America to exploit the world as well. Belief in oneself as God's chosen people has justified numerous collective American black spots and politics of exclusion.¹¹⁸⁰

Since the exodus of Egypt, historians have written of those who sacrificed and struggled for freedom.¹¹⁸¹

Reagan seems to occasionally follow the sacred story of exodus in shaping the American identity just as David Gutterman wrote. Exodus-narrative was certainly crucial in the earlier times when America first was populated, or even in Reagan's time, but then only among the immigrants. After coming to America the exodus has been completed and the Promised Land reached. After that another aspect of the exodus-narrative must be used, and this is the concept of a sojourner in the

¹¹⁷⁹ As an example might serve the stories the slaves and their African-American descendants have told where America is depicted as their Egypt.

¹¹⁸⁰ Gutterman (2005) p. 11-12

¹¹⁸¹ Reagan (6.6.1982) Address to the British Parliament s. 197

wilderness. The Promised Land has been gained, but the promise remains to be fulfilled. As the vast continent spread itself in front of the new settlers this wilderness had a dual meaning as both the Eidenic Promised Land and also as dangerous, uncharted land of which nothing was known. It was the original manifest destiny to tame this wilderness and turn it into the New Eden.¹¹⁸² Understanding this dualism between the Promised Land and the wilderness is according to Gutterman central in understanding the American character.¹¹⁸³ One must find a way to surpass the dualistic vision of America as both the Promised Land to gain, and the wilderness in which an American wanders.¹¹⁸⁴ An explanation can be found in these words of Jonathan Edwards; “When God is about to turn the earth into a Paradise, he does not begin his work where there is some good growth already, but in a wilderness [...] that the light may shine out of darkness, and the world be replenished from emptiness.”¹¹⁸⁵

This interpretation of God’s will tries to show that the emptiness which America was prior to colonization, was the starting point where God chose to create His paradise. Ever since the time of the pilgrims and puritans, America has been constantly moving toward the final establishment of an earthly paradise, and away from its origins as a wilderness. Certainly an important part of prophetic politics even today is bridging this gap between wilderness and New Eden, so that America can be established and re-established again as the Chosen Nation. The fulfilment of the American Dream in every citizen’s life could be seen as the point, when each wanderer in the wilderness is finally permitted to enter the Promised Land. God promised the chosen land for his people and they were immediately upon arrival able to make the best of it. In Reagan’s story world the actual struggle is two-fold. First a person must struggle and labour to get to America, the physical location of the New Israel, and then he must struggle to make the American dream a reality in his own life.

According to Boer, the story of exodus is a powerful and motivating myth, and it tells a political truth. But the truth is not what has taken place. It is something we can claim “at some future point, this political myth *will have been*.”¹¹⁸⁶

¹¹⁸² See Stephanson (1996)

¹¹⁸³ Gutterman (2005)

¹¹⁸⁴ Gutterman (2005)

¹¹⁸⁵ Kelly (1984) p. 40

¹¹⁸⁶ Boer (2009) p. 17

Therefore, the political truth of exodus and every other political myth remains to be realized. But they can be used to define identity here and now. Concerning political myths there is a lot more to study and I argue, that to use multiple stories within mythical as well as Judeo-Christian context, one is able to get a more unifying vision on how these stories affect the American reality. We need other sacred stories.

Helping one another is a part of our heritage; the government was so far away, our earlier settlers depended on each other. And often people forget that the religious convictions of our forefathers went a little beyond Puritanism. The Bible talks of faith, hope, and charity, and the greatest of these is charity. Americans took this admonition seriously, just as they did the parable of the Good Samaritan. If you remember, the Samaritan walking along on the other side of the road from the beaten pilgrim didn't take a look and then hurry on to the nearest town where he could find a local official and tell him there was someone out there that needed help. He crossed the road and went to the aid of the fallen traveller. The real meaning of the parable has always been not so much the benefit that was done to the beaten man, but the good that accrued to the Samaritan.¹¹⁸⁷

The parable of the Good Samaritan is another sacred story Reagan used in his prophetic politics. In the parable the Samaritan is the sojourner, the wanderer, and the outcast who chooses to help a person, who in turn would not have stopped. Reagan's interpretation of the Good Samaritan story is used as a cue for voluntarism. The parable is not about the despised helping the one who would not have done the same deed, but instead about everyone having to help the needy themselves and not ask for assistance from the government.

The spirit of voluntary giving is a wonderful tradition that flows like a deep, mighty river through the history of our Nation. When Americans see people in other lands suffering in poverty and starvation, they don't wait for government to tell them what to do. They sit down and give and get involved; they save lives. And that's one reason we know America is such a special country.¹¹⁸⁸

This is another sacred story forming the story verse that portrays America as a Christian and morally superior nation, since the story of the Good Samaritan is used in a way as to cast America and her citizens' actions both in the everyday domestic life, and America's global policies, into the role of the Good Samaritan. If somebody in America or anywhere else in the world needs help or assistance,

¹¹⁸⁷ Reagan (22.9.1981) Remarks at the Annual Ambassadors Ball to Benefit the Multiple Sclerosis Society. s. 823

¹¹⁸⁸ Reagan (15.10.1981) Remarks at a Luncheon of the World Affairs Council of Philadelphia in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. s. 939

America is ready to provide it. “This I know will sound chauvinistic, but the American people are the most generous on earth. This must be the result of our free way of life.”¹¹⁸⁹ America does not entangle itself in the policies of the United Nations or any other organization, but immediately begins helping without time-consuming consultation and asking for permission, or waiting for somebody else to make the decision. Just as the Samaritan worked charitably and without delay in the aid of the fallen traveller so does America, whether the role of the traveller is given to a person in the neighbourhood, a group of people anywhere (like the Contras) or even an entire nation (like Grenada). The sacred story of the Samaritan can be used to sanctify actions taken in foreign policy as well as plain humanitarian assistance on domestic scale. Whenever, wherever anyone or anything needs assistance, America will according to this sacred story provide it. And just as the Samaritan did not rely on anyone others help or permission neither does America. Even invasions such as Grenada are only the work of this global-scale Samaritan nation.

America can perform almost any action in its global policy unilaterally as long as it uses the story logic of this particular sacred story to justify its actions. For the benefit of the fallen traveller, be it a nation or something else, the action has to be taken immediately. The very skilful thing narratively about the invasion was that, as Mary Stuckey has noted, Reagan began months earlier to insert Grenada into his speeches as another example of countries under Castro’s control and thus paving the way for the actual invasion.¹¹⁹⁰ In these occasions Grenada was only mentioned as in the passing, but that was enough to bind Grenada into the metanarrative of the American enemies, and this in turn created a new node in the web of stories where the story could be “continued” at the time of the actual attack.

Reagan even offers in his narration a “correct” interpretation of this parable. What happened to the one assisted is not as important as the good “accrued to the Samaritan”. The benefit of the beaten man was not that important as the benefit that the Samaritan himself got out of his act. Using this interpretation as a cue in the entire story of the Samaritan foreign policy we can note, that it turns some stories completely around. In the case of Grenada with this interpretation the object of the invasion was not so much to have Grenada “restored to the family of free

¹¹⁸⁹ Radio address, Folder Speeches and Writings – Radio Broadcast, Taping date – 1977, March 2-3 “Charity” Edited Typescript 2/4, Box 8, Reagan, Ronald: Pre-presidential papers, Series I Speeches and writings, Ronald Reagan Library

¹¹⁹⁰ Stuckey (1990) p. 57

nations”¹¹⁹¹ as it was to advance American interests. It was done not to help Grenada, but help America itself.

In domestic and especially social politics the use of this storyline lies in distancing the federal government from the responsibility to assist and protect its citizenry. When a “good” American sees his or her compatriot in distress, poverty, hunger, or any other need it is the responsibility of the witness to provide immediate assistance and not wait for help from the government agencies. Somehow the good deeds they do end up benefiting them and not the one helped. When confronting needy the Americans must act by themselves to relieve the need. In the words of Reagan, “I have believed for a long time that the history of America is based on voluntarism, that we have done good works.”¹¹⁹² To be a good citizen, an American must assume the role of the Samaritan, when it comes to helping those in need. Thus, whenever government has to get involved, it is accordingly to the story logic, because of behaviour “unworthy” to Americans, that the people in the community did not provide relief. Because had the Samaritan not delivered immediate assistance, the traveller would possibly have died. Same thing applies to Americans. Whenever the federal government has to interfere and the outcome is less than desirable, the cause for this lies in ordinary Americans abandoning their “sacred duty” and not working actively to benefit the fallen.

The US foreign policy lacks a coherent direction, and this can be seen to derive from the fact that since 1776, the policy has been written anew and canonized in so many different myths in the form of doctrines, that the nation is pulled by traditions in every possible direction. McDougall sees as the reason behind this problem the religiosity involved in the character of Americans, which is in turn further strengthened by the diversity of religions. An empire united behind one religion often is willing to practice unilateral power politics, but the religious diversity, including secular faiths, causes the nation to engage in battle with itself. In domestic policy laws are the battleground, and in foreign policy the hallowed traditions, or the “holy writ,” that should guide politics. McDougall argues that these holy writs of diplomacy and foreign policy are so numerous that they form a “bible” of their own. The Old Testament writings are the ones from 1776 to the 1890s and

¹¹⁹¹ Reagan (10.2,1987) Remarks to the Annual Leadership Conference of the American Legion <http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1987/021087a.htm>

¹¹⁹² Reagan (27.10.1981) Remarks at a Rally in Richmond Virginia, for Gubernatorial candidate Marshall Coleman. s. 994

the New Testament is the rhetoric on the 20th century. The Old Testament preached the doctrines of Liberty at home, Unilateralism abroad, American system of states and Expansion. These traditions were about “Being and Becoming,” and crafted to deny the outside world and concentrate on building a future for America. These traditions told the story of a Promised Land, or a New Israel. The New Testament consists of Progressive Imperialism, Wilsonianism, Containment and Global Meliorism. The message behind these storylines was that America had a responsibility to protect and promote freedom and economic growth of a global scale. They are about “Doing and Relating,” and crafted to allow America to shape the world outside its borders, and to determine a future for the entire world. The New Testament tells a story about America as a Crusader State, somehow charged with a mission to convert and change the world.¹¹⁹³

The problem with American identity in foreign policy is that it does not settle at any given moment to metaphorically being Jewish, and abiding to the Old Testament, or Protestant, emphasizing the importance of the New Testament, but tries to be “Judeo-Christian” at all times, and thus is confused about her own role. At least a part of Americans at any given moment support certain holy writ over others, and the policy gets twisted to too many directions. This is evident in Reagan’s storytelling as well. At one moment America is the “land set apart by the Divine Providence” and at the next possible nexus in the web of storylines also “the last best hope of man,” with a destiny as the global champion of democracy. Stout is one of the academics, who see America indeed as the world’s last best hope but at the same time the world’s greatest threat.¹¹⁹⁴ It is a question prophetic politics partially has to provide an answer for. Politics is a two-edged sword and results depend upon how it is wielded.

And how stands the [shining] city on this winter night? More prosperous, more secure, and happier than it was 8 years ago. But more than that: After 200 years, two centuries, she still stands strong and true on the granite ridge, and her glow has held steady no matter what storm. And she's still a beacon,

¹¹⁹³ McDougall (1997) p. 4-5 The use of biblical terms is not meant in McDougall’s case that theology directly would have influenced foreign policy, but to highlight the fact that leaders often imagined the nation as a New Israel and the further US foreign policy drifted from “true religion and virtue” in in foreign policy, the more the Good aspect of USA magnified, but at the same time, so did the Bad and the Ugly. McDougall (1997) p. 11

¹¹⁹⁴ Stout (2006) p. 458

still a magnet for all who must have freedom, for all the pilgrims from all the lost places who are hurtling through the darkness, toward home.¹¹⁹⁵ Life in the world outside America is comparable to exodus in Reagan's story. His "shining city" is a lighthouse that at the same time illuminates the darkness in the world, and serves to draw and guide the wanderers in the wild to "home". America is the new Promised Land, but the tribe whose home it is, is not defined by race, such as Israelites, but all who "must have freedom." Allegedly, according to this farewell speech to the nation, after Reagan's presidency the city still stands, and has grown stronger and therefore more secure and prosperous. But the problem, even without discussion about other religions and how they might view America, is that within the Judeo-Christian tradition Americans can be portrayed also in the manner of Abraham Lincoln or Martin Luther King Jr. as "God's almost chosen people." The people are still sojourners, still wandering the desert wilderness, still looking for the actualization of their Promised Land. Israelites were sojourners once and are likely to be sojourners again, and the same applies in these modifications of the story to Americans as well.¹¹⁹⁶ There is strong inherent irony in the fact that the people of Israel are continuously by their prophets like Isaiah, Jeremiah and Micah told to treat the badly off sojourner well and generously but this aspect is hard to find from the American domestic or foreign policy. The role of the Good Samaritan is one America chooses to perform very seldom.

The stories discussed above have their origins in Biblical narratives. There is a strong tendency to view America in the narrative discourse and framework created by these stories. But, nevertheless, many elements outside professed religion have been incorporated into the stories. Bible has certainly been used to interpret America as the New Israel, but we cannot find that explicitly written in the Bible. Thus, while Gutterman argues that the stories are not sacred but only endowed with an almost sacred status, I have chosen to call them Americanized myths, because what they define above all, is what kinds of stories can be told about the American identity, which they have been narrated into existence to uphold and renew if the need arises. They are first and foremost myths about America. But they are myths about American origins, and attempts to explain America at the time of the narration. Boer argues that myth might be one crucial way to reach across the divide between our

¹¹⁹⁵ Reagan (11.1.1989) Farewell Address to the Nation
<http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1989/011189i.htm>

¹¹⁹⁶ Gutterman (2005) p. 12

present and “a very different future to draw terms from that future itself, however imperfect those ideas, images and terms might be.”¹¹⁹⁷

There is a difference between a discourse that narrates and one that narrativizes. One has a perspective that looks at the world and reports it and the other feigns to make the world speak for itself telling a story. Real events should not speak for themselves but it is easy to get imaginary events to do so. Narrative becomes problematic when one tries to portray real events, which do not offer themselves as stories, in the form of a story, or in other words narrativize them. A mythic narrative offers a solution, because it has no obligation to keep real and imaginary events distinct from one other, and thus both the political storyteller and the one who studies his stories, benefit from treating the stories told as mythical in nature. The conflict between imaginary and real, and the forms of telling allocated to each, can be made to disappear when a certain mythical quality is given to the story produced.¹¹⁹⁸ Some political narratives are hard or occasionally even almost impossible to narrate as myths, such as economic policies and budgets,¹¹⁹⁹ but some areas of polity, like identity politics, can be based almost completely on narratives in form of myths. White suggests that narrativity is at least intimately related to, if indeed not a function of “the impulse to moralize reality, that is, to identify it with the social system that is the source of any morality that we can imagine.”¹²⁰⁰ Reagan sees this point in reverse since for him God and belief form the basis of morality, and social system is built upon this morality, but his storytelling certainly aims at moralization of reality. Furthermore, narrativizing discourse serves the purpose of moralizing judgments and it is questionable if we even could narrativize without moralizing.¹²⁰¹

The essential claim Cynthia Weber makes about international relations applies as well to the realm of American politics. Both restrict their critical self-examination precisely through the myth function, by naturalization of political things. What is natural often does not need to be studied, indeed questions are seldom raised.¹²⁰² It takes a strange way of thought to question the obvious. Besides

¹¹⁹⁷ Boer (2009) p. 22

¹¹⁹⁸ White (1987) p. 4-6

¹¹⁹⁹ Although Stockman seems to treat budgetary matters as highly mythical during his time at the head of OMB. See Stockman (1987)

¹²⁰⁰ White (1987) p. 14

¹²⁰¹ White (1987) p. 24-25

¹²⁰² Hall (2006) p. 179

the need to naturalize politics with the myth-function, there is another reason why the concept of myth is necessary in the politics of our post-modern world. Our world is too difficult to understand, and we need to artificially divide it into more “digestible” units to comprehend. While according to Levi-Strauss “myth is unsuccessful in giving man power over the environment,” it nevertheless is able to give him “the illusion that he can understand the universe and that he *does* understand the universe.”¹²⁰³ Myth and mythology take the place of “hard” science in providing a total understanding of the world around us, and even the entire universe we are a part of. It is fitting, that our reality is constructed for us to digest with narratives, since in a society where myth is a living thing, “the World is no longer an opaque mass of objects arbitrarily thrown together; it is a living Cosmos, articulated and meaningful. In the last analysis, *the world reveals itself as language.*”¹²⁰⁴ The most suitable way thus to make the world reveal itself, is as a story world. We could not understand and appreciate the complexities of the society, if we saw it manifested in its entirety in front of us. The society or the world has to be simplified, and once the myth function simplifies the United States of America into America, can a citizen understand what it is composed of, even if the thing he understands is a banal simplification. But, nevertheless, only this simplified version can be used for the citizen to inject it with purpose, and emplot its actions in a meaningful manner. This quote from Reagan perfectly articulates my point. It is too difficult to contemplate the role USA plays in global politics but the mythified America can be explained in an oversimplification.

This country isn't perfect. But, it is the best one in the world. And; as the saying goes, “that ain't boast – just fact”. We have little to be ashamed of and everything to be proud of. If some psychotic African dictator or Latin American bully-boy or communist thug doesn't like us, who cares. Don't push anybody around, but don't let them push you around. The best way to avoid a fight is to show you're willing to fight if necessary. That is the wisdom of the street corner and the country store, the local barbershop and town meeting. Such wisdom may not get you a job in the state department. Some intellectuals may deride it as a psychological manifestation of inferiority feelings. And there are some congressmen who would faint dead away if you ever said such things to them. But that kind of wisdom has kept this country free for over two hundred years. It is the wisdom at the heart of the American people's desire for peace and freedom.¹²⁰⁵

¹²⁰³ Lévi-Strauss (1978) p. 17

¹²⁰⁴ Eliade (1963) pl 141. Italics in the original.

¹²⁰⁵ Speech, “Excerpts from remarks by the Hon. Ronald Reagan at Friends of Kirby Holmes Luncheon, Monte Carlo Banquet Hall, Utica, Michigan, Friday, September 29, 1978” Folder

The common man was able to understand Reagan and gain a glimpse of the world of politics, which became more comprehensible to him. As de Tocqueville writes; “only simple conceptions take hold of the minds of the people. A false idea, but one clear and precise, will always have more power in the world than a true, but complex, idea.”¹²⁰⁶ Naturally the story recipient, for whom the story has been oversimplified, is not able to grasp the nuances of politics, but this is of no great concern, because he is on the one hand interested in the political matters, thus adding legitimacy to political decision-making. He is also liable to be used as a pawn in the political game of chess. Just because his conception of politics is dependent upon, and created on the basis of stories told for him, he and his opinion can more easily be managed by altering the stories he is being told, than the actual policies those stories depict. As long as the story is altered, there does not necessarily need to be any change in the real life. But this is nothing new in American politics, and certainly Reagan is not the only politician to simplify issues to the public. Richard Nixon has said that, “it may seem melodramatic to say that the U.S. and Russia represent Good and Evil, Light and Darkness, God and the Devil. But if we think of it that way, it helps to clarify our perspective of the world struggle.”¹²⁰⁷ While the simplifications made Reagan’s points and stories more personal and more comprehensible, they also managed to place his message beyond argument.¹²⁰⁸ When he made his arguments in narrative form, that is, as anecdotes and stories, the only way for the opposition to attack the story or anecdote is to get at the argument. It is impossible to plausibly argue rhetorically or based on rock-solid facts against a point made in a parable or an anecdote. And there are not many politicians who could match Reagan in a battle of anecdotes.

Oversimplifying things is hazardous for the prophetic politician as well. Occasionally the oversimplifications make good points that stick to the minds of the people better than longer elaborations of the status quo. As an example will suffice Reagan’s description of the government; “I’ve sometimes compared government to that unkind definition of a baby: It’s an alimentary canal with an appetite at one end

Hannaford/CA HQ – R. Reagan Speeches – 9/29/1976 Friends of Kirby Holmes, Utica MI, Box 21, Ronald Reagan 1980 Campaign Papers, Series I, Ronald Reagan Library.

¹²⁰⁶ de Tocqueville (2000) p. 155

¹²⁰⁷ Nixon, cited in Knelman (1985) p. 177

¹²⁰⁸ Stuckey (1989) p. 15

and no sense of responsibility at the other.”¹²⁰⁹ But while making such oversimplifications, the prophetic politician needs to be able to at the same time narrate the political world to be complex as well, lest the difficulties inbuilt into his role are forgotten by the citizens, and to avoid alienating the more intellectual of politically aware segment of the citizenry. Again, this can be achieved by using story worlds to take the place of the “real” world. Then each citizen can incorporate his knowledge of the world as part of his story world building. In other words he can see the world to be endowed with the difficulties he is already aware of, but yet accept the simplifications. If the world would be revealed to him only through simplification he would become scornful of the naïveté. When the story world takes unnoticeably the place of the “real” world, he accepts the simplifications as a good way to make the “others” aware of the complex matters and functions that he can grasp.

Reagan would not have had such success with his creation of a mythical America had he chosen some completely new story and tried to turn it into a myth. He used old myths of “what being an American is” and thus was able to amplify those myths and in time add a personal touch to them as well. Of course there is no telling that he could not have succeeded in creating a completely new myth, but it always more risky and the success is more unlikely. Instead of creating something which could have worked as a myth for a short time he chose the way of only emulating existing myths. This is one reason why the American Revolution was so dominant in Reagan’s storytelling.

Bruce Lincoln has given us three most common ways to use myths in politics that aim for change. That is, revolutionary politics. Firstly the authority of a given myth can be contested. Secondly a fable, history or even a legend can be invested with authority and credibility and turned into myth and an instrument for change. Thirdly novel lines of interpretation can be given an existing myth or modify details in its narration and thus change the nature of sentiments it evokes.¹²¹⁰ We can say that Reagan wanted to demythify the idea of strong federal government but mostly his tampering with the myths was connected to the second and third examples of usage. As Boer notes, very often myths are used to ensure the status

¹²⁰⁹ Reagan (31.1.1984) Remarks at the Annual Convention of the Concrete and Aggregates Industries Associations in Chicago, Illinois
<http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1984/13184b.htm>

¹²¹⁰ Lincoln (1989) p. 25, 27

quo of politics and used as a way the social system legitimizes itself and manages dissent.¹²¹¹ Reagan's mythical politics aims at a revolution, but precisely Reagan's style of revolution. It wants to transform the world as Americans see and experience it and while he uses myths, there is no denying that his storytelling is not a political act while the actual language does not advocate politics to a great degree.

While Barthes endorses the importance of understanding politics in the widest sense of the world he still has a too narrow definition for it. Myth may indeed be depoliticized speech but the creation of that myth or a narrative is a highly political act just as using and narrating that myth in political speechmaking. It is political to create a story world free of contradictions and seemingly rid of any political burdens. Reagan did make things more simple and innocent in his narratives but the reason for doing so were political to the extreme. What better way could there be for politicking than to do it in a manner that seems apolitical to the casual observer. It is only an illusion that narrative or mythical policymaking and politicking would be free of political load and for one to be able to naturalize his politics to such a degree that they are not even thought of as politics, could well be politics *par excellence*. I argue therefore that myths can be political. If not in themselves, they become political when they are used as means to a political end.

But to summarize all I have written in this section I agree fully with Bruce Lincoln's characterization of myth as "ideology in narrative form."¹²¹² Myth is just one more way to package ideologies for the story recipients and more importantly, it is an authoritative way to do it since the status of the myth itself presents the ideology in a form which is not easy to contest and appears as common sensical material. But, the view of myth as ideology in the shape of narrative brings us to discuss more in depth...

3.3. IDEOLOGICAL AND CULTURAL NARRATIVES

Ideas do have consequences, rhetoric is policy, and words are action.¹²¹³
-Ronald Wilson Reagan

¹²¹¹ Boer (2009) p. 62

¹²¹² Lincoln (1999) p. 207

¹²¹³ Reagan (22.4.1986) Remarks at the Heritage Foundation Anniversary Dinner
<http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1986/42286f.htm>

I have discussed the mythical narratives in depth and the reason is that Reagan chose to present so many of his stories in mythical form. Everything that was connected to his mythical America was mythified in turn. But religious stories and myths are not the only types of narratives involved in justifying politics. It is now my intention in this third section to discuss some other important types of legitimating stories. I shall start by showing how ideology can be packaged in narrative form and spread under the guise of “values.” Ideology as a concept carries negative connotations in a culture as fascinated with freedom as America is, and by promoting “values” and “ideals” or even the American Dream these negative connotations can be diluted. I shall argue that ideologies are totalitarian and do not allow competing ways of thought to exist. From this point it is fitting to move to the discussion of culture as a factor that shapes our life and that is shaped by our lives in turn. Both ideology and culture (like religion and myth before) are able to justify political stories and create such dominating narratives that shape all of the storytelling. I shall attempt to show how any of these dominating narratives can be contested with a counter-narrative, but admit that it is a demanding task if the web of stories is spun so that all four types of justifying narratives as involved in the dominant narrative. While the concept of such a dominant narrative as a master narrative has been questioned in the recent years due to the plurality of storytelling, I shall argue that one of the objects of narratives of political leadership is to diminish the plurality and attempt to create master narratives. Even if the master narratives of legitimation as dead, as Lyotard asserts, we still persist in telling them to ourselves and they still have the power to lead our lives. And when the justification of the political master narrative is derived from religious, mythical, ideological and cultural stories, the task to abolish them is formidable.

Fredric Jameson analyses narratives with the presupposition, that in analysis of texts the political interpretation should have priority, since “there is nothing that is not social or historical – indeed, that everything is “in the last analysis” political.”¹²¹⁴ While this is essentially true, and any text can be interpreted politically, there might not be a need to do so, since so many texts are political in themselves by being told for political purposes, that there is no need to burrow very deeply into them. We can naturally read novels looking for political undercurrents,

¹²¹⁴ Jameson (2002) p. 5

but it is more beneficial for the realm of political studies to read what the political leaders have written and told to somehow understand the mechanisms stories play in us and we play in stories. There are naturally stories that either are more political than others or have more profound political implications. Ira Chernus writes that a politically influent story “need not be true, of course; in storytelling as in war truth is the first casualty. And it need not be logical. The story simply has to be familiar and satisfying.”¹²¹⁵ Here seems to be a paradox, if we contrast this idea with the story logic that has been elaborated by David Herman. However, this does not necessarily need to be so. Herman’s narrative theories are beautiful and logical in their structures, but somehow the ideas about the “pleasure of the text” and its ability to arouse political as well as other passions that Barthes has written about are swept under the carpet. As Boer has argued, “passion is the stuff of political myth.”¹²¹⁶

Political narratives need to arouse passions and instigate a change or prevent the change from occurring in a particular moment of *kairos*. They do not need such strict inner cohesion or even story logic, if they only manage their immediate purpose of influencing the status quo. Either the winds of change are blowing and the prophetic politician needs to calm them down to stabilize his policies or he has to act as the metaphorical butterfly that flaps its wings and creates such a gale. The mechanism of arousing passion either to change or to prevent it from occurring is the same. The passion is of momentary nature, it fulfils its role in a short time period immediately after the narration. It does not matter what a scholar of political science publishes one year or years later acting as a literary critic and shattering the vulnerable story logic since the story by then has either affected the change it was created to do or failed in any case. However, as Reagan noted:

Well, any motion picture or any drama or play is based on one thing: It isn't successful unless it has or evokes an emotional response. If the audience does not have an emotional experience, whether it's one of hating something or crying or having a lot of laughter, then you've got a failure out there.¹²¹⁷

For political purposes the critics who praise the speech in their studies are inconsequential. The immediate response is what matters. Aristotle claims that when composing, the poet should “be an actor: for [...] they are the most persuasive and

¹²¹⁵ Chernus (2006) p. 4

¹²¹⁶ Boer (2009) p. 145

¹²¹⁷ Reagan (6.12.1983) Interview With Garry Clifford and Patricia Ryan of People Magazine <http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1983/120683c.htm>

affecting who are under the influence of actual passion. We share the agitation of those who appear to be truly agitated – the anger of those who appear to be truly angry.”¹²¹⁸

James Phelan, sees narrative as rhetoric, and writes that the narrator is “telling a particular story to a particular audience in a particular situation for presumably, a particular purpose.”¹²¹⁹ It is not only that narrative uses rhetoric or has a rhetorical dimension, but the fact that narrative is not only a story, but action as well. This works as a good definition of the political uses of narratives, albeit I consider rhetoric and narrative to be two different methods of persuasion. Rhetoric seeks to rationalize and affect the thoughts of the story recipient, while narrative can be used to dig deeper into the psyche of the story recipient, and not so much to give reasons and arguments, but to incite emotions. To exaggerate, rhetoric aims to converting the brain, while narrative can be at best used to set the heart blazing.

There is in political narratives the need not only to write a good story, but to narrate it with passion. This is more than mere rhetoric; it is the total immersion of the narrator into the story world of his own creation. Political narrating is more than speechmaking. It is rather acting out the story in the presentation. The more convincing the narration becomes, the more the narrator actually himself lives the emotions he is trying to communicate to his audience. Tzvetan Todorov has argued that “to speak is either to alter the feelings of which one speaks, or else to produce the feelings which one feigns in speech; thus, false speech become true and supposedly true speech becomes false.”¹²²⁰ Political leadership is at least partially about creating emotions and showing them, and, hopefully managing to communicate those feelings to the audience. Truth is not as important as what something feels like, and thus the narrator has to be able to act his emotions as well as articulate them.

It is not only the story that needs to be passed on and communicated to the audience, but the emotional content. A good and arousing political story has to be able to incite strong emotions for or against something. So, at its best as E.M. Forster argues,

what the story does [...] is to transform us from readers into listeners, to whom “a” voice speaks, the voice of the tribal narrator, squatting in the

¹²¹⁸ Aristotle (1940) p. 33

¹²¹⁹ Phelan (1996) p. 4

¹²²⁰ Todorov, Cited in Culler (1975) p. 109

middle of the cave, and saying one thing after another until the audience falls asleep among their offal and bones. The story is primitive, it reaches back to the origins of literature, before reading was discovered, and it appeals to what is primitive in us. That is why we are so unreasonable over the stories we like, and so ready to bully those who like something else [...] Intolerance is the atmosphere the stories create.¹²²¹

Essentially we are talking about the same passions Barthes spoke about. Stories do not rely on our self-conception of ourselves as rational beings of the post-modern world, but on our more primitive feelings and passions by trying to arouse them. That is why they are fitting tools for politics to use, especially during times of rapid changes. Story does not require its audience to think, analyze and deduct, but rather to feel and act, and the stronger the feeling and the resulting action is, the more political the story and its telling are.

Together we can and will keep America the great nation that God intended it to be.¹²²²

3.3.1. IDEOLOGY IN NARRATIVE FORM

This peculiar word “freedom” – with hundreds of definitions – has been debased in the coinage of communications. It might be helpful to go back to the original derivation of the word – a dozen language roots with common ancestry: always it springs from words that mean “peace” and “love” Strangely enough, the word “liberty” traced back to its roots means “growing up” or “maturing” or “taking responsibility.” And therein lies the whole story – we can have peace and brotherly love by accepting our responsibility to preserve freedom here where it has known its longest run in six thousand years of recorded history.¹²²³

-Ronald Wilson Reagan

Ideologically this man [Reagan] is a dinosaur.

-General Secretary Gorbachev.¹²²⁴

Usually ideology, according to Cynthia Weber, can be defined as a “coherent and comprehensive set of ideas that explains and evaluates social conditions, helps people understand their place in society, and provides a program for social and political action.”¹²²⁵ This certainly is something entirely different than the concept of ideology in Reagan’s storytelling. He sets American “ideas” as opposed to the

¹²²¹ Forster (1953) p. 41

¹²²² Reagan (25.5.1982) Remarks in Los Angeles at a California Republican Party Fundraising Dinner. s. 689

¹²²³ Reagan (1981) p. 340

¹²²⁴ Gorbachev, cited in Pemberton (1997) p. 170

¹²²⁵ Ball-Dagger (1995) Cited in Weber (2005) p. 4

totalitarian “ideology”¹²²⁶ in such a way, that the American way of life would not even be an ideology, but just a set of ideas or even ideals. But there are ideologies of both conscious and unconscious type. The above definition points to a conscious ideology which applies to the viewpoint of a communist, liberal, or a conservative alike. The conscious ideology, like Reagan’s American Dream, according to this definition, is often political in nature but the unconscious ideologies hold even more political power, since they lack names like “communism” they can be labelled under, and thus made harder to identify as ideologies. The idea that “America is the greatest nation” can act as an example of an unconscious ideology, since no one claims it as his very own viewpoint. It is rather a commonly accepted “fact” or description of the way things are.¹²²⁷ Unconscious ideologies are not even commonly articulated or argued and even less questioned. Weber claims that while conscious ideologies are “packaged as programs for political action that we debate in the political arena, unconscious ideologies are the *foundations of our ideological and political thinking that we place beyond debate.*”¹²²⁸ This is evident in Reagan’s politics. The stance of America as a part of the God’s plan and the most moral nation on earth are never questioned. They go without saying and shape the realm of actual policymaking. Reagan denies having any ideology and, indeed, on the level of the story, he commits himself only occasionally to such conscious ideologies as “republicanism” or “conservatism,” but his unconscious ideology shapes every political action he makes or undertakes and this is the ideology he wants to communicate among the Americans.

“Well, we should always remember from the very beginning that that [communism] is their [Russians] philosophy, it’s their religion.”¹²²⁹ What does it mean to claim, as Reagan does, that Communism is a religion? If it is narrated to be a form of religion, it can be disclaimed in an entirely new discourse. Earlier in the 1960’s Reagan had often referred to the “false god of Marx and his false prophet Lenin.”¹²³⁰ In the years towards his presidency he had changed his attitudes somewhat to see even Marx in a role of a false prophet, instead of a god, and communism as religion of the Communist state. Contrasting freedom and

¹²²⁶ See for example Reagan (17.5. 1981) Address at Commencement Exercises at the University of Notre Dame. s. 434

¹²²⁷ In the words of Alasdair MacIntyre “Fact is in modern culture a folk-concept with an aristocratic ancestry” MacIntyre (1984) p. 79

¹²²⁸ Weber (2005) p. 5. Italics mine.

¹²²⁹ Reagan (23.12.1981) Interview with the President. s. 1197

¹²³⁰ Reagan. Cited in Kengor (2004) p. 73

Judeo-Christian religion to oppression and “Communist religion,” Reagan both gained momentum for his crusade, and likewise portrayed his battle against Communism as a question of faith. Reagan did not limit himself to a question of competing philosophies or ideologies, because their battle for preference would take place on a rational level with argumentation. Choosing to depict Communism as religion moves the debate to another level. It is a question on competing theologies, and in the Judeo-Christian tradition of America, (that Reagan narrated to exist) there is only the belief in God which can be accepted. Therefore Communism is blasphemy and belief in a “wrong” God. Reagan follows the guides set by Alexander Pope who wrote “Men must be taught as if you taught them not, and things unknown proposed as things forgot.”¹²³¹ Reagan often uses the commandment to remember when he is telling something new to his audience. Instead of giving them new thoughts, he rather asserts that these are just forgotten facts. Ironically when Reagan said “remember” it often meant that something entirely new is about to follow.

If communism is labelled as an ideology among others, it is easier to draw comparisons with for example Reagan’s ideology of universal freedom. Then it would be easier to compare and argue on the benefits and disadvantages of each way of life. Reagan gets support for his view of Marxism as a religion from the leading protestant theologian of the 20th century in America, Reinhold Niebuhr. Niebuhr writes that Marxism gives us “a secularized version of Jewish prophecy.” For Niebuhr Marxism is not only “another form of utopianism” but a “Marxian religion” as well.¹²³² When the contest of ideologies is removed from the plane of rational argumentation, and comparison takes place in the playground of theology, passions are raised and rationality flies out of the window. When contrasting ideologies as religions, it is easier to claim that one is on God’s side. But in the case of American political religion and the Marxist “vast religious-political movement”¹²³³ there are many similarities as well, the most prominent being the “pretensions of innocency”¹²³⁴ like the “original sinlessness” of Garry Wills.¹²³⁵ A prophetic politician will portray opposing ideologies as false beliefs and narrate his

¹²³¹ Pope (1903) p. 23

¹²³² Niebuhr (1986) p. 10-12

¹²³³ Niebuhr (1954) p. 22

¹²³⁴ Ibid.

¹²³⁵ Wills (2000) 454-455

own as ideals or universal values, such as freedom or liberty. Ideology must be hidden in the political narration; it has to be disnarrated or even leave a gap.

While Reagan spoke continuously on behalf of freedom, and was opposed to all forms of totalitarianism, it must be noted that his attempts to portray the American history bears a strong mark of totalitarianism.

we were meant to be an endless experiment in freedom -- with no limit to our reaches, no boundaries to what we can do, no end point to our hopes. The United States Constitution is the impassioned and inspired vehicle by which we travel through history. It grew out of the most fundamental inspiration of our existence: that we are here to serve Him by living free -- that living free releases in us the noblest of impulses and the best of our abilities; that we would use these gifts for good and generous purposes and would secure them not just for ourselves and for our children but for all mankind.¹²³⁶

Lubomir Dolezel describes totalitarian power as “fiction-making in that it gives its gaps ontological status, projects them into the actual world. Totalitarian historiography is not so much a rewriting of history as an attempt to remake the past.”¹²³⁷ This is true of Reagan’s narrative as well. The past is created anew but simultaneously there is an attempt to change the way of thinking at the present moment of narration. Lyotard wrote that

cultural politics targets the unconscious [of the masses] in order to tap its energy [...] Cultural politics becomes what is essential in politics. The community is “reconstituted” by climbing onto the stage where heroic figures are offered for its wild transference. [...] Political art is “culture” and “culture” is the art of directing the transference.¹²³⁸

How fitting are these words of Lyotard in describing Reagan-era America, and how surprising it is that originally these words were used to describe the Nazi regime. Indeed out of all the modern phenomena the Nazi regime excelled in the use of myth as politics, producing it in speeches, films, spectacles and even academic writings to create nationalistic and patriotic sentiments.¹²³⁹ It is not my intention to draw conclusions about the relation between these two administrations, but only to point out, that political action in situations of crisis often tend to be similar in nature, and that these times of distress bring up the inherent need of the people for prophetic leaders. Under domestic and social stress, such as in the beginning of the Reagan era inflation and stagnant economy created, there is a need for change, and

¹²³⁶ Reagan (27.1.1987) Address Before a Joint Session of Congress on the State of the Union
<http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1987/012787a.htm>

¹²³⁷ Dolezel (1999) p. 261

¹²³⁸ Lyotard (1997) p. 26

¹²³⁹ Lincoln (1999) p. 75

administrative political leaders are not the most effective type. The people tend to yearn for such leadership, which might be termed prophetic within the context of democracies, and dictatorship where democracy is not built into the system. Therefore, it does not come as a surprise that Reagan depicted the job done after his first term in office, “at home and abroad, our country is on the right track again. As a nation, we've closed the books on a long, dark period of failure and self-doubt and set a new course.”¹²⁴⁰ The change he has made, is rather undoing the change made by the Carter administration. The impression of change he uses is that it is rather an escape from the stress caused by earlier changes and now he has retuned America on the right path, the one that begins with the American values and ideas his narration cherishes and the “right” Way of Life since the original sinlessness. But what needs to be understood is that Reagan is propagating a return not to the past, but to adhering to the values of the past and this is an important distinction. The “right path” leads ever onward and America in his narration only needs to relocate the path again to follow it to the fulfilment of the American Dream. This does not fully adhere with the typical conservative way of thought. An active change needs to be made to counter the wrong changes but not return to the past glory again. America has in its power to eradicate history and “start the world all over again.” This means that the return to the right path does not mean going back to the point where America left the path, a return to the past, so to say, but instigating such changes that the path of original values and ideas can be rejoined in the present. It is not the past golden era Reagan wants to return to, but rather use the value system and ideas (or ideology) of that era to continue to the future. “We must preserve those first principles that made America strong and will keep her free. That doesn't mean turning back the clock.”¹²⁴¹

The stories about the American way of Life or Dream are totalitarian at the same time as they propagate freedom. This is not a paradox, but only a part of the way a master narrative works in the world. It excludes some things and the gaps left by exclusion define not only the story world, but the political world, which actually becomes storied, and is thus being turned into a story world. Since political stories are about the immanent world, exclusions in them project themselves into the story

¹²⁴⁰ Reagan (23.8.1983) Remarks at the Annual Convention of the American Legion in Seattle, Washington <http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1983/82383b.htm>

¹²⁴¹ Reagan (26.4.1982) Remarks at the Annual Meeting of the United States Chamber of Commerce. s. 515

world, which for many of the less informed citizens takes the place of the “real” world. Even if the story is essentially about freedom, and liberal in character, it can be severely restricting and curb the freedom of other stories. Thus, in politics, any story told by the political leadership for political purposes seeks to minimize the plurality of stories and is thus totalitarian. Roland Barthes argues that,

Ideological systems are fictions [...] classical novels, packed with plots, crises, good and evil characters [...] Every fiction is supported by a social jargon, a sociolect, with which it identifies [...] and finds a sacerdotal class (priests, intellectual, artists) to speak it generally and to circulate it.¹²⁴²

Every ideology can be seen as fiction, and thus can be represented and communicated through narrative means. It is interesting, that Barthes gives an ideology a sacred status, so that while it creates and shapes the way one can even talk about it, (like a “sacred story”) an ideology has its priests as well. Ideology, seen like this, is not far removed from religion, because it is after all a belief system. When it comes to the values associated with the given way of talking or the language, the sociolect itself, it can be referred to as “the norms of the text”. In Reagan’s story these values are presented through a single dominant perspective, which is his own. If additional ideologies emerge in the text, they become subordinate to the dominant narrator-focalizer. Reagan provides his story with his own point of view, or focalization, and this ideology becomes the authoritative one and all other ideologies in the text are evaluated from this “higher” position. Reagan’s ideology, often presented through the word “values,” is implicit in his orientation to the story, but also often formulated explicitly by practically spelling them out. Reagan’s ideology focalized the story by giving it a fixed viewpoint, but also played a role in both the story itself and its narration.¹²⁴³ But the sociolects do not exist in harmony; they fight over supremacy and produce the counter narratives. Barthes goes further to argue that each fiction or jargon

fights for hegemony; if power is on its side, it spreads everywhere in the general and daily occurrences of social life, it becomes *doxa*, nature: this is the supposedly apolitical jargon of politicians, of agents of the state, of the media, of the conversation; but even out of power, even when power is against it, the rivalry is reborn, the jargons split and struggle among themselves.¹²⁴⁴

¹²⁴² Barthes (1990) p. 27-28

¹²⁴³ On focalization see Rimmon-Kenan (1983) p. 81-82

¹²⁴⁴ Barthes (1990) p. 28

In fact in a very Bakhtinian sense to listen to a narrative is, in part to listen to values associated with a given way of talking or sociolect.¹²⁴⁵ Words and stories are used in such a repetitive manner, that they eventually become stereotypes of themselves. The same stories are told by many narrators. Besides Reagan, other officials of his administration tell the same story in the same words and through this multivoiced and repetitive telling, the entire ideology is spread along with the narrative. When one listens to a speech, or reads the similar narrative from some other source, the ideology is the unifying content of these different texts. To make the choice to listen to Reagan is to invite the values embedded in his narrative to enter one's cognition. This does not necessarily mean that those values get accepted, but the conscious choice has been made to at least receive them. According to Bakhtin "the life of the text, that is, its true essence, always develops on the boundary between two consciousnesses, two subjects."¹²⁴⁶ A text is dialogic, and for its meaning to come to existence, there needs to be a text-mediated exchange of values between the narrator and his story recipient. In other words, the story recipient makes a decision consciously to allow the sociolect to influence him, when he chooses to further acquaint himself with the text. The ultimate meaning of the text is produced at least partially in this dialogic "conversation" by the reader. This explains why a person, who already accepts the dominant sociolect of the text, is prone to stronger emotions than one, who enters into an argumentative dialogue with the text. But if the ultimate acceptance of the text is the result of the dialogue, there is no zealot greater than the recent convert to any faith or ideology.

Barthes claims that every ideological activity is presented in the form of compositionally completed utterances, but argues that the reverse is also true. Every complete utterance runs the risk of being ideological. Thus the completion of utterances defines sentence mastery and a politician, who is interviewed, takes great deal of trouble to come up with endings, because if he stops short, his entire policy could be jeopardized.¹²⁴⁷ Utterances are ideological and communicate ideologies because ideologies take the form of utterances. Reagan is a typical example of a politician, who claims not to communicate an ideology, but a certain ideology of freedom or American Way of Life is inherent in his speeches, and by Bakhtin's

¹²⁴⁵ Phelan (1996) p. 43

¹²⁴⁶ Bakhtin (1986) p. 106

¹²⁴⁷ Barthes (1990) p.50

definition those speeches are utterances themselves. Speechmaking and the careful composition of the utterance is essential to a political figure, who wishes to communicate a way of living or thinking, whether he calls it an ideology or a vision.

When other generations look back at this conservative era in American politics and our time in power, they'll say of us that we did hold true to that dream of Joseph Winthrop [...] that we did keep faith with our God, that we did act worthy of ourselves, that we did protect and pass on lovingly that shining city on a hill.¹²⁴⁸

Reagan acted as the spokesman of the Conservative movement in America, but differed from their ideology in several ways. Virtually all conservatives believed that human nature is flawed, and there is an unchanging mixture of good and evil in each person, but that there also existed an objective moral order independent of humanity. They saw authority as important in imposing order on these flawed human beings for their own well-being, as well as for that of the society. At the same time individuals needed freedom to bring themselves and the society to conform to the objective moral order. This juxtaposition between freedom and authority created tensions within the conservative movement.¹²⁴⁹ Reagan took these old myths of the conservative movement and made a new retelling of them. There is no doubt that deep inside Reagan understood the human nature to include evil as well, but this was omitted from the narratives he told. During his governorship Reagan wielded the sword of authority very effectively to settle the student revolutions in several California universities, and especially Berkley. Yet during his presidency he always spoke only on behalf of freedom and never even mentioned authority. Reagan's America was as still just as sinless as it was thought to be prior to the war of independence from England. Back then, all sin that existed in America, was the result of the British tyrannical rule. In Reagan's America alike, all sin had been brought in from the outside. Mostly this was due to the Communist plan to "export its ideology."¹²⁵⁰ While individuals were for Reagan undoubtedly marked by the original sin that cast them out of Eden, God had seemingly forgiven them by creating a New Eden in America, and the society composed of flawed individuals

¹²⁴⁸ Reagan (3.10.1983) Remarks at a Dinner Marking the 10th Anniversary of the Heritage Foundation <http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1983/100383h.htm>. Again, it is worth noticing that Reagan does not remember John Winthrop's first name properly. This was an integral part of his narration and self in general. He repeatedly referred to V.I. Lenin with the first name "Nikolai" and often forgot names of the people working for him in quite crucial positions.

¹²⁴⁹ Pemberton (1997) p. 45

¹²⁵⁰ Reagan (24.10.1985) Address to the 40th Session of the United Nations General Assembly in New York, New York <http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1985/102485a.htm>

returned to perfection and was unmarred by any sin whatsoever. Reagan seldom attacked individuals or groups (except Communists) by name and whenever he criticized a group, he portrayed them as misguided people who did not fully understand the consequences of their actions, and not as evil individuals. Here the basis of Reagan's policy seems to lie in the teachings of Jesus, who asked for God's forgiveness for his torturers, who "did not know what they are doing." In the case of the Soviet Union the people themselves were even totally innocent and had not done anything. It is the Soviet system that is responsible.

Our quarrel is not with the Russian people, with the Ukrainian people, or any of the other proud nationalities in that multinational state. So, we must be careful in reacting to actions by the Soviet Government not to take out our indignations on those not responsible.¹²⁵¹

Partially this expiation of the people from all sin is also an attempt to clear his own past flirtation with liberal movements during the Hollywood days. Even the unrelenting anti-communist could make mistakes. The same applies to others as well. As he described his behaviour and thoughts,

I was blindly and busily joining every organization I could find that would guarantee to save the world. I was not sharp about Communism: the Russians still seemed to be our allies. [...] most of us called them [American Communists] liberals and, being liberal ourselves, bedded down with them with no thought for the safety of our wallets.¹²⁵²

Never mind supply-side economics, which became known as "Reaganomics," or rebuilding the strength of the American military, or combating the Soviet Union ideologically after so many years of détente, Reagan's greatest contribution to conservatism was optimism.

I'm not optimistic about the future of America because I have a sunny disposition. I'm not optimistic because I don't know the realities. I'm optimistic because I do know them. I'm optimistic because I have witnessed the American experience for more than seven decades, and I know that the American people can do anything.¹²⁵³

There was no longer dour language of limits and decline, but always looking forward to a bright and sunny future. When traditionally American economy had been considered as a pie; each had his or her own slice, and enlargement of one slice would diminish the others' slices. Reagan pounced on the metaphor and talked

¹²⁵¹ Reagan (27.6.1984) Remarks to Participants in the Conference on United States-Soviet Exchanges <http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1984/62784a.htm>

¹²⁵² Reagan (1985) p. 162-163

¹²⁵³ Reagan (13.6.1985) Remarks to Citizens in Bloomfield, New Jersey <http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1985/61385b.htm>

about creating bigger shares by making the pie bigger.¹²⁵⁴ Jari Rantapelkonen notes that the tendency to slide towards optimism and a better future reflects the American Way of Life.¹²⁵⁵ Indeed, after the gloomy presidency of Jimmy Carter with talk of national malaise, Reagan's message sounded like a return to attempt to fulfil the American Dream.¹²⁵⁶ Reagan spread his ideology of optimism and tried to renew the hope of the future which is an integral part of the American culture.

3.3.2. CULTURALLY DOMINATING NARRATIVES

Let's remember what we're all about. All of us, as Americans, are joined in a common enterprise to write the story of freedom -- the greatest adventure mankind has ever known, and one we must pass on to our children and our children's children -- remembering that freedom is never more than one generation away from extinction.¹²⁵⁷

-Ronald Wilson Reagan

Ideologies and the culture they are born in are tightly connected. On the concept of ideology Kenneth Burke argues that a poet can use the belief of people in something to get an effect. Ideology is according to his definition the

nodus of beliefs and judgements which the artist can exploit for his effects. It varies from one person to another and from one age to another – but in so far as its general acceptance and its ability are more stressed than its particular variations [...] an ideology is a “culture”¹²⁵⁸

As an example of a cultural ideology we can use the concept of extending freedom globally. Freedom is so inbuilt into the American politics, at least on the level of speechmaking, that it no longer is a human aspiration, but an ideology tightly connected to culture and other cultural stories. Claiming that ideology is a culture, or a cultural product takes us a long way into understanding how some of these ideologies are subconscious. Even if a person does not accept or take in the rants of any demagogue, it does not mean that he is not inflicted by one or many separate ideologies. Since ideology is partially cultural, anyone can be affected by ideology even without necessarily noticing it. Since ideology shapes the culture, it shapes

¹²⁵⁴ The idea of making the “pie” bigger was under Reagan's commentary already in 1976 and it was coined from the “growing pie” metaphor of Herman Kahn. Radio address, Folder Speeches and Writings – Radio Broadcast, Taping date – 1976, September “Herman Kahn - Futurist” Typescript, Box 2, Reagan, Ronald: Pre-presidential papers, Series I Speeches and writings, Ronald Reagan Library

¹²⁵⁵ Rantapelkonen (2006) p. 12

¹²⁵⁶ James Carter wanted to use the nickname “Jimmy” of himself, and thus I comply with no intention to sound disrespectful.

¹²⁵⁷ Reagan (1.8.1983) Remarks at the Annual Meeting of the American Bar Association in Atlanta, Georgia <http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1983/80183a.htm>

¹²⁵⁸ Burke (1968) p. 161

everything surrounding a person, and thus has at least indirect meaning in the way that person lives his or her life, be that the American way of life or some other.

The importance of culture is evident even in the relationship between religion and politics. According to John F. Wilson these interact in a social setting, and culture is the medium in which the resolution of tensions is represented.¹²⁵⁹ While the tensions are settled, culture provides justification to both. Northrop Frye saw culture as ultimately the factor that sanctifies both religious and political myths. Taken outside the culture where it was created, a myth, whether of Greek gods or a religio-political one, will lose its validity.

Culture interposes, between the ordinary and the religious life, a total vision of possibilities, and insists on its totality – for whatever is excluded from culture by religion or state will get its revenge somehow. [...] no religious or political myth is either valuable or valid unless it assumes the autonomy of culture, which may be provisionally defined as the total body of imaginative hypothesis in a society and its tradition.¹²⁶⁰

Culture is the factor that shapes our worldview and our beliefs. I refer to culture not as something that is stable and fixed, but rather a continuous and self-contradicting process which can and may be manipulated with both political and non-political narratives. I do not claim that everything Reagan told in his stories is a part of the entire American culture, but one of the aims of his prophetic politics was to alter that culture to better supports his policies. Culture does not lie only in movies, books, comics, TV shows and music but in the words of Cynthia Weber “how we make sense of the world and how we produce, reproduce, and circulate that meaning.”¹²⁶¹ One of the ways we do this is through storytelling and following Clifford Geertz culture is “an ensemble of stories we tell about ourselves.”¹²⁶² These stories need not be actually told, but can be just as well silent stories in the form of common sensical beliefs, that we take for granted, and consciously told stories in the personal meaning-making. A culture has to produce stories about the world that can get embedded into the things that everyone knows and that go without saying, in order to exist in even a semblance of something concrete. Only by “common sense” can we as citizens and political subjects, as well as individual members of society, “forget” the true common sense we each tend to have as children. Only a child tends to ask “stupid” questions like why people fight wars. We adults have the common

¹²⁵⁹ Wilson (1979) p. 7

¹²⁶⁰ Frye (1957) p. 127

¹²⁶¹ Weber (2005) p. 3

¹²⁶² Geertz (1975). Cited in Weber (2005) p. 4

“sense” that provides us with an “explanation.” Usually in the cases of these explanations, once one uses his intelligence to borrow deeper into the matter put to question, the actual asking of the question makes more sense intellectually than the answer given.

For Clifford Geertz religion is a cultural system in which sacred symbols “synthesize a people’s ethos – the tone, character, and quality of their life, its moral and aesthetic mood – and their world view – the picture they have of the way things in sheer actuality are, their most comprehensive ideas of social order.”¹²⁶³ McLoughlin argues that all of these are for Americans derivative from the Judeo-Christian tradition. Reagan fully echoes this by claiming that,

The Judeo-Christian ethic is a prescription for a happy and productive community, city, State, or nation. Getting back to values is part of getting back to basics. It's part of preparing our country for the 21st century.¹²⁶⁴

The American culture has at its historical core a system of inherited conceptions including “the chosen nation; the covenant with God; the millennial manifest destiny; the higher biblical or natural law; [...] the moral law (the Ten Commandments, the Sermon on the Mount; the laws of science,) presumed to be from the Creator.”¹²⁶⁵ Similarly the Declaration of Independence is envisioned as having been divinely inspired. Religion lies behind the justifications America provides itself for its existence and purposes. Out of these basic conceptions, whose definitions have varied from time to time; have raised a wide variety of other cultural myths, like that of the Innocent Nation. In the Reagan era this was packaged, as Garry Wills calls it, the myth of “original sinlessness.”¹²⁶⁶ According to Reagan’s interpretation America started anew on a clean slate and thus was not marred by the original sin, which according to a multitude of theologians has tainted all of humanity since the exile from Eden. With the founding of America, Eden was re-entered, the paradise regained. The use of original sinlessness is one of the factors that enabled Reagan to view his mythical America as a perfect society, since there was no flaw in the beginning and the foundational myths can be pure.

All these contemporary myths can be reduced back to their origins in religious stories or foundational myths by following their development, and the

¹²⁶³ Geertz. Cited in McLoughlin (1978) p. 102

¹²⁶⁴ Reagan (26.3.1987) Remarks to the National Governors' Association - Department of Education Conference in Columbia, Missouri
<http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1987/032687h.htm>

¹²⁶⁵ McLoughlin (1978) p. 103

¹²⁶⁶ Wills (2000) 454-455

purposes for which they were created. Each of them is then in turn fitted into the contemporary cultural concept of who Americans are, and what is their place in the world.¹²⁶⁷ Religion might be the basis of these myths in any culture, but the culture itself acts as another legitimizer. All these myths have been used differently in different times. Some myths are occasionally cast aside and silenced, some gain more importance. Especially during an awakening, or at other politically profitable times, when it is necessary to influence the idea Americans have of themselves, these myths need to be evoked and narrated anew. It is the narration, the communication of these myths, which one has to alter in order to change the meanings of the myths themselves. When a myth becomes a story and is told as a new interpretation, its meaning can be altered to one's political preferences. Myths are at the same time both stories and symbols, and as McLoughlin argues: "One way to describe an awakening is to call it a period during which old symbols are clothed in new meanings."¹²⁶⁸ I claim that creation of new stories on old plots or myths as retellings are the most convenient means of altering world views and the role of the political narrator becomes crucial in recreating the national image.

You may remember that verse in the Bible that says, "Your old men will dream dreams; your young men will see visions." Well, I deeply believe that this is just such a time of reawakening in America, a time when our country is healing the wounds of the past and beginning to look with courage and confidence to the future. Yes, we are making a new beginning.¹²⁶⁹

For Paul Tillich religion "is the meaning-giving substance of culture, and culture is the totality of forms in which the basic concern of religion expresses itself."¹²⁷⁰

Religion plays an important role in any given culture. It sets the forms for thought processes and condenses the values, which guide the behaviour of the individual. In that sense religion is a precondition for culture and at the same time culture becomes perceived in terms of a discrete phenomenon within it. Culture both acquires and maintains its legitimacy on the basis of a meaning system, which is at bottom religious. Wilson echoes Peter Berger in claiming that citizens exist in a dialectical relationship with their "worlds," and that these worlds exist only in the knowledge

¹²⁶⁷ McLoughlin (1978) p. 103

¹²⁶⁸ McLoughlin (1978) p. 103

¹²⁶⁹ Reagan (20.1.1984) Remarks to the Reagan Administration Executive Forum <http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1984/12084a.htm>. This biblical quotation is from the book of Joel, another prophet Reagan cites.

¹²⁷⁰ Tillich, cited in Mead (1977) p. 62

of them, that individuals and collectives share and reproduce.¹²⁷¹ My addition to this argument is that this world, which appears to us as citizens as the “real world,” can be a story world or a combination of many in the form of a story verse. It is thus the task of the prophetic politician to attempt to take a leadership role in the reproduction of these worlds and to bind them into a story verse.

David Gutterman uses Max Weber and Clifford Geertz to argue that narratives, and especially the foundational narratives, are part of a cultural fabric by being inherited, interpreted and retold. We are suspended in webs of significance we have spun for ourselves, which can be thought of as “culture,” and Gutterman proposes that narratives form the strands of these webs.¹²⁷² As I have written, the storylines of Reagan are able to construct an entire web all by themselves. The object of Reagan’s prophetic politics and prophetic narration is then to recreate and interpret the American cultural tradition as well. Reagan’s elaborate web of interconnected stories is able to produce to the story recipient a version or an interpretation of the nature of American culture as a whole. Reagan’s use of American values actually both designs and reflects American popular culture. Reagan’s bedrock values of family, work, neighbourhood, peace and freedom were reflected in many of the popular TV shows, like “The Cosby Show.” At the same time movies portrayed strong, often violent characters, almost lone cowboys fighting the injustices of the world like “Rambo” or “Dirty Harry.” Reagan was not only a reflection of the popular culture of his times, but the relationship was more complex. The Reagan presidency was one factor in creating the climate just as Reagan was an answer to the needs of the American public. The values Reagan espoused were included into the national culture but at the same time he was a response to the need of reflecting such values. Reagan was at the same time a product and the producer of the cultural climate.

For Levi-Strauss language is a very crucial concept for a culture. Language is at the same time a result of a culture, a part of it, and even a condition of it. Language spoken by the population reflects its total culture, and at the same time, among numerous other things combined together, forms the culture. It is also a condition of the culture because it is “mostly through culture that we learn about our own culture” but also because of the “material out of which language is built is of

¹²⁷¹ Wilson (1979) p. 24-25

¹²⁷² Gutterman (2005) p. 27

the same type as the material out of which the whole culture is built.”¹²⁷³ Language is nevertheless only the vessel of transmitting and formulating culture or whatever it wants to carry. Lévi-Strauss agrees that the “vocabulary matters less than the structure.”¹²⁷⁴ The culture lies outside language, but is the vessel to pass on and share cultural values. Culture also shapes all the stories one can tell about it, because it is impossible to remain as if one was not interlinked to any culture. At the same time culture is shaped by narratives. In the words of Lyotard, narratives themselves define their own competency and give guidance into how they should be applied. “They thus define what has the right to be said and done in the culture in question, and since they are themselves a part of that culture, they are legitimated by the simple fact that they do what they do.”¹²⁷⁵

It is not only the realities of the contemporary times of the narrator but also cultural traditions which offer a variety of plotlines which can be used to configure events into stories. Some of these are passed on as myths, some as children’s tales or other fables. As Polkinghorne claims, “The ordering of events by linking them to a plot comes about through intermixing of the various elements of the cultural repertoire of sedimented stories and innovations.”¹²⁷⁶ Culture shapes the person very profoundly. Culture influences the cognitive and linguistic processes that guide the self-tellings of one’s life, structure experience, organize memories, and actually even build the very events that the life is composed of. Bruner argues that we “*become* the autobiographical narratives by which we “tell about” our lives” and even “become variants of the culture’s canonical forms.”¹²⁷⁷ We become the stories we tell and in the telling become stock characters of a culture’s narrative models.

Identity is often portrayed in the form of narrative. It is a common argument in our contemporary conjunction, that selves are created through the means of storytelling. Stories are held to be not only accounts of individual experiences through time, but rather are researched to understand the ways how storytellers and the conditions of storytelling shape what is being conveyed, and what the contents of the stories tell about the selves within them.¹²⁷⁸ The famous claim of Alasdair MacIntyre is that, “We all live out narratives in our lives and [...] understand our

¹²⁷³ Lévi-Strauss (1969) p. 68-69

¹²⁷⁴ Lévi-Strauss (1969) p. 203

¹²⁷⁵ Lyotard (1984) p. 23

¹²⁷⁶ Polkinghorne (1988) p. 20

¹²⁷⁷ Bruner (2006) p. 102

¹²⁷⁸ Holstein-Gubrium (2000) p. 103

own lives in terms of narratives that we live out”¹²⁷⁹ It leads into acceptance of the idea, that our lives can be viewed as lived narratives, that happen to ourselves. As Alan Palmer claims, “We have to form stories in order to make our lives coherent. It is by these stories that we live. Our lives are narratives that are embedded in the social context within which we function.”¹²⁸⁰

Our life stories are hopelessly tied to cultural stories about our social surroundings, and we cannot position ourselves as outsiders from this context. Therefore our narrative life stories cannot be separated or severed from the culturally accepted stories of our socio-political existence, at least as long as the feeling of belonging to a society of a sort is valid. We exist only in a social context, as Palmer claims.¹²⁸¹ This social context is often interpreted as the cultural surroundings of the people. Reagan’s story correlates well with the story of the American Way of Life as the means to fulfil the American dream. On one hand this means, that the story of the American Dream could be researched partially through the life story of Reagan. There is a difficulty to this since, in the words of MacIntyre, “the narrative of any one life is part of an interlocking set of narratives [of others].”¹²⁸² A more important aspect arises from the notion that Reagan’s story portrays America as a “collective” of a sort. Barbara Czarniawska claims that “whole communities as well as individual person are engaged in a quest for meaning in their life.”¹²⁸³ The only way for a community, be it a small village or a great nation, to find a meaning, is to unify it into an indivisible whole. Narratively constructed civil religion, as a cluster of widely accepted foundational myths, may provide a set of means to do so.

According to Peter Berger self and society are two sides of the same coin, since identity is socially bestowed, sustained, and transformed, and the genesis of the self, is the same event as the discovery of a society. Society is largely responsible for creating the selves that populate it.¹²⁸⁴ This process also works in the opposite direction. The “society” consists of people, individual selves, and it is possible for these individuals, acting as and on behalf of the society, to create narratively the types of selves they would prefer the society to consist of. It is not

¹²⁷⁹ MacIntyre (1984) p. 212

¹²⁸⁰ Palmer (2004) p. 193

¹²⁸¹ Palmer (2004) P. 200

¹²⁸² MacIntyre (1984) p. 218

¹²⁸³ Czarniawska (2004) p. 13

¹²⁸⁴ Holstein-Gubrium (2000) p. 51

only the society that creates selves, but those individual selves, who act with the authority of the society. Political and other leading figures of the society are able to use their elevated positions within the frame of society to inflict changes. In society, sentiments constitute the borders and bonds. These sentiments include such feelings as loyalty, affection and connectedness along with more heated and even passionate feelings. In a fluid society, which is undergoing change, narratives that raise passions can deconstruct established social norms and construct new ones.¹²⁸⁵

Lyotard argues that for a society to exist there has to be a social bond between individuals. Self is not an island, but exists in a fabric of relations composed of language games, and each of these social bonds is a language game in itself. There are poles of attraction, such as the nation-state or a party, that people dedicated and attached themselves to, or at least used to do so before the post-modern times.¹²⁸⁶ But the society is not disintegrating while the old poles of attraction supposedly have disappeared. People do not move around as atoms in gas, and there still is a social bond. People need to attach themselves to something, and it is the function of narrative politics to provide them with several stories they can use as new poles of attraction. If the great names of the past do not resound anymore, new tellings can make them echo again, or new names and new heroes can be narrated into existence. As Molly Andrews notes, one of the “most powerful and pervasive political narratives which organises personal and public stories is that of the relationship between the individual and the nation.”¹²⁸⁷

Reagan sets the state and the people as antagonists and instead of a citizen as an elementary unit of state building uses “an American” and builds a society. After all, what else is society basically than in the words of Bruce Lincoln, “a grouping of people who feel bound together as a collectivity and in corollary fashion, feel themselves separate from others who fall outside their group.”¹²⁸⁸ The state is replaced in Reagan’s narration with the concept of a nation or a society that is made up of a collective of Americans.

When Reagan’s stories create the nation, as a by-product he legitimizes the concept of “federation”, a collective of states. This federal government is itself the type of other Reagan tries to set the American people to oppose. There is inbuilt

¹²⁸⁵ Lincoln (1989) p. 20

¹²⁸⁶ Lyotard (1984) p. 14-15

¹²⁸⁷ Andrews (2007) p. 76

¹²⁸⁸ Lincoln (1989) p. 9

irony to the situation. Reagan seeks to undermine the importance of federal government but at the same time enhances it in his creation of American identity for the people. Patriotism and nationalism are ways in which a state or a federation reproduces its identity but this identity construction needs an external other beside the internal one as well.¹²⁸⁹ Thus everything that opposes Reagan's America as a concept can be portrayed as the enemy, whether this role is delegated to international communism, or the liberal democrats of domestic politics. Reagan's narration, which downplays the meaning of federal government or state, initially seems to be opposed to David Campbell's writings, which tend to emphasize the role of the state itself. This difference, however, is semantic to considerable degree. Identity is nothing inherent to an individual or even a state but is formed within some discourse. The identity of a state is created within the discourse of foreign and security policy according to Campbell. It is a performed identity and its meaning is to create a collective identity.¹²⁹⁰ In this process "I" is turned into "we."¹²⁹¹ Another inbuilt irony lies in the fact that Reagan argued, "I am part of government now, but I am just as fearful as I ever was of government's capacity for growth and government's appetite for power."¹²⁹² At the same time he built the American military strength to an unsurpassed level, and thus that segment of the government got as inflated as the national debt, which was the outcome of the build-up. But in Reagan's story world this was a moral project above all. The strong military was not considered by Reagan as part of the "big government." While he had a long tradition for criticism towards all government spending and high taxes, there seemed to be no limit to the money he would spend on building up the military capacity.

A weaker America will not be a safer America; our program is peace through strength. Peace through strength rests on a secure foundation of values. Don't let anyone tell you that we're morally equivalent to the Soviet Union. This is a democratic country of free people. A democratic country where all of us enjoy the right to speak, to worship God as we please, and to live without fear. We're not equivalent -- we're far superior to any totalitarian regime, and we should be darn proud of it.¹²⁹³

¹²⁸⁹ Campbell (1992) p. 10-11

¹²⁹⁰ Campbell (1992)

¹²⁹¹ Whitebrook (2001) p. 8

¹²⁹² Speech: Young Republicans' Convention, Omaha 6/23/63 Box 44 Subseries E, Reagan, Ronald: Pre-presidential papers, Series I Speeches and writings, Ronald Reagan Library.

¹²⁹³ Reagan (5.6.1985) Remarks at a Fundraising Luncheon for Senator Don Nickles in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma <http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1985/60585b.htm>

The reason for this apparent paradox lies in the special role Reagan lays on the military. "Military strength is indispensable to freedom. I have seen four wars in my lifetime, none of them came about because the forces of freedom were too strong."¹²⁹⁴ The heavy bureaucracy and big government with its regulations restricts the freedom which should be the birthright of every American is all of Reagan's stories. When it comes to military, the uncontested strength of this part of the system of governance is a protector of all the freedoms an American enjoys. The effect of individual freedom is what separates the military from all other areas of government as good. "The soldier, the sailor, the airman, and the marine in the United States and around the world are the ultimate guardians of our freedom to say what we think, go where we will, choose who we want for our leaders, and pray as we wish."¹²⁹⁵

The aim of the politics of identity during the Reagan era was the restoration to glory of the traditional grand narratives of the American Way of Life and the American Dream. The genius of Reaganesque identity narrative was in its compliance to the post-modern identity stories at the same time as it remained truthful to the grand narrative of the past. I argue that it depicted the grand narrative in a vague enough way, so that many story recipients could tell their highly individualistic personal narratives, which could still inhere to the grand narrative. The grand narrative was retold in a manner which could involuntarily accommodate as many individualistic narratives as possible.¹²⁹⁶

"We're a country of heroes,"¹²⁹⁷ claims Reagan. MacIntyre notes that in all those cultures where moral thinking and action is structured according to classical schemes, the chief means of moral education is the telling of stories. "Where Christianity, Judaism or Islam has prevailed, biblical stories are as important as any other; but every one of these cultures, Greek or Christian, also possesses a stock of stories which derive from and tell about its own vanished *heroic age*."¹²⁹⁸ This

¹²⁹⁴ Reagan (4.6.1984) Address Before a Joint Session of the Irish National Parliament <http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1984/60484a.htm>

¹²⁹⁵ Reagan (15.5.1982) Radio Address to the Nation on Armed Forces Day. s. 645

¹²⁹⁶ In fact Holstein and Gubrium do not deny the importance of grand moral narratives in contemporaneity. For example they see the "the good life" as being so grand a story that it is still nearly unimpeachable. "Grand narratives are regularly given voice in everyday life. They seem to have always been with us." p. 218-219

¹²⁹⁷ Reagan (29.6.1983) Remarks and a Question-and-Answer Session With Participants in the National Conference of the National Association of Student Councils in Shawnee Mission, Kansas <http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1983/62983b.htm>

¹²⁹⁸ MacIntyre (1984) p. 121. Italics mine.

stock of stories for example about the Founding Fathers, provide the historical memory of the society, whether adequate or inadequate. In order to understand contemporary America, we need to understand a heroic society, whether it indeed actually ever has existed anywhere or in any age. A person in a heroic society is what he does, and thus every individual has been a given role and status within a well defined and determinate system. In fact, morality and social structure are the one and same in heroic society, and it becomes what it is only through its role. For Mead identity is rooted in the sense of solidarity with the ideas and ideals of a historical community and thus man is at the same time a creature as well as creator of his culture.¹²⁹⁹ Identity of the self is a social creation, not an individual one.¹³⁰⁰

As MacIntyre notes that we are what our past has turned us into and

we cannot eradicate from ourselves, even in America, those parts of ourselves which are formed by our relationship to each formative stage in our history. If this is so, then even a heroic society is still an inescapably a part of us all, and we are narrating a history that is peculiarly *our own* history when we recount its past in the formation of our moral culture.¹³⁰¹

For MacIntyre the heroic society is a part of the contemporary society because it exists in the past which has formed us and there is a need to understand history. For Reagan, the heroic society is not only in the past, but has continued through the ages, and America is still a heroic society and, following his political vision, will forever remain so. “Our future can be as heroic and as exciting as we will it to be. Each day brings new opportunities for great dreams and great feats. Let's begin now -- united, confident, and determined to get the job done.”¹³⁰² In a heroic society, “the telling of stories has a key part in educating us into the virtues.”¹³⁰³ Niebuhr argued that there is an “ironic tendency of virtues to turn into vices when too complacently relied upon.”¹³⁰⁴ Thus, if the American Way of Life and the Dream are to remain healthy, every now and then an evaluation of their basics has to be made and modifications made into the national narrative. Americans like to see themselves as exceptional in many ways, but they certainly manage to fulfil their

¹²⁹⁹ Mead (1975) p. 4

¹³⁰⁰ MacIntyre (1984) p. 121-129. It must be noted that for MacIntyre the age of the heroic society has long since passed and for example in Europe most countries had made the transition away from it by the middle ages. MacIntyre (1984) p. 165-167

¹³⁰¹ MacIntyre (1984) p. 130

¹³⁰² Reagan (25.1.1986) Radio Address to the Nation on the State of the Union
<http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1986/12586a.htm>

¹³⁰³ MacIntyre (1984) p. 216

¹³⁰⁴ Niebuhr (1954) p. 133

exceptional nature when it comes to the limits of patriotism and nationalism. There is a need for a splash of realism in American idealism. In the words of Max Lerner “The cult of the nation as a social myth has run as a thread through the whole of American history.”¹³⁰⁵

Polkinghorne states that we “retrieve stories about our own and the community’s past, and these provide models of how actions and consequences are linked. Using these retrieved models, we plan our strategies and actions and interpret the intentions of other actors.”¹³⁰⁶ These historical narratives, which more often than not have gone through the process of mythification, therefore provide our contemporary times with points of reference and tools of interpretations. At the same time they shape our future as well, since these models of the past influence the strategic planning of our futures, while we might not advocate a return to the past itself. The purpose of the political storyteller is to choose and pick the most fitting stories or cultural myths for each occasion to use. It is the job for a competent storyteller to retrieve these stories so that the possible connotations are likely to advance his political purposes. The story George Washington on his knees at Valley Forge¹³⁰⁷ can be used to bring up connotations of a people not too proud to believe in God and pray for his help or to back up a vision of country which is used to overcoming hardships but not to use in the context of Reagan era foreign policies. Certain storylines brought up from the cultural collection of stories fit certain occasions and Reagan was particularly able to choose the most fitting ones.

Polkinghorne asserts that to describe a story fully, one has to “include both the elements that are unique to that particular story and those that can be found, at least in essence, in other stories.”¹³⁰⁸ Thus the researcher ought to have experience with multiple narratives in order to provide a description that includes contrasts and comparison both within the story analyzed, and between this and other stories. These comparisons can point out the “story’s special figurational aspects in relation to the cultural stock of stories available to the teller of the tale.”¹³⁰⁹ As an example might serve the concept of the “shining city on the hill” Reagan so loved to speak of. The “shining city” practically became a trademark of Reagan’s narration since it

¹³⁰⁵ Lerner cited in Andrews (2007) p. 81

¹³⁰⁶ Polkinghorne (1986) p. 135

¹³⁰⁷ For example Reagan (3.7.1983) Message to the Nation on the Observance of Independence Day <http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1983/70383a.htm>

¹³⁰⁸ Polkinghorne (1986) p. 167

¹³⁰⁹ Polkinghorne (1986) p. 167

was the primary means of depicting his mythical America, but its origins are in the Bible. The Gospel of Matthew says;

Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.¹³¹⁰

This is typical of Reagan and illustrative of prophetic politics. A certain story of a thematic concept is picked out for further elaboration. In this case the origin of the story is in the Bible but intertextuality connects it with a wide array of cultural and ideological stories as well. But ultimately the story is given a slightly new meaning.

I've thought a bit of the "shining city upon a hill." The phrase comes from John Winthrop, who wrote it to describe the America he imagined. What he imagined was important because he was an early Pilgrim, an early freedom man. He journeyed here on what today we'd call a little wooden boat; and like the other Pilgrims, he was looking for a home that would be free. [...] I've spoken of the shining city all my political life, but I don't know if I ever quite communicated what I saw when I said it. But in my mind it was a tall, proud city built on rocks stronger than oceans, wind-swept, God-blessed, and teeming with people of all kinds living in harmony and peace; a city with free ports that hummed with commerce and creativity. And if there had to be city walls, the walls had doors and the doors were open to anyone with the will and the heart to get here. That's how I saw it, and see it still.¹³¹¹

The above quotation marks the only occasion during Reagan's eight-year presidency that he tried to elaborate and further describe his vision of the "shining city" the hill that he loved to emphasize as an essential part of past and future America. Here is also an example of Reagan trying to narrate something in a way of showing with words what his vision is like, and at the same time trying to insert the picture of his "shining city" to be a part of the story worlds created by his listeners just as he wants it to be. The city is more like a fortress, so strong that even the oceans cannot erode its foundations, which are naturally faith-based. It stands proud and tall, undefeated, indeed unchallenged, enjoying the blessings of God and peace bestowed on it. It is a city that abides to the rules spelled out elsewhere during the story world construction. It is an impenetrable fortress for its enemies, and yet welcomes in everyone who wishes to enter and live according to its rules. Yet, it is like the kingdom of God, because it requires "the will and the heart to get there." As a matter of fact Reagan equates the Kingdom of God and America so profoundly that

¹³¹⁰ Matthew 5: 14-16

¹³¹¹ Reagan (11.1.1989) Farewell Address to the Nation

<http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1989/011189i.htm>

to be an American, is to belong to the Kingdom of God as well. “Let us remember that being an American means remembering another loyalty, a loyalty as the hymn puts it, ‘to another country I have heard of, a place whose King is never seen and whose armies cannot be counted.’”¹³¹²

There is strong symbolism included. Shining city symbolizes America while at the same time it symbolizes the Kingdom of God or at least its earthly manifestation. “America is still a symbol to a few, a symbol that is feared and hated, but to more, many millions more, a symbol that is loved, a country that remains a shining city on a hill.”¹³¹³ The storyline of America as a symbol of all the aspirations of the world creates it is a truly special place. It stands above the hubbub of the disorganized world, showing the world what they should attempt to become themselves. Depicting America as the shining city has a political purpose.

We must present to the world an America that is not just militarily strong, but an America that is morally powerful -- an America that has a creed, a cause, a vision of a future time when all people of the world will have the right to self-government and personal freedom.¹³¹⁴ But ultimately within the storyline America is not merely an exemplary nation, but the new version of Eden. As Frye argues, Eden has almost always been placed on a mountaintop. The Promised Land is always situated above the wilderness, “its capital being Jerusalem, the centre of the world and the city on the mountain, “whither the tribes go up.” This is evident as well in Milton as in Ezekiel’s wilderness vision of dry bones in a valley with the prophet seated “upon a very high mountain.”¹³¹⁵ When Reagan places America as his “shining city on a hill” he raises it above the wilderness which all the rest of the world creates. America becomes at the same time a place specially touched by God and a place from where the heaven can be reached. It is not only Jerusalem, or even the Garden of Eden, it is something connected with the divinity itself.

Alexander Campbell might have played a role in the fact that Reagan added the adjective “shining” to Winthrop’s “city on a hill.” Campbell wrote that “the light which shines from our political institutions will penetrate even the dungeons of

¹³¹² Reagan (3.6.1988) Remarks Upon Returning From the Soviet-United States Summit Meeting in Moscow <http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1988/060388c.htm>

¹³¹³ Reagan (8.7.1985) Remarks at the Annual Convention of the American Bar Association <http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1985/70885a.htm>

¹³¹⁴ Reagan (4.9.1984) Remarks at the Annual Convention of the American Legion in Salt Lake City, Utah <http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1984/90484a.htm>

¹³¹⁵ Frye (1969) p. 125

European despots, *for the genius of our government is the genius of universal emancipation*. Nothing can resist the political influence of a great nation, enjoying great political advantages, if she walks worthy of them.”¹³¹⁶ These words could just as well have been Reagan’s and show how great an influence religion actually played in shaping his world view.

But to sum up the argument; while the stories concerning the founding of the nation are extraordinary or they have been made so by mythifying them in earlier tellings, they still need reinvigoration. They are such widespread myths in American political context that they have almost become canon. They are still dominating stories but to reap the full political benefits they need to be given a new spark by adding something uncanonical to spice them up. Thus they can be used in new contexts for new purposes along with their traditional function.

Robert Bathurst introduced the concept of ”fabulation” into IR studies. The meaning of fabulation is that a culture tells a story of itself, its place in the world, its heroes and achievements, and by doing this, creates at least partially its reality. The product of fabulation is often seen as the history of the nation, as history often is only a fable of how the nation wants to see itself ontologically. For Barthes historical discourse cannot reach the “real” and merely cultivates the “reality effect.”¹³¹⁷ Fabulation can be used to interpret the behaviour of political leaders, which is created by assuming certain characteristics and personal traits, as if they were performing a role. Fabulation is not concerned with how truthful the fictive side of the story is, but only points out that there is a story which seeks to portray the desired reality.¹³¹⁸ “Narrative structure, which was originally developed within the cauldron of fiction (in myths and the first epics) becomes at once the sign and the proof of reality.”¹³¹⁹ In the words of Joseph Campbell “one may invent a false, finally unjustified, image of oneself as an exceptional phenomenon in the world, not guilty as the others are, but justified in one’s inevitable sinning because one represent the good.”¹³²⁰ For an outsider from the American context this quote has profound meaning, and serves as one reason for “the manifest destiny” of America. Since a culture or a nation creates a self image for its own purposes, it is

¹³¹⁶ Campbell (1988) p. 63

¹³¹⁷ Barthes (1981). Cited in Dolezel (1999) p. 249 “*l’effet de reel*”

¹³¹⁸ Bathurst (1996) p. 24-25. 47

¹³¹⁹ Barthes (1981). Cited in Dolezel (1999) p. 249

¹³²⁰ Campbell (1968) p. 238

occasionally necessary to pick up a mirror and take a closer look at that image and determine, whether it corresponds to the reality at all. Only by introspection with a critical eye is a culture able to evaluate whether it is on a right track. But for Reagan there was no doubt about being on the right track but only the need to push onwards. In fact, Reagan does not even need tracks; "Never has there been a more exciting time to be alive, a time of rousing wonder and heroic achievement. As they said in the film "Back to the Future," "Where we're going, we don't need roads."¹³²¹ While it is an invigorating thought for the citizenry to hang on to, Reagan's America with its mission was a frightening concept internationally, since his policies were founded on the fact that,

We'll never stop. America will never stop. We never give up. We'll never give up on our special mission. There are new worlds on the horizon, and we're not going to stop until we all get there together. America's best days are yet to come. You ain't seen nothin' yet.¹³²²

3.3.3. MASTER AND COUNTER NARRATIVES

What we have to do is kidnap his horse.
-Governor Mario Cuomo at the Democratic National Convention in 1984 on how to challenge Reagan in the upcoming election.¹³²³

The ideas of Hannah Arendt are often used in connection with narrative studies, but her conception of the role of narrative differs radically from mine in the realm of stories told by political leaders. Always and everywhere, Arendt focuses on the plurality of storytelling practices, and thus the plurality of stories told as well. While such multivoiced-storytelling enriches the public discussions concerning the *polis* and keeps debate going, it does not provide political unity for the people. Alasdair MacIntyre seems to speak on behalf of a single, unitary and almost hegemonic narrative, and such a narrative could, in a time of profound crisis, be able to draw the nation together as a strong unity fit to survive.¹³²⁴ During a time of social and political as well as economic well-being there is time and resources for the nation to engage in introspection through pluralistic political storytelling, but when a crisis

¹³²¹ Reagan (4.2.1986) Address Before a Joint Session of Congress on the State of the Union
<http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1986/20486a.htm>

¹³²² Reagan (22.10.1984) Remarks at a Reagan-Bush Rally in Medford, Oregon
<http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1984/102284d.htm>

¹³²³ Cited in Smith (1997) p. 822. This comment, albeit laden with humour, shows clearly the desperation of the Democratic party in how to challenge Reagan's political storytelling.

¹³²⁴ MacIntyre (1984)

occurs, the nation would be better equipped to respond to the situation if it is pulled together under one, uniting narrative, hegemonic though it may be. And even in the more stable international situation the hegemonic narrative is something to attempt to create in domestic politics as well. For which political leader would like to see his power contested by other narratives? Plurality of stories creates a diversity of political beliefs and opinions.

Andrews and Bamberg wish to attract our attention to how people frame their stories in relation to the “dominant cultural storylines.” These dominant storylines can be called master narratives or dominant narratives and practically they offer people “a way of identifying what is assumed to a normative experience.”¹³²⁵ These master narratives give us the context of our lives and actually

serve as a blueprint for all stories; they become the vehicle through which we comprehend not only the stories of others but crucially of ourselves as well. For ultimately, the power of master narratives derives from their internalisation. Wittingly or unwittingly, we become the stories we know and the master narrative is reproduced.¹³²⁶

Master narratives are opposed and challenged by counter-narratives. Michael Bamberg describes them as “flip-sides of master narratives.”¹³²⁷ Both types of narratives exist in interaction, and this poses a challenge to be able to provide a clear distinction between them, since both “emerge in co-presence and as discursive *process*.” Bamberg suggests positioning as a way for analysis.¹³²⁸ It is not as easy to do as it is to say. Political master narratives aim at dominating the discourse to such a degree, that the counter-narratives are buried. If the master narrative is successful, the average citizen is not influenced in the slightest degree by the counter-narrative, which might erode its foundations given enough discursive space.

We might even say that every political master narrative has its counter narrative, but these counter narratives are only implied and may not even be told at all by anybody. Such an implied narrative has a legitimizing function. Examples are easy to pick out. For SDI the implied counter narrative which did not need spelling out was the story of full-scale nuclear war. For the American Dream the counter-narrative was the totalitarian worldview. Thus, the existence, even silent, of a

¹³²⁵ Andrews (2004) p. 1

¹³²⁶ Andrews (2004) p. 1

¹³²⁷ Bamberg (2004) p. 353

¹³²⁸ Bamberg (2004) p. 353

counter narrative is important for the master narrative, but the master narrative has to be able to unquestionably dominate it as well.

Bamberg notes that there are two different interpretations of the term “master narrative.” One argues that the existence of master narratives is the factor, which delineates how the narrator assumes positions with and within their stories. The other claims that in a much wider perspective, every narrator is principally subjected to “grand récits and metanarratives from which there seems to be no escape.”¹³²⁹ The latter interpretation creates frames according to which courses of events are easily plotted, since audience is thought to “know” and accept these courses. These frames need to be countered by appealing to other, contradictory frames. Bamberg insists that the subject should not allow himself to “be swallowed and absorbed by them,” since “social and individual forces [...] have the force to change master narratives.”¹³³⁰ It is true that mostly social, but also individual forces can alter the form and content of master narratives, but this is the task for the prophetic politician. He has to alter the master narrative and replace it with his own version and thus be a proactive participant in changing the specifics of the master narrative to keep some control of it.

While Reagan just as any prophetic politician needs to work within the grand narrative of America, there exist still multiple master narratives concerning America and he has to choose the one most beneficial to him as a starting point of a narrative path. There is no benefit in using precisely the same story as has been used before, but the prophetic politician has to alter the story. He needs to make minute changes into the original to turn the story into his own vision. The alterations do not necessarily need to be significant, but only go to show the thumbprint of the prophetic politician so that he can claim the new story to be his own, while it still uses the same narrative framework. For politics to exist at all there needs to be a master narrative to support it, and provide legitimation for it. This need not be single elaborate story, but it can be a network of stories just as well as some more unifying concept, which we do not even recognize as a master narrative. “Democracy”, “culture,” “capitalism,” or “freedom” might serve as this type of concepts among uncountable others.

¹³²⁹ Bamberg (2004) p. 359-360

¹³³⁰ Bamberg (2004) p. 361

The perspective of the story recipient decides which is the master- and which the counter-narrative. There is nothing within the narrative itself that would grant it a master status. There is no “extra strength” in any narrative that would create a reason to design a counter narrative to oppose its hegemony and power.¹³³¹ The master status is partially derivative from the speaker position and cultural context as the way it becomes plausible to a large majority of story recipients. For Democrats who dominated under President Carter, Reagan’s story was initially a counter-narrative, and only later became the master narrative they tried to oppose. There are no explicit criteria, which would decide whether a certain dominant cultural narrative is indeed in a position to actually dominate.¹³³² It cannot be denied, that even in democracies, all actors are not equal. The president is a social object, who occupies a different status than a common citizen, and thus has more influence.¹³³³ In the realm of American politics the speaker position of a president, especially one as popular as Reagan was for most of his presidency, gives his narrative at least relative dominance, which can be shattered rapidly as well. An example of this is the loss of credibility Richard Nixon suffered after the Watergate scandal. A counter narrative can thus become the dominant narrative, but the opposite is also true. As Corrine Squire argues, master narratives are “always less stable and unified than they appear, more susceptible to fracture and diversion.”¹³³⁴ Even the type of master narrative, which practically seems to have been engraved in stone, is teetering on a tightrope. This creates the constant need for a prophetic politician to rearticulate, reshape and retell his narratives so that they are more likely to dominate the discourse. By altering the master narrative the prophetic politician may add to the effectivity of the story itself to better respond to the particular demands of the situation.

Counter-narratives are tools for the political resistance or opposition. In the course of the life of an individual he is well capable of opposing the dominant narratives which surround him. The politically important question that remains unanswered is how to employ a counter-narrative in such a way, that it not only opposes the dominant-narrative on the level of individuals, but on the level of the entire society as well. How to get the ones, who story their own lives after the

¹³³¹ Bamberg (2004) p. 354

¹³³² Kölbl in a commentary on Andrews (2004) p. 32

¹³³³ Stuckey (1990) p. 3

¹³³⁴ Squire. Cited in Andrews (2004) p. 4-5

master narrative to pick up the counter-narrative, and start to abide by it, is the great problem for any political narrator. The counter-narrative, that describes the cultural context and positioning of the minority at the time of the initiation of the narrative, has to get accepted as the one, which becomes the norm for the majority. This is the great challenge for a prophetic politician. He has to not only counter the master narrative, but create a new master narrative to take its place. In presidential politics the time to do this is the election period. It is practically the only time when the elevated speaker position of the incumbent president can be challenged with a story that is evaluated by the citizenry to be on an equal footing. If the narrative takeover succeeds, the political takeover will result. *Le roi est mort, vive le roi.*

Bamberg claims that in the case of counter-narratives narrators do not “present a simple counter-story but seem to be juggling several story lines simultaneously. It is in this sense that counter-narratives always operate on the edge of disputability and require a good amount of interactional subtlety and rhetorical finessing on the part of the speaker.”¹³³⁵ Reagan’s narration began with the status of a counter-narrative but gained the status of a master narrative. If the “underdog” narrative has to use a virtual web of storylines to succeed, there is no reason why any of those storylines, if they have gained acceptance among the story recipients, should be left obsolete when the narrative has earned the status of a dominant narrative. Every political narrative is always countered to some degree, and thus has to struggle to maintain its legitimacy, and is situated on the very same “edge of disputability.” In the realm of politics, even the master narratives are constantly challenged by new stories and new telling, and have to retain those reactive abilities, that earlier had earned them the dominant position among other stories.

While Andrews argues on behalf of counter-narratives, she admits that no one is an island. We are born into communities and live as parts of these communities, ranging from one’s family into one’s nation and these are “*dominated* by certain political narratives. They are our inheritance. As we grow in our social consciousness we then learn to inhabit these narratives, to make them our own.”¹³³⁶ The greatness of Reagan’s storytelling was that he was able to resist the dominant Democratic narratives of his time, and offer them a plausible counter-narrative in the process of his personal story spinning. This narrative was then accepted as the

¹³³⁵ Bamberg (2004) p. 363

¹³³⁶ Andrews (2007) p. 205-206. Italics mine.

new dominant narrative, the new sacred story for America. In addition he was able to bring an exceptionally large part of America to “inhabit” and “make their own” his version of the story.

America has always been a vision of opportunity, a place where an individual could, with hard work, go as far as his own talents or her own talents would take them.¹³³⁷

For Reagan, the entire idea of America was a “vision.” His vision was a mirage or even a nightmarish hallucination to the left-wing democrats, but they were not able to contest his vision with anything as powerful of their own. From the viewpoint of narrative political leadership Chernus makes a profound statement when he argues that, “we don’t judge stories on whether they are true to the facts. We judge them by their ability to change our lives, for better or worse [...] We also have to recognize that we can choose different stories, leading to different policies, for tomorrow.”¹³³⁸

It is the task of the citizen to be aware of the narrative framework involved in politics and to choose the ones to follow, instead of allowing himself be led by the dominant narration.

Once a political story has become the “master narrative,” the most important and sacred story shaping the political realm, it is no use to try to disclaim it as false, but to create a new counter-narrative, and change policies for the better with its aid. In this we see the theory of Thomas Kuhn about scientific paradigms in narrative form. He uses paradigm to mean a set of shared values and ways of thinking of a scientific community. These paradigms change in the course of time, not because the earlier ones were false, but the new ones are better and more adept in describing the way things are. It might take time for the new paradigm to get accepted, and not everyone will choose to accept it.¹³³⁹ These paradigms are the master narratives of science. The master narratives of politics need to be changed in the same manner; by trying to extrapolate from the fringes of the earlier master narrative and perhaps take it to a direction it never was intended to take to better describe the world. Stories need to be written, elaborated, told and retold until an acceptable one for the majority of the population comes into existence.

This is a time for choosing. I made a speech by that title in 1964. I said “We’ve been told increasingly that we must choose between left or right.”

¹³³⁷ Reagan (8.10.1984) Remarks at a Dedication Ceremony for a Statue of Christopher Columbus in Baltimore, Maryland <http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1984/100884b.htm>

¹³³⁸ Chernus (2006) p. xi

¹³³⁹ See Kuhn (1970)

But we're still using those terms – left or right. And I'll repeat what I said then in '64. "There is no left or right. There's only an up or down:" up to the ultimate in individual freedom, man's age old dream, the ultimate in individual freedom consistent with an orderly society – or down to the totalitarianism of the ant heap.¹³⁴⁰

Along with assuming the role of a preacher-prophet, Reagan tries to change the conception of "politics as usual". In his story world there is no political left or right, only an up or down, and forward or backward. In a sense this was a counter narrative Reagan used, since with his interpretation of the nature of politics he attacked a well-established interpretation of divide into left and right. With this as one elementary ingredient of his story world he is trying to dilute the divide into Republicans and Democrats and thus gain more voters and more support. The more he is able to dissolve the divide, the less people would vote for the party and concentrate on the issues presented in his vision. The way Reagan uses the issues in his political prophecy shows him as an advocate of progress and better times to come, while his narrative portrays his opponents as fearful reactionaries. Up is the way to fulfilment of dreams, and down is the way to darkness and even nightmares. Occasionally Reagan even challenged the dominant narrative about what the parties stand for.

And it's often said that the once-proud Democratic Party of Franklin Delano Roosevelt and Harry Truman is dead and gone; that the Democratic Party has been taken over by the left; that the departure from the mainstream, which we began to see at the 1968 convention, now defines the party at the national level, especially the liberal leadership in Congress. But there's something you should know: the party of F.D.R. and Harry Truman couldn't be killed. The party that represents people like you and me, that represents the majority of Americans, that party hasn't disappeared. The fact is, we are stronger than ever. You see, the secret is that when the left took over the leadership of the Democratic Party, we took over the Republican Party. We made the Republican Party into the party of working people; the family; the neighborhood; the defence of freedom; and, yes, "one nation under God." So, you see, the party that so many of us grew up with still exists, except today it's called the Republican Party.¹³⁴¹

¹³⁴⁰ Reagan (20.3.1981) Remarks at the Conservative Political Action Conference Dinner. s. 278, Reagan also said the same thing about left and right in his announcement for the candidacy of governorship of California. Speech, "A Plan for Action: Announcement of Candidacy", January 4 1966, Folder: 1966 Campaign: RR speeches and statements, Book I, Box C30, Research Unit, Ronald Reagan Governor's papers, Ronald Reagan Library. The "up or down" was a concept Reagan employed throughout the campaign for governorship as a part of practically every speech to be found in aforementioned box C30

¹³⁴¹ Reagan (19.10.1988) Remarks at a Republican Campaign Rally in Bowling Green, Ohio <http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1988/101988b.htm>

This narrative treatment Reagan gives to the well-established stories on the nature of politics is an example of contesting the dominant narratives. The divide to Republicans and Democrats and what they stand for, can rightfully be treated as an “established fact” in the traditional political story world. Here Reagan causes two entirely different story types and story worlds, to engage in confrontation. The story worlds are so fundamentally different that no co-existence is possible. The story recipient must choose the story and the story world he finds more plausible. Thus, while it may be impossible to overrule one master narrative within its context, it can and may well be surpassed by another one, based on an entirely differently structured story world. Then the stories themselves are not contradicted, but the battle for public acceptance is transferred to a higher level, that of contrasting story worlds. Here lies the biggest advantage of narratives in politics. You do not try to counter a widely accepted narrative directly with another narrative that follows the same principles. A fundamentally different narrative, that creates a different story world has to be used, and once the story worlds themselves become the locus of disagreement, and the choice between two different political viewpoints or decisions has to be made on the basis of whichever story world is more credible than the other, can one desacralize a story. Why bother to participate in a political contest on the level of rhetoric and debates over concrete issues when one can narratively create a story world to be the level, where the differences in politics are storied to exist, and where the entire nature of these differences can be cast in new terms by the manipulation of what is being narrated.

There is another way to challenge the dominant narrative as well. The storytelling of Ronald Reagan was such a grand narrative in its scope and complexity as well as its status, that it would have been perhaps too time-consuming for political purposes to create anew a narrative that is completely juxtaposed to it, and gain such wide acceptance for the new narrative that it could have supplanted Reagan’s narrative. Barthes observes that it is extremely difficult to vanquish a myth from the outside.¹³⁴² Thus Reagan’s storytelling-based politics, which centre on his vision of the American Dream, cannot be vanquished by attempting to distance oneself from it, or escape the stranglehold such a sacred story takes on the subject it mythifies. An effort to escape a myth allows the myth to prey on just that effort. To

¹³⁴² Barthes (1991) p. 135

change any system, even a story world or a story verse, the most effective way is to do it from the inside. To overturn the narrative or myth, the way is to enter the story world, and try to alter the perceptions of that very story world instead of trying to create a completely new one. After all, Reagan had by the 1980s been building his story verse for his narratees for thirty years. To become a *conquistador* of that story verse is a difficult process, if one tries to create another story world strong enough to engage it in battle.

Each counter-story creates and validates a “counter-reality.” This too creates a story world of its own, unless the counter-story is not told in sufficient relation to the master narrative it opposes. Bamberg writes that even in counter-narratives, there are always some aspects of dominant narratives that are left intact, while others are changed. So the counter-narrator is, according to him, never able to get away from the framework of the master narrative, which dominates tellings, but has to work with parts and structures of the existing frames “from within.”¹³⁴³ Andrews claims that counter-stories are more than often critical stories towards the master narratives, “neither fully oppositional, nor untouched [by them]”¹³⁴⁴ This offers a way for the political storyteller to tie his counter-story to the dominant story in such a way, that it can use, and rearrange the dominant story world to adhere to the logic of his own story. I propose leaning on Barthes that the master narrative can be taken as a starting point for a new semiological chain that will lead to a new ideology.

A counter-narrative can, in other words, become a parasitical narrative and infiltrate the dominant narrative’s story world to change it from within. The bigger the dichotomy between the master narrative and the counter-narrative, the less the counter narrative is able to benefit from the suitable sections within the dominant narrative, or use the pre-created story world. If the master narrative is too different and opposing, the counter narrative has to create an alternate story world, and engage the dominant narrative into a “battle” instead of infiltrating its story world. A counter-narrative can “expose the construction of the dominant story by suggesting how else it could be told-”¹³⁴⁵ This offers a tool for the researcher in his process of deconstructing the master narrative, but it can also be used by the political narrator. Once he is able to dissect the master narrative and expose its

¹³⁴³ Bamberg (2004) p. 363

¹³⁴⁴ Andrews (2004) p. 2

¹³⁴⁵ Andrews (2004) p. 3

structure, he has sufficient understanding of the weak points within it that he can use in his attempt at creating a counter narrative. There is a relation between the dominant narrative and its counter-narrative, and this relation has to be kept in the mind of the counter-narrator, in order for him to exploit the master narrative. The counter-narrative can be “a different way to tell the same story,”¹³⁴⁶ but optimally it should tell a different story while using the storyline of the dominant narrative. A counter-narrative or reconstructed myth has greatest effect if it leech-like attaches itself to the original myth or master narrative, and cancerously feeds itself on the plentiful story verse, and at every possible turn of the storyline tries to make the storytelling take new directions by offering a credible choice within the existing story worlds for the narratees to take. Thus the original story can be made to take new and surprising directions, and the time required for the original master narrator to grasp control of the story again allows a moment, when the entire story verse can be taken over to yet further change the laws governing it.

Francois Lyotard argues that ever since the Second World War and the blooming of techniques and technologies, “the grand narrative has lost its credibility, regardless of what mode of unification it uses, regardless of whether it is a speculative narrative or a narrative of emancipation.”¹³⁴⁷ Supposedly these grand narratives have been overtaken with “little stories” told in their place with great varieties. There nevertheless arises an interesting question. Is post modernity something that only the intellectual elite even in our highly developed western societies can afford to enjoy, and does the large mass of citizenry still live within the bounds of modernity. In American politics the grand narrative of “freedom” was in the days of Reagan, as well as in the days of George W. Bush, a legitimizer for all types of action in the eyes of the majority of the people. The political world is still able to rally its “armies” of the people behind the old flags of master narratives. Naturally there are contesting narratives, the “*récits petites*,” which are told in opposition, but the master narrative still holds superiority over them. Or do the words of Reagan have a sense of truth in them: “Sometimes in the world of politics, it seems that our dialog hasn’t gone much beyond “Me Tarzan, You Jane”.”¹³⁴⁸ Is it only that the world of politics in general, or the world of American politics, or

¹³⁴⁶ Andrews (2004) p. 3

¹³⁴⁷ Lyotard (1984) p. 37

¹³⁴⁸ Reagan (9.9.1982) Remarks at Kansas State University at the Alfred M. Landon Lecture Series on Public Issues <http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1982/90982d.htm>

America itself, has not moved into the post-modern age? As Vilho Harle has noted, religion and myths about religion were often the basis of justification for political organizations in the ancient world.¹³⁴⁹ If we as *zoon politikon* are not just as post-modern as we tend to view ourselves, is it really surprising to notice that the old myths and beliefs still have power to shape or politics.

The post-modern critique as a whole tends to question the validity of the metanarratives. Frederic Jameson says the two “legitimizing “myths” or narrative archetypes (*récits*) [...] as the alternate justifications for institutional scientific research [are] that of the liberation of humanity and that of the speculative unity of all knowledge”¹³⁵⁰ Since the older master narratives of legitimation no longer function in the service of scientific research, this would be the case in other fields as well. There supposedly is no longer belief in social and political teleologies or the great actors or subjects of history like the West or the nation-state. Lyotard wants to bury the master-narratives but for Jameson they are only just that, buried and seemingly disappeared but continuing as unconscious activity in the political unconscious.¹³⁵¹ They are only hidden, not dead, but Lyotard fails to acknowledge their continuous existence. For him, post-modern is the time when grand narratives are in crises as differentiated from the modern, where science “legitimizes itself with reference to a metadiscourse of this kind making an explicit appeal to some grand narrative.” Post-modern is “incredulity towards metanarratives” in legitimating knowledge.¹³⁵²

Despite the criticism about the existence of “grand narratives” by Lyotard, I nevertheless argue that Reagan’s narratives are exemplary specimen in that category. Lyotard wanted to disseminate these grand narratives and, along with their deterioration, alternative narratives would raise in form of untold and forgotten stories to further question the validity of the grand narratives, and bring to the foreground hitherto silenced stories.¹³⁵³ Narrative itself did not lose its validity, but the types of narratives deemed important switched from master narratives to “little narratives,” which remain the “quintessential form of imaginative invention.”¹³⁵⁴ Reagan’s stories were able to not completely silence, but certainly drown out the

¹³⁴⁹ Harle (1998) p. 100-101

¹³⁵⁰ Jameson (1984) p. ix

¹³⁵¹ Jameson (1984) p. xi-xii

¹³⁵² Lyotard (1984) p. xxiii-xxiv

¹³⁵³ Lyotard (1993)

¹³⁵⁴ Lyotard. Cited in Czarniawska (2004) p. 13

voices of smaller and alternative narratives about the American Dream. The idea Reagan communicated in his storytelling definitely was not acceptable to each and every citizen, in fact, there were large parts of the population who did not accept Reagan's ideology or even narratives, but no voice loud enough could raise to effectively challenge Reagan's grand narratives.

Even if the great narratives have failed, according to Lyotard, there still exists the "unavowable dream the post-modern world dreams about itself - a tale that, in sum, would be the great narrative that the world persists in telling itself."¹³⁵⁵ What does it matter that the great narratives have "obviously failed" from the viewpoint of such intellectuals as Lyotard himself, if the world still insists in telling itself the great narratives. They have not become less powerful, since they are still persistently used despite the crumbling of their foundations, but, if anything, have become even more political. Telling narratives, and especially the great narratives described by Lyotard, is political action to the extreme. Here I would quickly like to revisit the concept of civil religion and more precisely the narratively crafted civil religion I have been discussing earlier. Since it gives shape to the way the members of the society perceive their existence it is a master or a great narrative. Seen in this context it does not matter that scholars have repeatedly pointed out either that it has never existed in reality or that it has never been inclusive enough to be truly American. In politics, to put it harshly, it is the majority that matters and the prophetic politician has to be able to have his story accepted only on large enough segment of the society to be elected. And if his story as a grand narrative is based on nothing, if civil religion really has not existed, this does not have to hamper the politician either since the majority of citizens he has converted to believe in his metanarrative persists on telling that story about itself. While its foundations may have crumbled, as long as the society tells the story of civil religion it still remains alive and has an effect on the world of a metanarrative.

But the expressions "metanarrative" or "master narrative" carry too many negative connotations in our allegedly post-modern world. Therefore I choose to favour the concept of "Americanized myth," seen as foundational or legitimizing myth in the American context which has become "canon" by gaining legitimation from both being deeply ingrained into the "common sense" but also having religious

¹³⁵⁵ Lyotard (1997) p. 81-82

connections in its mythmaking process which has taken place entirely within the American culture. In a way, then America shapes the myth as a cultural context and together with the religious origins of the myth turns it into canon. Ira Chernus argues that stories shape our worldview even when they are not in the shape of tangible stories on paper, or whichever distribution medium is in use.

We can't even tell our most important stories completely in any detailed narrative. We take them for granted. We know them in bits and pieces, but the whole story is always there. Mentioning just one piece is like pushing a button that brings the whole story to life; the process unfolds largely unconsciously.¹³⁵⁶

The prophetic politician must thoroughly understand the structures of the grand national narrative archives of these Americanized myths; what stories touch the people in a certain manner and why, which stories cause what kind of emotions. Then they can use all the foundational myths of the nation without almost having to narrate them at all. They can only use bits and pieces to conjure up greater parts from the memories to create greater visions, like a magician producing his tricks. A gifted narrator needs only subtly hint at other stories in the course of his narration, and let intertextuality work its magic. The old stories need not be spelled out over and over again. There just needs to be some kind of reference, to allow the new narrative to exploit them as well. Likewise the construction of civil religious story verse is aided by the interconnectedness of these narratives of political justification. Cultural narratives support ideological ones, culture itself has been altered by the myth function and many of the myths are religious stories which have become more secular with time and repetitive tellings. But the same process can be described in other order. Ultimately religion justifies culture as in seeing America as a Christian Nation; ideologies create and shape culture, etc. These different types of narratives swirl around each other and their criss-crossing storylines end up creating a rich story verse of stories about things people believe in.

¹³⁵⁶ Chernus (2006) p. 3

4. PROPHETIC NARRATIVES

You and I have a rendezvous with destiny. We can preserve for our children this last best hope of man on earth or we can sentence them to take the first step into a thousand years of darkness. If we fail, at least let our children and our children's children say of us we justified our brief moment here. We did all that could be done.¹³⁵⁷

Ronald Wilson Reagan

Now that I have thoroughly discussed the narratives used to justify politics, it is time to elaborate the idea of prophetic politics. I have showed that cultural, ideological, mythical and religious narratives can be used to legitimize the status quo of politics and I have even shown some ways how the reshaping of these stories by forging new types of connections between them and narrating them in slightly different ways can be used to inflict changes in politics. The politician can use them to initiate the creation of a story verse beneficial for his purposes. Most often these stories can be used to preserve and maintain the stability and status quo of politics. With rearticulation and new ways of combining them a change can also be inflicted. They are not, however, the primary types of stories the politician has at his disposal to create fundamental changes in politics or give the impression that something has radically changed under his leadership, like Reagan attempted to provide the people with the impression that his policies were something else than “politics as usual.” I argue in this chapter on behalf of prophetic narratives as the proper tools for these purposes.

Prophetic politics uses all these narratives of political justification as narrative groundwork, but adds something new to them and their connections. Paul Ricoeur points out that there exists a clear opposition between narration and prophecy, and that this relation causes a tension that affects the theological message as well. He describes these two as different literary forms; “that of the chronicle and that of the oracle.”¹³⁵⁸ For Ricoeur narrative consolidates the perception of time and prophecy dislocates it. He sees a problem in describing the stability of the

¹³⁵⁷ Reagan (1981) p. 358. This part was later included in “the Time for Choosing” speech almost unaltered and since the idea of a rendezvous with destiny surfaces often during the presidency one can find additional proof that Reagan’s world view was largely sedimented by the time he became president. The idea of a rendezvous with destiny was not new or either his own coinage. The term first emerges used by Franklin Delano Roosevelt.

¹³⁵⁸ Ricoeur (1995) p. 41

foundational events of a people and in unfolding the menace of deadly events to come.¹³⁵⁹ Unfortunately Ricoeur does not talk further of this divide he perceives. He leaves his thinking incomplete and unsatisfying and gives the impression that he speaks of only those prophecies that describe a disastrous future.

In this upcoming chapter I shall show that narration and prophecy can be and for political purposes even should be made to co-operate harmoniously. The first section will discuss the use of prophecy as an actual tool at the disposal of the prophetic politician. I shall focus on demands of the prophetic role on the politician and describe what kind of persona he has to narrate for himself and how to situate himself in the society and in relation to his message. The second section is devoted to exploring the genres of narratives the prophetic politician can choose from, and again, we will notice that prophesying is not restricted to the use of certain narrative modes, but is more dependent on the tone of the narration and the content of the message. Throughout this section my theories of prophetic politics are derived from the need to interpret and name Reagan's version of political narration and thus Reagan is used in all examples used to illustrate the theoretical idea. I have taken a more theoretical approach to the topic elsewhere.¹³⁶⁰

I shall discuss the traditionally American mode of prophesying, the American Jeremiad, but argue that Reagan's optimistic conception of the future distanced him from the Biblical jeremiadic speakers and to some degree also those who have used the jeremiadic type of narratives earlier in US politics. I shall also take a glimpse into the dark side of Reagan's prophecies; the Armageddon, but ultimately argue that apocalypticism involved in it does not suit prophetic politics. Time cannot be allowed to end, and therefore the last section is devoted to the discussion of how prophetic politician handles the connection between past, present, and future. To sum up, this chapter will attempt to define the theoretical basis for prophetic politics and how it could be used by a political leader.

4.1. PROPHECY AS A POLITICAL TOOL

If that is mixing politics and religion then it is a good and proper mix.¹³⁶¹
-Ronald Wilson Reagan

¹³⁵⁹ Ricoeur (1995) p. 40-41

¹³⁶⁰ See Hanska (2009)

¹³⁶¹ Reagan (2001) p. 23. From a letter to Sister Mary Ignatius.

Despite the fact that Jari Rantapelkonen has studied the narrative leadership focusing on war as the extension of politics, his findings fit the more peaceful side of the political realm as well. He argues that the narrative leadership of war is attached to the “core values of America that determine the condition of American society. *Narrative leadership is not only about dreaming about the future but it is also about religious faith, at least on a metaphoric level.*”¹³⁶² Dreams of a glorious future are bound together with the religious faith at the actualization of the dream. Prophetic politics is a tool of leadership and thus its narratives are concerned with faith if not in God, then in the country, or at least in the values perceived by many to be transcendent and are thus inescapably religious. In his reading of Plato Bruce Lincoln maintains that poets are reduced to servants of the state, and their myths to the scrutiny and manipulation by political leaders. While the poets producing myths position themselves as mediators between Gods and men, their position as tools of the authorities cause their “undeniable truths” to be nothing more than state propaganda.¹³⁶³ But how can we treat Reagan in the light of this argument? He is certainly producing propagandistic material in his retold myths of America but he is acting as both the poet and the political leader. While the myths have a propagandist function, Reagan, like any prophetic political leader is in charge of the manipulation of the myths. He is thus more than a poet or a narrator, but his role has to be clarified.

I have chosen to do this with the help of the concept of “prophet.” The main purpose here is to burrow deeper into the persona of the prophet and his prophetic message. I have taken the Old Testament viewpoint to introduce the *dramatis persona* of the prophet. Since I am primarily interested in how a politician could assume a prophetic role, I argue that the concept of a prophet needs to be altered from the biblical examples. In the context of this dissertation I wish to blend the biblical prophets somewhat with the Greek connotations of the word. In Ancient Greece, as Lindblom writes, “everyone who had something to announce publicly was called a prophet. Sometimes prophets were regarded as interpreters of philosophical doctrines, sayings of the poets, divine words and oracles.”¹³⁶⁴ A

¹³⁶² Rantapelkonen (2006) p. 253, italics mine.

¹³⁶³ Lincoln (1999) p. 42

¹³⁶⁴ Lindblom (1962) p. 27

Prophetic politician should not be automatically equated with the biblical prophets, but a middle ground between them and their Greek counterparts has to be used – with a splash of modernity thrown in.

There are numerous similarities between the political and the Israelite prophets, but at least as many points where they differ completely. The prophetic politician is, after all, a politician, albeit the typecast is different from the average political player. But it has been argued that the primary concern of Israelite prophecy was in the realm of international politics, since this supposedly was the arena of their God's main activity. Some of the most impressive parts of classical prophecy were directed against imperial ideology, and even the social criticism the prophets provided, was partially to avoid fatal consequences on the Israelite kingdoms.¹³⁶⁵ In this sense the tendency to use prophecy as a political tool is deeply grounded in tradition.

There is no point in merely claiming that religion plays a role in American politics in general and especially in identity politics. Such a claim would be far too universal and bland. To assert that this religiosity takes a prophetic shape actually adds something new to the discussion. How then is a religious or mythical narrative constructed to be beneficial for political purposes, or rather, how does prophetic politics use religion as a legitimizer? Mika Aaltola has written that the language of political religion offers “a way of showing how things *may* be, but at the same time it also puts forward an imprisoning way of conveying how things *must* be.”¹³⁶⁶ My argument is that this can be best done in the form of prophecy. As de Tocqueville writes in the realm of religion everything is “classified, coordinated, foreseen, decided in advance” and in the political world “agitated, contested, uncertain.”¹³⁶⁷ Some of the ambiguousness of the political world can be cleared away by the infusion of prophetic religiosity in it. Matters, which are by their nature uncertain, can be narratively endowed with the semblance of certainty, which is in turn derived from the divine plan according to which things must ultimately go. Therefore prophetic political leadership makes it possible for the unstable realm of politics, or rather the story verse built upon it, to seem and to be felt more stable and thus to offer more sense of security for the people. The more religious beliefs can be

¹³⁶⁵ Blenkinsopp (1995) p. 147

¹³⁶⁶ Aaltola (2007) p. 12

¹³⁶⁷ de Tocqueville (2000) p. 43

transplanted into the political world, the more insecurity concerning the times to come can be eradicated from the story verse which in turn influences the way citizens experience the world they physically live in. At the same time when prophetic politics provides certainties concerning the things to come it is a part of the mechanism prophecies are built upon that uncertainty has a strong role as well. Uncertainties are, as earlier argued, part of being an American, but in the context of prophecy they add necessary tension into the situation. While the glory of the future is certain, the possibility of it being actualized is uncertain and dependent on the response of the people to the prophetic message. The fact that the decisions people make determine, or are portrayed to determine, the realization of the prophecy keeps an element of tension at all times. This leads to necessary political activity on behalf of the citizens to keep the Dream alive instead of just waiting for all the good to come. The Western system of moral values is to a large degree even in our multi-faith world grounded in the moral norms of Christianity, and thus the Judeo-Christian tradition of prophecy may provide us with a point of departure into studying prophetic politics.

As we in the Occident have generally continuously sought to remove religion from all our public affairs it is surprising that the concepts of God and belief still play such a crucial role in our lives both private and political. After all, the mere conceptions of self-governance, self-determination and independence, which are so crucial to the post-Westphalian states, are contradictory to the concept of a God as a supreme ruler. I wish to emphasize that prophetic politics does not need to rely on God. God can be used as a supportive source of justification, but even then direct mentions have to be avoided not to overstate the importance He has in the discourse. It is not the concept of God that prophetic politics strives on, but rather religiosity and the impulse to believe. Thus religion as a system of belief maintains its close connection to politics to such a degree that modern policy seems to be absolutely saturated with messianic impulses. Clearly discernible are three drivers that together create a continuous process; sovereignty, messianism, and expiation.

Sovereignty creates a need for something “higher” to lean on at times of need or crisis. Messianism, which can take the form of prophetic politics, tries to provide an answer, since these policies seem to be based on something even higher than the sovereign, a God, divine providence, America itself or whatever suits the situation. When, after all, messianic politics fail to deliver what they promise, the

guilt of failure comes to existence, and will have to be expiated or removed. This expiation would be a complex process, and a prophetic politician is indeed able to make it unnecessary.

As long as his promises of deliverance are vague and ambivalent enough, so that there can be no claims of them not having come true, the need for expiation does not arise. There would be an urge for expiation only in those cases, when something concrete is promised at a certain point in time. When the goals of prophetic politics have been narratively created to be of very ambiguous nature, they can be as a mirage of an oasis to the thirsty; seemingly within grasp, but simultaneously moving further in the horizon with every step taken towards reaching them. As Boorstin claims, vagueness is a great resource of the America, because uncertainties are the producers of optimism and energy. “If other nations had been held together by common certainties, Americans were being united by a common vagueness.”¹³⁶⁸ Prophetic politics both benefits from this noted appreciation of vagueness, and at the same time creates an image of certainty about the identity, past, and the future for those, who wish to rid themselves of this vagueness. Boorstin also argues that the same “very uncertainties which inspired and exhilarated Americans also made them feel a special need of reassurance. The more uncertain its destiny, the more necessary to declare it ‘manifest.’”¹³⁶⁹ It is the vagueness and not the manifestness of the national destiny, which is the great power of American national and political life. The vagueness still remains, since prophetic politics only seems to offer certainties by the leadership, but this is an illusion.

According to the definition of Clifford Geertz religion is “a system of symbols which act to establish powerful, pervasive and long-lasting moods and motivations in men.”¹³⁷⁰ It is thus the role of the revivalist prophet to sustain the reality of the culture myths, and especially to reinterpret them to meet the needs of social change, and to clothe them with an aura of reality, with the prophet’s own conviction that he is indeed the messenger of God.¹³⁷¹ Sidney Mead has written about the Religion of the Republic as the shape American civil religion takes, and he calls it prophetic, since “its ideals and aspirations stand in constant judgement over the passing shenanigans of the people, reminding them of the standards by which

¹³⁶⁸ Boorstin (1965) p. 219

¹³⁶⁹ Boorstin (1965) p. 274

¹³⁷⁰ Geertz. Cited in McLoughlin (1978) p. 104

¹³⁷¹ McLoughlin (1978) p. 104

their current practices and those of their nation are ever being judged and found wanting.”¹³⁷² Prophetic politics can be used either to stabilize the current situation or inflict a drastic change. This is not the paradox it looks like at first. It is about the manipulation of the stories. The ideals and aspirations are contrasted with shenanigans but the manipulation of stories and altering the content of Americanized myths in storytelling can turn the shenanigans into long lasting motivations just as easily as depicting long lasting moods as fleeting fancies. The prophetic politician has to manipulate the important stories for the results he pursues.

Lindblom writes that the “subject of the prophetic religion is in the first place the people as a community. It can be shown that the national religion proclaimed by the prophets also includes individual religion; but the religion of the people is unmistakably prominent in the preaching of the prophets.”¹³⁷³ Prophetic politics does not need to use any single religion as its tool but rather the religiosity or reverence of the sacred which seems to be inbuilt into the human condition. Prophetic politics, in short, uses whatever system of belief is the common denominator of the people. It can also, like Reagan did with his mythical America try to provide and create the system of belief for the people, if there is no such common belief. “Our young people cry out for a cause, a belief, in which they can invest their youthful strength and idealism. And too often the cause they find is tragically false.”¹³⁷⁴ We need causes and we need something to believe in and these needs are there for the prophetic politician to exploit to his political purposes.

MacIntyre claims that while all lived narratives are unpredictable in their nature, there always coexists a certain teleological character as well.

We live out our lives, both individually and in our relationships with each other, in the light of certain conceptions of a possible shared future, a future in which certain possibilities beckon us forward and others repel us, some seem already foreclosed and others perhaps inevitable. There is no present which is not informed by some image of some future and an image of the future which always presents itself in the form of a *telos* – or of a variety of ends or goals – towards which we are either moving or failing to move in the present. Unpredictability and teleology therefore coexist as part of our lives; like characters in a fictional narrative we do not know what will happen

¹³⁷² Mead (1975) p. 65

¹³⁷³ Lindblom (1962) p. 308

¹³⁷⁴ Speech: Welcoming the Reverend Billy Graham, 9/28/69. Box 44 Subseries E, Reagan, Ronald: Pre-presidential papers, Series I Speeches and writings, Ronald Reagan Library

next, but nonetheless our lives have a certain form which projects itself towards our future.¹³⁷⁵

How could one better phrase the essence of prophetic politics? The most important aim of narrative prophetic politics is to communicate to the people a vision of the future to “beckon them forward” and at the same time warn them of the alternative future which will become inevitable if the narrated politics are not followed. The citizenry needs to be convinced with credible and skilled storytelling that the objectives of the politician are precisely the same, as those of the citizenry, or the “beckoning future” the individual has in mind, needs to be transplanted with the prophetic vision of the future the politician narrates.

Well-told narratives enable the politician to ignite political passions better than more conventional means. Eliade notes that millenarian movements “are always begun by strong religious personalities of the prophetic type, and are organized or expanded by politicians for political ends.”¹³⁷⁶ I argue, nevertheless, that the relationship can just as well be reversed. There is no need for religious personality in the equation, but the politician can assume that role to use, and even exploit religious belief for his earthly purposes in fulfilling his ideology. A politician can incite a revolutionary political movement, and act as the prophetic leader, if he tells effective enough stories. With “revolutionary” I refer in this context to any policy that differs greatly from the way politics are run at the moment, or, even more importantly, give the impression of differing completely. Even if Reagan carried off some of his political changes, such as introducing “Reaganomics,” there are still many constants in policy carried from one administration to another. Thus the “Reagan Revolution” was more a revolution of images, ideas, visions and ideals than of fundamental changes in the course of political decision making.

Gutterman argues that storytelling is political because it demands story listening, and this exchange of narratives is a collective effort to search for meanings and this in turn defines public life, and shapes the context within which politics takes place. At the same time Gutterman argues that storytelling is an act of proclamation and that storytellers seek recognition and to have their stories heard.¹³⁷⁷ There seems to be something paradoxical in this. A storyteller, in the

¹³⁷⁵ MacIntyre (1984) p. 215-216

¹³⁷⁶ Eliade (1963) p. 70-71

¹³⁷⁷ Gutterman (2005) p. 21

realm of prophetic politics, definitely is not a person who wants to shout his stories into a dark void; he always seeks some kind of response, some effect. Storytelling in politics is more about proclamations than anything else, and the more stories told resemble proclamations, the closer we are to prophetic politics.

But the notion that political narration is proclamatory does not mean that a prophetic politician needs or even wants to “exchange narratives” with anyone. He wants to be heard, noted and acted according to. Political leadership, even in its narrative form, does not require more than the one prophetic proclamation, and for the effectiveness of the narration, it is beneficial if the number of contesting stories that offer themselves for exchange can be limited. In prophetic politics there optimally is no exchange of narratives, or collective effort in search of meanings.

Indeed, it is the primary object of prophetic politics to avoid the story recipients getting the impression that there would even exist another way of depicting political reality, or even reinterpreting the message any other way that it has been proclaimed and communicated. While acting as the spokesman for the message, the prophetic politician has to act as the interpreter of the message as well. I argue that this tendency to limit the scope and spread of other stories lies at the very centre of political storytelling, when we discuss the stories told by the figures associated with the political leadership. As a tool of political leadership, prophetic politics stands apart from other political storytelling in the sense that it aims for the position of an uncontested metanarrative.

Much of the research considering narratives today focuses on the pluralistic notion of storytelling, and how society is enriched, when we can bring to surface of hearing hitherto unheard stories. But storytelling is not merely a jolly process, which shows the multicultural and pluralistic society in all its colourful splendour. “Fascists tell stories, zealots tell stories. To say that stories generate meaning and hope is not to say that all such meaning and hope is beneficial to humanity.”¹³⁷⁸ Stories can be much more than innocent productions. The anti-American counter-narratives of Ayatollah Khomeini or Osama bin Laden are good examples of stories, which cause harm to the world, just as Manifest Destiny and American Exceptionalism have the potential to. Depicting the United States as “the Great Satan” would be no big deal, since the story itself is fascinating to read and contrast

¹³⁷⁸ Gutterman (2005) p. 23

with the American stories, but the results of effective communication of these stories have been violent and have led to destruction and loss of life - but so has the grand narrative of War on Terror as well. One can, nevertheless, not deny that these stories are just as prophetic as those of Mohandas Gandhi or Martin Luther King Jr. were. They are only told to attain less acceptable goals, but that does not diminish the effects of their respective prophetic messages. The stories told by Adolf Hitler about his *Endlösung* are no less prophetic than those of global spread of democracy and freedom told by Reagan. The evaluation of the virtue or vice of the prophetic message is inconsequential. It is these “dark prophecies” which may result in bloodshed that political narration must be able to encounter.

4.1.1. THE FIGURE OF THE PROPHET

This is an exciting time to be alive, an exciting time to be in Washington, a time of both challenge and reaffirmation. Each of us has been put here with a purpose.¹³⁷⁹

-Ronald Wilson Reagan

This subchapter is intended to clarify the meaning of the concept “prophet.” I shall use both biblical definitions and Weberian sociological definitions, but I shall argue that neither fits perfectly the prophetic politician. There is less divine revelation involved than in the case of the biblical *nabi*, and less charisma, but more exploitation of religious and mythical beliefs than in the Weberian definition. Similarly the prophetic politician assumes the role of a narrator more than the traditional prophet. He is more responsible for the content of the message, than just proclaiming it as it was given to him. He has to be able to create the message and communicate it to his citizens.

In traditional prophetic narratives there was no question of the authorship. Yahweh was the author of the divine word, and the prophet acted only as his mouthpiece, that is to say, as the narrator. The prophet received the word directly from God into his mouth. What the biblical prophet had to bring forth “is not their own words (they would be worthless), but only the precious divine word which has been put in their mouths.”¹³⁸⁰ Lindblom writes that the prophet “in not in himself a politician, a social reformer, a thinker, or a philosopher; nor is he in the first place a

¹³⁷⁹ Reagan (20.1.1982) Remarks to the Reagan Administration Executive Forum. s. 47

¹³⁸⁰ Lindblom (1962) p. 114

poet, even though he often puts his sayings in a poetical form.”¹³⁸¹ But at the same time there are a lot of indications that the early prophets also intervened in politics like Samuel in the days of Saul and David who was a “religious and political leader of the greatest importance, working in virtue of his personal authority.”¹³⁸² The prophetic politician of today has to be all the things Lindblom denies him. He is a politician above all; it is only his semblance that confuses.

However, the Biblical prophets of the Near East work as a suitable point of departure into the realm of prophecies. The traditional prophetic figure was that of the *nabi*¹³⁸³. They were “intermediaries, bearing the word of message from heaven to earth and the word of petition from earth to heaven.”¹³⁸⁴ Along with these characters, there existed the “writing prophets,” whose purpose was to bring us the great figures of the past and hand down the core of the teaching.¹³⁸⁵ The difference between these two prophetic types is exemplified in their narrations as well. The speeches of the *nabi*¹³⁸⁶ are given in the actual situation, and to grasp the reality of his word, we should grasp delve into that actuality. The written prophecies are more distanced from the actual situation.¹³⁸⁷ Grottanelli agrees; for him the dreams and visions are the means of direct communication of the divination, and since it is then directly inspired divination, it automatically stands opposed to the world of writing. The true communication of God’s will should be enunciated outright.¹³⁸⁸ The prophet who uses spoken word becomes more than a diviner; he is entrusted with and carries the supernatural will, and transmits than along with mere information. The message is broader and it comprises movement and action.¹³⁸⁹

The writing prophets are exemplified by figures like Amos whom Blenkinsopp calls an intellectual leader because his use rhetorical devices makes him part of the literati.¹³⁹⁰ Of course in some other instances the disciples of the prophets wrote down the oral prophecies and thus the line is not quite as easy to

¹³⁸¹ Lindblom (1962) p. 1

¹³⁸² Lindblom (1962) p. 74-77, 97

¹³⁸³ Lindblom (1962) p. 102 provides a thorough discussion on the origins of the word *nabi* which is not of Hebraic origin.

¹³⁸⁴ Buber (1949) p. 2

¹³⁸⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁸⁶ Naturally *nabi* was not the only term used for prophets. For a list of terminology and a discussion on the meanings of individual expressions see Blenkinsopp (1995) p. 124-128

¹³⁸⁷ Buber (1949) p. 96

¹³⁸⁸ Grottanelli (1999) p. 173

¹³⁸⁹ Grottanelli (1999) p. 174

¹³⁹⁰ Blenkinsopp (1995) p. 141

draw between these two types.¹³⁹¹ For example Baruch was responsible of writing down the messages of Jeremiah after his dictation.¹³⁹² The modern prophetic politician needs to be able to combine the best qualities of the writing and speaking prophets to gain maximum exposure to his message. The rousing of political passions is important in speechmaking, but at the same time the message has to be constructed logically, albeit only in relation of the story logic that upholds the story verse. The prophet must be versed in different genres to take advantage of them and the more texts he has read, the more he can put to use through intertextuality. I argue that the spoken political prophecy is more important than the written one in the actual policymaking. This is because the spoken word in Ricoeurian terms is less distanced. The spoken prophecy can get results more effectively because of immediacy to inflict changes more rapidly. Thus, a rousing speech can get the audience to act immediately to the benefit of the politician. The written prophecy, let's use Karl Marx as an example, may alter the world profoundly, but those alterations lie in the future and are more distanced in terms of temporality. The attempts of the Soviet Union to spark the revolution of the proletariat were far in the future of the moment when the "prophecy" was written and published.

The label of prophet is problematic because of its wide usage. Thus, a distinction needs to be made concerning the different uses of the expression "prophet." While scholars make several distinctions between the prophets in Old Testament, all of them can be considered separate from those contained in the pages of the New Testament. All of them are *still* different from the post-Biblical prophets in the medieval or our contemporary times. Blenkinsopp sees the contemporary use to include things like prediction, emotional preaching, social protest, millenarian movements and their founders. He also notes that even within Hebraic tradition almost any significant figure could be called a *nabi*. For him prophet can be defined as "dissident intellectual" above being a social critic or a charismatic person.¹³⁹³ The old prophets are not similar to newer prophets, and any of these do not correspond with the political prophets who are distinctly their own category.

Hvidt argues that the tradition of prophesying did not cease in the period leading up to Christ so that John the Baptist would have been the first after a long

¹³⁹¹ Lindblom (1962) p. 162-164, 239-279 provides a good overview to how the prophetic literature was created. and how it got the form that we encounter today.

¹³⁹² Lindblom (1962) p. 222, 255

¹³⁹³ Blenkinsopp (1995) p. 2

prophetic silence. His claim is that prophecy had continued to be a part of the church unremittingly from Moses onwards and that prophecy is still part of the charisms of the modern church.¹³⁹⁴ Mostly this contemporary prophetic tradition is alive outside the Western world. I, nevertheless, do not discuss the post-Christian tradition of prophecy any more in depth in order not to confuse the concept of a prophet any more. Should I include here the contemporary charismatics, evangelical leaders and such *homines religiosi*, I would have to discuss phenomena such as soothsayers. As Uri Margolin notes, we are continuously surrounded by prognostications concerning the future. Reality is envisioned as a space of at least partially indeterminate potentialities existing around us, or in which we exist, at any given moment. Futurologists of all type, military, economic, social or political forecast us their own respective versions of the future, and out of this battle of contrasted story worlds the prophetic politician must be able to get his voice heard and his story believed in.¹³⁹⁵ The presidential pollster Richard Wirthlin claimed that “the primary leadership function of the American President is to reaffirm constantly the country’s highest purposes and the potential for individual efforts to alter the course of the future in a positive direction.”¹³⁹⁶ In only a few words Wirthlin was able to describe what prophetic politics as a way of leadership is to be like. Wirthlin argued later that despite the fact that ran the strategy-making for the presidential campaigns that the credit was Reagan’s. “It occurred to me that we had to do something that would change the chessboard of politics. That something didn’t come from my strategy book; it came directly from Ronald Reagan.”¹³⁹⁷

In a way Reagan was only one link in the tradition of American prophets and certainly far removed from being an intellectual. Garry Willis argues that Reagan liked prophecies since they personalized issues, and also, because he was a storyteller. The stories about matters and issues were always better for him than any evidence.¹³⁹⁸ There are numerous other reasons to assume the prophetic role as well. McLoughlin makes a distinction between political and religious prophets. According to him politicians like Joseph McCarthy and Richard Nixon were prophets, just as well as Monsignor Sheen, Norman Vincent Peale and Billy

¹³⁹⁴ Hvidt (2007) p. 50-51

¹³⁹⁵ Margolin (1999) p. 163-164

¹³⁹⁶ Wirthlin. Cited in White (1988) p. 51

¹³⁹⁷ Wirthlin (1997) p. 636

¹³⁹⁸ Willis (2000) p. xxiv

Graham. The people in the first group were political prophets, and their message was essentially anti-communist, while members of the second group fought for a return to old cultural values.¹³⁹⁹ The messages of prophets were overlapping to a degree, especially in combating Communism. Billy Graham, as a prime example, had a very long career which involved courting with politicians from Nixon to Reagan and naturally the prophecies of religion and politics and anti-communism got to some degree confused.¹⁴⁰⁰ For some religious people Graham's association with politicians made him too partisan to be even considered a messenger from God. At the same time politicians courted the church leaders and thus religion and politics were enjoined again. But was there ever a breach in the relationship?

I have earlier written about Reagan and other presidents acting as the priests of the nation. Buber argues that the roles of the prophet and the priest are fundamentally different, but there are occasional times, like offerings of public sacrifices, or times of crisis when the prophet stands in the place of the priest.¹⁴⁰¹ As I have argued, the prophetic politician can also create crisis situations to advance his politics. At the same time he enhances his already prestigious role by combining the characters of the traditional president as a leader to both priest and the prophet. Joseph Blenkinsopp agrees that the roles of a priest and that of a prophet can overlap at times. For him "the roles are fluid – not an unusual situation in role performance."¹⁴⁰² According to Buber the man who stands on the borderland of prophecy, between prophecy and priesthood is still "a true seer of visions even though he inclines to speculation."¹⁴⁰³

Even if the prophetic politician attempts to stand between prophecy and priesthood, he is, nevertheless, a politician and that aspect should never be forgotten in prophetic politics. Max Weber insists that

anyone seeking to save his own soul or the souls of others does not take the path of politics in order to reach his goal, for politics has quite different tasks, namely those which can only be achieved by force. The genius – or demon – of politics lives in a state of inner tension with the God of love, and even with the Christian God as manifested in the institution of the church, a tension that may erupt at any moment into irresolvable conflict.¹⁴⁰⁴

¹³⁹⁹ McLoughlin (1978) p. 187

¹⁴⁰⁰ See for example Hughes (2003) p. 172-173 about the anti-communism faith of Graham. No doubt this made him even a better friend to such an ardent anti-communist as Reagan

¹⁴⁰¹ Buber (1949) p. 78

¹⁴⁰² Blenkinsopp (1995) p. 2

¹⁴⁰³ Buber (1949) p. 187

¹⁴⁰⁴ Weber (1994) p. 366

Prophetic politics is not about saving souls but rather a form of political manipulation where beliefs both religious and mythical are used as tools. The tension is there, and as has often happened, it has created a conflict. But with meticulous care in the narration, the story web can contain the conflict, and the role of God or religion can be kept relatively hidden among the strands of the story web. “The prophet is a man of public word. He is a speaker and a preacher.”¹⁴⁰⁵ He participates in politics and in religion, but it is necessary for the prophet to make a distinction what is God’s and what is Caesar’s. The prophet must increasingly in our modern societies distinguish between those matters, which belong in the realm of religion, and that of politics in order to be able to blend them together where deemed necessary. Therefore, to combine religion and politics, one has to have a clear idea of what constitutes both of these areas of human experience, in order to make his prophetic message appear logical and coherent.

The role the politician has to assume first as a narrator and secondly as a prophet, since his narration belongs to that genre which is multifaceted. I have chosen to use the label “prophet” while an “oracle” for example would suffice almost just as well. Indeed, the prophets were traditionally oracle-givers and this function was present throughout the whole history of prophecy.¹⁴⁰⁶ The added quality in a prophet when compared to an oracle is the fact that the oracle is only someone to consult for the leader, while the prophet takes upon himself the function of the leader of his people. Concerning the status of the prophetic politician the words of Northrop Frye can be used. He stated that

It is clear that the poet who sings about gods is often considered to be singing as one, or as an instrument of one. His social function is that of an inspired oracle. [...] The poet’s visionary function, his proper work as a poet, is on the plane to reveal the god for whom he speaks. This usually means that he reveals the god’s will in connection with a specific occasion [...] but in time the god in him reveals his nature and history as well as his will, and so a larger pattern of myth and ritual is built up out of a series of oracular pronouncements.¹⁴⁰⁷

Time after time a new *nabi* will arise in the form of the prophetic leader. Since the days of Moses, the *nabi* had been pushed from the place of the leader into someone, who expounds what the leadership is not. But even within the span of biblical prophecies the *nabi* regained in prophetic thought the vocation to lead as in the

¹⁴⁰⁵ Lindbom (1962) p. 2

¹⁴⁰⁶ Lindblom (1962) p. 149

¹⁴⁰⁷ Frye (1957) p. 55

former days.¹⁴⁰⁸ But what is important to understand about the role of the prophet is that he is not necessarily religious. As Blenkinsopp writes “Prophecy, finally is not unambiguously religious in nature, especially if we pay due regard to those prophets who functioned as social critics.”¹⁴⁰⁹ Thus Reagan only wanted to make his personal role stronger by assuming the role of the priest as part of his role in prophetic politics. As I have written, Reagan believed to have been “called” to work in politics and according to Meese Reagan believed that “he did not seek politics but that politics had sought him.”¹⁴¹⁰ Thus Reagan is closer to a prophet in the Weberian sense than a priest who is appointed to the office.¹⁴¹¹

Max Weber wrote about “charismatic leadership,” but claimed that this can be exercised by “the prophet – or in the field of politics – by the elected war lord, the plebiscitarian ruler, the great demagogue, or the party leader.”¹⁴¹² It is not a big step to further blend the boundary between religion and politics, as they are already intermingled in the American context and employ the role of the prophet in politics as well. Weber also claims that this type of leader is “personally recognized as the innerly “called” leader of men. Men do not obey him by virtue of tradition or statute, but because they believe in him.”¹⁴¹³ Weber goes on to distinguish between a “professional politician” and a charismatic leader by arguing, that the first one did not want to be a lord, like the second type did. They just entered the service of such a lord, and were at his disposal for the actual running of politics.¹⁴¹⁴ “I am not a politician in the sense of ever having held a public office, but I think I can lay claim to being a “citizen politician.” I have always had an interest in politics and been an active participant.”¹⁴¹⁵ Reagan always wanted to argue that he was a citizen politician and seemed to dislike the professionals in politics.

I just happened to have a deep-seated belief that it is high time that some of the people from the rank-and-file citizenry should involve themselves in

¹⁴⁰⁸ Buber (1949) p. 230-231

¹⁴⁰⁹ Blenkinsopp (1995) p. 3

¹⁴¹⁰ Meese (1997) p. 21

¹⁴¹¹ Blenkinsopp (1995) p. 79

¹⁴¹² Weber (1994) p. 312 In this discussion it has to be said about Weber that he defined politics as “striving for a share of power or for influence on the distribution of power, whether it be between states or between the groups of people contained within a single state.” Weber (1994) p. 311. This quite realist viewpoint influences his thoughts on political leadership since he does not consider altruism to be a motivator as such.

¹⁴¹³ Weber (1994) p. 312

¹⁴¹⁴ Weber (1994) p. 316 “*Berufspolitiker*”

¹⁴¹⁵ Speech, “A Plan for Action: Announcement of Candidacy”, January 4 1966, Folder: 1966 Campaign: RR speeches and statements, Book I, Box C30, Research Unit, Ronald Reagan Governor’s papers, Ronald Reagan Library.

government so that it will be a government of and by, as well as for, the people. And feeling that way, I think I can qualify as a citizen-politician and I don't believe that the country was created by men who were politicians.¹⁴¹⁶ One of the reasons is explained by Weber's concepts. Reagan's charismatic presence was able to carry him over the "grey mass" of political labourers and into leadership, a lordly position. According to Weber, a professional politician has "no vocation [and is] the type of man who lack precisely those inner, charismatic qualities which make man a leader."¹⁴¹⁷ Reagan liked to use derisive terms about these professionals of politics like "paper pushers of the Potomac."¹⁴¹⁸ Lou Cannon asserts that Reagan "bridled" if he was referred to as "politician" in interviews or articles.¹⁴¹⁹ Reagan's political persona was in Weberian terms a vocational politician and he argued that

because I am not a politician, with no political aspirations, so that I don't have to be weighing political expediency, or what is the wise political thing to do, that that just makes me brave enough that maybe this is the thing that I can get in to do some of the things that have to be done.¹⁴²⁰

As Reagan narrated it, he was himself only continuing along the road trodden by the Founding Fathers who "were not professional politicians. They were citizen politicians, earnestly concerned with the tremendous problems our brave new country faced, and wholeheartedly dedicated to the task of finding new solutions to those problems."¹⁴²¹ There was a political benefit for Reagan in portraying himself as a vocational politician. Following this storyline Reagan was not in politics for his own benefit or living but for the altruistic good he could bring about to Americans. This would mean according to the story logic that none of the decisions Reagan makes are for political reasons, but only to advance the cause of the "right" and what is proper for his mythical America. Using the role of a vocational politician Reagan was able to exploit the role of a prophet as well, since a professional politician is a man advancing his career and acting according to what is politically

¹⁴¹⁶ Statement, "Announcement day press conference...Statler Hilton, Pacific Ballroom. Jan 4, 1966" Folder: 1966 Campaign: RR speeches and statements, Book I, Box C30, Research Unit, Ronald Reagan Governor's papers, Ronald Reagan Library.

¹⁴¹⁷ Weber (1994) p. 351

¹⁴¹⁸ Radio Address, Folder Speeches and Writings – Radio Broadcast, Taping date – 1976, September "Getting back at the Bureaucrats" Typescript 2/3, Box 1, Reagan, Ronald: Pre-presidential papers, Series I Speeches and writings, Ronald Reagan Library

¹⁴¹⁹ Cannon (2003) p. 324

¹⁴²⁰ Answer, "Questions and Answers, Orange County, March 30, 1986." P. 187, Folder: 1966 Campaign: RR speeches and statements, Book I (5), Box C30, Research Unit, Ronald Reagan Governor's papers, Ronald Reagan Library

¹⁴²¹ Speech, "Elk Grove, May 14, 1966" p. 257 Folder: 1966 Campaign: RR speeches and statements, Book II (1), Box C30, Research Unit, Ronald Reagan Governor's papers, Ronald Reagan Library

correct. A prophet, just as a vocational politician needs to speak out for what is right and what will advance the will of the divine providence. Reagan compared the professional and vocational politician in saying,

If a candidate is in politics just for the power of excitement -- or excitement, I should say -- he's bound to be disappointed. The power never lasts forever. And as for excitement, well, there's a lot less of excitement in government than there is in just plain work. But if someone enters politics in the name of ideals and principles, then it's all worthwhile. Every campaign, every interview takes on meaning as part of a larger plan, as part of a vision for America's future.¹⁴²²

Once again the essential keyword to prophetic politics, “vision” pops up. The politician needs to have a vision to pursue and to communicate to the people. The enticing vision of the future is not enough for the prophetic politician to become one. The narration of the vision is crucial, but the aspiring prophetic politician needs to get into a narrator position, even temporally, where he can communicate that vision. For this purpose, the vision has to be backed with personal qualities, charismatic personality in the forefront.

Weber considers charisma to be an “extraordinary personal gift or grace.”¹⁴²³ He uses terminology, which is inherently religious. So, what Weber did, was bring the prophet from religion into the more secular or profane sphere of politics. My purpose is to reverse the process and “de-secularize” the charismatic politician back into his prophetic role. The charismatic politician is a secularized leader of his subjects with divine-like charisma and the prophetic politician is a man who deliberately used mechanisms of religious belief to advance his policies. “Mankind is in desperate need of leaders with courage and wisdom.”¹⁴²⁴ Reagan’s conception of leadership is not centred on “getting things done” but an almost Biblical sense of a “leader of the people”. A politician is a leader in his stories, and as such his most important qualities are personal courage along with wisdom, and yes, charisma as well.

The concept of charisma can be stuck on Reagan with other connotations than purely the Weberian one. Richard Neustadt writes that there is no doubt that Reagan had charisma, but rather in its contemporary usage as being concerned with affection and inspiration flowing from the masses to the leader, a feeling that the

¹⁴²² Reagan (25.7.1988) Remarks to Members of the American Legion's Boys Nation
<http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1988/072588a.htm>

¹⁴²³ Weber (1994) p. 311

¹⁴²⁴ Reagan (13.10.1981) Toasts of the President and King Juan Carlos I of Spain at the State Dinner. s. 922

leader cares for the masses, which in turn prompts the response that the masses care for the leader.¹⁴²⁵ The feeling of oneness with the people and the inspiration derived from them was crucial in Reagan's narration. People were depicted as strong participants in everything Reagan did.

You see, since my first meeting with General Secretary Gorbachev in 1985, I have always regarded you, the American people, as full participants in our discussions. [...] I do firmly believe the principal credit for the patience and persistence that brought success this year belongs to you, the American people.¹⁴²⁶

One sign of Reagan's charismatic personality can be deduced from electoral results as well. As White has shown, Reagan was one of the five presidents in U.S. history elected for the second term who could not get a majority for his own party in the House of Representatives.¹⁴²⁷ People voted for Reagan as the President, but in House elections they voted more along the party lines. Reagan's personal charisma could not carry the Republicans into an electoral victory. Interestingly the reading Blenkinsopp provides us of Weber, points out that charisma is not merely "an individual and certainly not an incommunicable phenomenon."¹⁴²⁸ Seen in this light, the presidential inauguration gains even more importance than has been given to it earlier. It can be seen as a ritual performance in which the charisma endowed by the office of the presidency is passed onward. But in addition to this, Reagan had a lot of personal charisma which could not be communicated to George H. W. Bush.

Another label that can be pinned on the charismatic political leader is that of a "demagogue." But Weber uses this expression with positive connotations. The negative overtones the term carries makes us forget that Pericles was the first demagogue in the sense that he led the *demos* of Athens and did this by the power of the spoken word. Modern demagogue has to be an expert of the use of words since politics today are conducted in the public by the means of the written and spoken word.¹⁴²⁹ But in prophetic politics the story itself steps to the forefront. It is not enough to only be a skilful orator or a rhetorician but the prophetic politician in contrast with the demagogue has to be able to use stories as his tools of leadership. The more sacred these stories are held to be, the more foundational the myths are

¹⁴²⁵ Neustadt (1990) p. 324

¹⁴²⁶ Reagan (10.12.1987) Address to the Nation on the Soviet-United States Summit Meeting
<http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1987/121087d.htm>

¹⁴²⁷ White (1998) p. 92-93

¹⁴²⁸ Blenkinsopp (1995) p. 117. As an example can be used the passing of prophetic authority from Elijah to his successor Elisha. See Lindblom (1962) p. 65

¹⁴²⁹ Weber (1994) p. 330-331

used, the greater the chance of success. And with a good enough story as the motivator, the prophetic politician is able to get the people to follow him, and his storylines.

We all want a great nation to be greater, a nation of free and equal Americans who stand together in the glow of fellowship and in the light of God. That's the country I'm working for, and that's the road that we want to walk down. And I say to you: Come on and walk down the road with me.¹⁴³⁰ William James writes about the traditional prophets having visions, speaking in languages, and falling in ecstatic states, when the prophets truly believed they had seen their respective gods or heard them declare themselves. These men had a strong sense of inspiration, in this sense meaning that they acted as vessels for a higher power. This higher power entered them with great and irresistible force which determines the point of view the prophet has concerning his contemporary issues. This is a reason why Old Testament prophets uttered their prophecies like God himself was speaking through their mouths. James argues that the characteristic of a prophet was that he spoke with the authority of God, declaring himself, what God wanted to say, "Thus sayeth the Lord God."¹⁴³¹ Grottanelli points out, that to prophesy, did not mean in the Ancient Near East the same as to make prophecies, but rather to behave like a prophet, that is, "like an ecstatic, or, better yet, like "one possessed," with connotations of madness."¹⁴³² Another peculiar component of traditional prophecies seems to have been nudity.¹⁴³³ For example Saul "remained in the prophetic state in the presence of Samuel: all that day and night he lay naked."¹⁴³⁴ If we look at the biblical examples of prophets, there are too many types to categorize in any manner. Hosea, for example, had to be the mouth of God, and he had to submit his whole personality and personal life to be a part of the message. His whole personal lot was to be displayed to the people and he even had to be married to a "woman of whorishness." Thus his personal life had to exhibit the unfaithfulness Israel had shown to God.¹⁴³⁵ Even the persona of the prophet had to be a part of the message in such cases. Most of the Israeli prophets behaved like inspired persons, they were often antithetical to political power, always faithful to

¹⁴³⁰ Reagan (26.7.1984) Remarks at the Reagan-Bush Rally in Atlanta, Georgia
<http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1984/72684a.htm>

¹⁴³¹ James (1981) p. 340

¹⁴³² Grottanelli (1999) p. 92

¹⁴³³ Grottanelli (1999) p. 95

¹⁴³⁴ I Sam. 19:24

¹⁴³⁵ Buber (1949) p. 110-111, see also Lindblom (1962) p. 166-168

the ideas of social justice, and apparently in possession with spiritual or even supernatural powers of their own. The two most famous of the early prophets, Elijah and Elisha, were even extraordinary by their way of life, since they had no fixed abode and dressed in camel hair shirts.¹⁴³⁶ How can we fit any of these lifestyles and these characteristics into a modern politician?

The answer is that we cannot and do not even need to. Even in ancient Israel, every prophet was an individual, and by all accounts Isaiah led a more balanced and normal life that for example Jeremiah.¹⁴³⁷ The personality of the prophet was also reflected in their lives and revelations as well. The message of each prophet was different, and this is because of their personal qualities.¹⁴³⁸ As time has passed, prophets themselves, and the content of prophecies has changed. The prophets of our times, outside evangelical denominations, cannot show signs of emotional, spiritual or mental disturbances, that is, they may not speak in languages, have fits or seizures, fall into an ecstatic state, or anything like that. They have to deliver their message in a relatively rational manner and terminology, and even shy away from claiming to speak for God in the words of God. The nature of prophecy is not fixed. In fact Lindblom claims that even in the Old Testament context some of the latter prophets, unlike their predecessors, “did not experience ecstasy of a wild and orgiastic type. Their revelations were more of a moral and personal character.”¹⁴³⁹ The prophetic leader, for example a politician, must with the form and content of his prophesying only evoke the metatexts and metanarratives of prophecy, and guide his story recipients to associate his narrative with the prophetic genre. The concept of vision, however, remains crucial to prophetic politics. Vision in this political context does not refer to anything, which originates in an ecstatic state, but rather a cool and calculated plan of how to move from the present into the future, and even more importantly what the future is to be like. The prophet must be able to build an imaginary world of tomorrow, and manage to communicate the vision to the people in such a manner, that they will start yearning for such a future to actualize.

When one considers the idea on American prophets, it is necessary to keep in mind the American tradition of laymen working as preachers, organizing revivals and generally spreading the Gospel. Indeed, majority of the most efficient revivalists

¹⁴³⁶ Grotanelli (1999) p. 129

¹⁴³⁷ Lindblom (1962) p. 193

¹⁴³⁸ Lindblom (1962) p. 197

¹⁴³⁹ Lindblom (1962) p. 178

were not clergy, but average people. There was a deep dislike across the separation of clergy and laity, especially in the cases that involved the composition of the ministry.¹⁴⁴⁰ Revivalism is nothing unique to the American experience, but its popularity and power owed much to the fact that it depended on public speech in plain language and extemporaneous of speech.¹⁴⁴¹ Religion and the word of God were democratized in America. “If God spoke through the common man, the voice of the people was the voice of God.”¹⁴⁴² This is a two sided argument; on the one hand anybody, layman or priest could and still can assume for himself the role of a prophet. Being God’s chosen does not necessitate a role within an established church. On the other hand, the word of God could be gotten from the people. This is an idea Reagan cherished in his narration. As I have argued, people were one of the objects of belief. The voice of the people was the voice of God. People themselves were one mediator of God’s will. Therefore all instances, where the people’s voice could be heard, were also moments when God’s will became known. This sheds a completely new light on democratic decision making, if taken to the limits of the argument. It is not, however, my purpose to do so here.

America traditionally fears demigods and dictators who have charisma, divine favour, or grace granted them by God. “American democracy is embarrassed in the charismatic presence.”¹⁴⁴³ This places new demands on the political prophet to be. He has to narrate his identity in such a manner as at the same time being the messenger of God to the people, and the messenger of the people to the powers that be, both political and divine. He must be a “common man” but at the same time possess a touch of the divine. He has to create a role of being among the people and working for them as selflessly as he works for God, and stand outside the political work of governing the people. A political prophet must be a champion of the people and champion of God at the same time and narrating such an identity where he has “two masters” is a demanding task.

Successful prophets never lose their sense of personal identity. They only bear the message of God, but do not become God incarnate.¹⁴⁴⁴ The prophet is separate from his prophecy and furthermore, from the origins of his prophecy.

¹⁴⁴⁰ Herberg (1960) p. 106

¹⁴⁴¹ Boorstin (1965) p. 318

¹⁴⁴² McLoughlin (1978) p. 86

¹⁴⁴³ Boorstin (1962) p. 50

¹⁴⁴⁴ McLoughlin (1978) p. 21

While he delivers the will of God to the people, he does not become immersed into that will, but can be separated from the message. The fact that Reagan interwove himself into his prophetic message as a character and a specimen of the American Dream among other things besides being the narrator is no different from the position of Hosea. Their lives reflected their message but the prophetic message itself has its origins elsewhere. They were just subservient to the message that was theirs to deliver. "I communicated great things, and they didn't spring full bloom from my brow, they came from the heart of a great nation"¹⁴⁴⁵ As Lindblom argues, the prophet knows that his thoughts and words never come from himself but are given him.¹⁴⁴⁶ We can call Reagan a prophet of America since traditional prophets got their ideas from God but for Reagan they came from the nation.

Once the political role of a prophet is chosen for a politician, religious connotations cannot be cast aside. Even if the message of the prophet springs from the heart of the nation and those values the people hold transcendent, the people are not a strong enough to legitimize his role. Thus Reagan could not stick completely to the mythic image of America as legitimation for his politics but "needed" God as well. While mythical, cultural and ideological stories provide legitimation, it is mostly religion which is able to create a sense of certainty by involving divine will in it.

Yes, religion is a guide for me. To think that anyone could carry out the awesome responsibilities of this office without asking for God's help through prayer strikes me as absurd.¹⁴⁴⁷

The idea of a president needing Divine support to keep up his strength in carrying on his duties goes back all the way to George Washington, but the one Reagan uses as an example he follows is Abraham Lincoln.¹⁴⁴⁸ The dependency of the president as well as his willingness to seek guidance and assistance from God is part of the Americanized myths that aims for picturing the president as performing his duties under a Divine blessing. If he seeks guidance from God, his message to the people must essentially be a prophecy, because it is the translation of God's will or at least

¹⁴⁴⁵ Reagan (11.1.1989) Farewell Address to the Nation
<http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1989/011189i.htm>

¹⁴⁴⁶ Lindblom (1962) p. 2

¹⁴⁴⁷ Reagan (3.11.1984) Written Responses to Questions Submitted by France Soir Magazine
<http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1984/110384a.htm>

¹⁴⁴⁸ See for example Reagan (4.2.1985) Remarks at the Annual Convention of the National Religious Broadcasters <http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1985/20485d.htm> or Reagan (13.1.1986) Proclamation 5429 -- National Day of Prayer
<http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1986/11386b.htm>

acting as his messenger. In everyday matters and times of relative calm in international politics the president acts just as anybody but the role of God in affairs of America increases during times of crises. Reagan accepts this myth into his story world and allows it to shape the concept of presidency in his narration as well. James Combs articulates fittingly the task of Reagan or indeed of any prophetic politician. He has to “re-enchant the world, to imbue the profane present with the aura of sacral past in order to forestall or reverse the rapid decomposition of value orientations.”¹⁴⁴⁹

While the modern political prophet cannot truly claim to be a direct mouthpiece of God and maintain full credibility, he still has to involve religion in his message and disnarrate the fact that his policies are tightly connected to God’s will, be it manifest destiny, or some other version of divine purpose. The world needs to be re-enchanted and this is what Reagan does with his concept of mythical America which is sanctified by the past, yet looking toward the future.

4.1.2. THE POSITION OF THE PROPHET

Long enough have we been sceptics with regards to ourselves, and doubted whether, indeed, the political Messiah had come. But he has come in us, if we would but give utterance to his promptings.¹⁴⁵⁰
-Herman Melville.

I shall continue to describe the role of the prophetic politician in this part. I shall show how his has to position himself in relation to both the society and his message as well. We have just finished a discussion what type of role the prophet has to narrate for himself. We have seen the importance of charisma and vision and we have seen that the political prophet as a figure is distanced from his biblical counterparts. I shall argue that in a very biblical manner the prophetic politician needs to situate himself as between the people and the object of their faith, be it God or America or something else. He has to be just an average American, who has been endowed with a vision. Only when he is seen as “one of us” by the majority of people, is his message likely to be accepted. Then the vision is seen to at least partially originate in “folk wisdom.” The prophet must rise from among people, or at least create that image narratively. Still, he has to be different from the people as

¹⁴⁴⁹ Combs (1993) p. 27

¹⁴⁵⁰ Melville. Cited in Marty (1984) p. 219

well; he needs to have that special connection with God. He is a messenger and mediator with the task of making the will of one known to the other. It is this role of a messenger and communicator of wills sets him apart from the rest of the people, while he is a crucial figure of the society. I shall argue that tradition of prophecy and practical reasons of political plausibility demand from the prophetic politician that he disclaims his own prophetic role and those of the other false prophets. I shall discuss what makes a prophecy “true” and if even the “truth” of the prophetic message does apply to the prophetic politician who deals with the profane realms of politics and tells his visions for political purposes.

Reagan is described in almost any book on him as a very private person. He was amicable and behaved towards others in a very friendly manner, but seemed distanced from such close relations like his children and even his closest confidant, his wife Nancy, was occasionally left out. In a way this suits his “role” as a prophet, even if only coincidentally. As for example Roland Barthes notes, one chosen by God is set apart and “marked with solitude.”¹⁴⁵¹ In a way even Reagan’s innermost personality characters suit his role as a prophet. He is a solitary man, set apart in a profound manner. Weber attaches this quality to a successful political leader as well. He argues that the politician has to have “a distance from things and people. A “lack of distance” [...] is one of the deadly sins for any politician.”¹⁴⁵² Keeping this distance has an inbuilt paradox in it, because while it allows the politician to make cool decisions “with the head,” Weber claims that when it comes to politics “dedication to it can only be generated and sustained by passion.”¹⁴⁵³

The only way to overcome this is to channel the passion away from the people and into the vision that carries prophetic politics. This Reagan managed since the two great loves of his life were Nancy and America. –And judging by all evidence available the latter was the source of even more passion. Reagan’s biographer Edmund Morris claims that he wondered if Reagan’s one and only passion in life was not the love of country.¹⁴⁵⁴ Reagan wrote that “Sometimes I had an awesome, shivering feeling that America was making a personal appearance for me, and it made me the biggest fan in the world.”¹⁴⁵⁵ Thus, passion for politics, is an

¹⁴⁵¹ Barthes (1977) p. 130

¹⁴⁵² Weber (1994) p. 353

¹⁴⁵³ Weber (1994) p. 353

¹⁴⁵⁴ Morris (1999) p. 655

¹⁴⁵⁵ Reagan (1985) p. 297

essential quality of the prophetic politician, but a sense of judgement and the passion have to be combined and the “person who can do this must be a leader; not only that, he must, in a very simple sense of the word, be a hero.”¹⁴⁵⁶

In the Biblical tradition the prophets usually were not heroes. Gutterman borrows from Hannah Arendt the notion of a prophet being a “conscious pariah” and a figure situated in the margin of the society. According to Gutterman, biblical prophets are fundamentally liminal figures like Moses, who maintained “a position from which they could offer a challenging critique of the social order.” He adds that in their task to transform the world, prophetic politicians “share the intent to challenge people to displace themselves from the corrupting forces at the centre of a given culture or community.”¹⁴⁵⁷ Gutterman is bent on positioning the prophet in the margin. Grottanelli sees the prophets to come from the people. They are like Moses, but Moses described as “the charismatic leader of old, who enjoyed a direct relationship with the deity.”¹⁴⁵⁸ In the words of Moses prophets “rise up for you from among your kinsmen.”¹⁴⁵⁹ For me the crucial words are to “rise up” A prophet becomes a prophet only when he is able to distinguish himself and rise from the margin into a position of leadership. It is impossible to see Moses, a leader of his people, as a marginal figure. Very often examples like Mohandas Gandhi, Jesus of Martin Luther King Jr. are used as examples of prophets of the margin. I argue that Jesus and Dr. King certainly originated among the masses; King because of the colour of his skin and Jesus due to his humble origins. But both gained acceptance among larger audiences with the spreading of their messages and only this elevated status made them prophets. No matter how fundamentally ethical the teachings of Jesus were, no matter how justified the dream of Dr. King, had they not escaped the margin with the growing popularity of their individual messages and stepped into the stage of political life with their newly endowed speaker positions, we would not today call them prophets. Gandhi is an interesting case, because he willingly chose to escape his original speaker position in the higher echelons of the Indian society and situate himself in the margin. He was, after all, a highly educated man who had received his education in England. He became part of the lower strata of the Indian

¹⁴⁵⁶ Weber (1994) p. 369

¹⁴⁵⁷ Gutterman (2005) p. 42

¹⁴⁵⁸ Grottanelli (1999) p. 104

¹⁴⁵⁹ Deuteronomy 18:15

society, but his popularity among these lower castes endowed him, once again, with an elevated speaker position.

Ironically the position at the centre of the society is such that the prophet or president becomes isolated again.¹⁴⁶⁰ Being the centre of the society isolates one just as effectively as having been situated on the margin of the society. Since the prophets often are critics of the social or political status quo, they initially emerge from the opposition to the social order. In order for them to become prophets in the true meaning of the word, they have to gain some recognition which in turn elevated their position away from the margin. What makes a hero or a prophet is distance, either in terms of geography or temporality. “Great heroes are men from whom one feels at a great distance.”¹⁴⁶¹ A prophet, who stays in the margin, is just another grumbler against the social order and only the “village idiot.” Or he can be pictured like the people of Israel who “murmured” in the Wilderness. There is no authority, only the voice of dissent. Only after gaining fame the thinker, who opposes the powers to be, truly deserves the status as a prophet. While the birth and raise of prophetic figures to prominence would be intriguing to study, politically the most important thing is what those figures do, when their speaker position is thus elevated.

In this case Reagan serves yet again as an example. Between the governorship and the presidency his radio addresses do not sound a note of prophetic leadership. Despite his popularity as a speaker in the political circuit, he was still a marginal figure. His political star was on the rise, and ever since the Goldwater Speech of 1964, he had been ranked as having tremendous potential. Unfortunately, this was within the circles of the Republican Party, and not the entire citizenry. His message in those radio addresses is full of criticism towards the way the country is run, and do not present the glorious future. At that time he was, if anything, a prophet of the opposition to the way politics was run. Just because of his marginalized speaker position, his grumbling message could not inflict such a change as is needed for the politician to become a prophetic leader, instead of just an echoing voice pointing out wrong-doings in the society. It was only after the escalation from the ranks of the party to a presidential candidate which established him in a position to spread his vision.

¹⁴⁶⁰ Exum (1996) p. 38

¹⁴⁶¹ Boorstin (1965) p. 333

Reagan as a prophetic politician took the option of separation to some degree as part of his role. He distanced himself from people in a manner similar to that of Moses. While narrating himself as the “boy next door” and “common man,” his persona remained very distant even to close political associates. He had aides and people who worked for him in a very devoted manner, but they never became more than that. But it was separation from the political world which he wanted to portray and not from the people, Americans. While Reagan acted out the role of the citizen-politician and positioned himself on the margins of the political realm, he put a lot of effort into narrating himself to be in touch with the heart of America and her people. Despite his apparent separation from the reality experience by the average US citizen Reagan narrated himself to be fully involved in the community created by ordinary Americans, yet set apart from the machinery of governance, and it was this position he used to narratively attack the government. This role of the citizen-politician was inherent to Reagan’s image, but it had been created and first exploited during his campaign for governorship by political consultants Stuart K. Spencer and William E. Roberts, who were quick to turn Reagan’s ignorance about Californian issues and politics into an asset by picturing him thus. Reagan became a man of the people who would use common sense and courage to clear the mess caused by “politicos.”¹⁴⁶²

A prophetic politician has to rise with the aid of his narration into the role of an aesthetic figure that is above politics. He should represent things, usually expressed in his vision, that are above and beyond mere prosaic politics. While he may not dominate the “real” political world he must be the one in full control of the poetic world of political play.¹⁴⁶³

In the swirl of issues and events that is Washington, there remains one overriding purpose, the purpose toward which everything else we do in this town is -- or should be -- aimed. I guess I would define it this way: creating a peaceful and safe world in which we can all securely enjoy the rights and freedoms that have been given to us by God. Being free and prosperous in a world at peace -- that's our ultimate goal. That is, as you might say, the business at hand here in Washington.¹⁴⁶⁴

The dream of a world in perpetual peace can be seen as the ultimate goal of politics, but it nevertheless is far beyond the political realities and everyday work. Another

¹⁴⁶² Pemberton (1997) p. 65

¹⁴⁶³ Combs (1993) p. 20

¹⁴⁶⁴ Reagan (29.7.1986) Remarks at a White House Briefing for Republican Student Interns on Soviet-United States Relations <http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1986/072986e.htm>

such vision above politics was Reagan's Strategic Defence Initiative, dubbed by its critics as "Star Wars," but in Reagan's storytelling a means to ensure a future without nuclear weapons or "journey toward achieving humanity's ancient dream: a world in which swords are beaten into plowshares and war is preached no more."¹⁴⁶⁵ These visions or dreams, whatever one wants to call them surpass and transcend the realm of politics and further distance the prophetic politician from the toil and struggle of everyday policymaking. The vision is intangible and poetic and gives the illusion of serving a higher purpose than mere national interest.

In the history of prophecy, from around sixth century B.C. onwards, God seemed to grow distance to his people. There were no more prophets like Moses of antiquity, who conversed directly with God, but the prophetic message starting to rely more on interpretation than God's direct communication.¹⁴⁶⁶ There is a need for a contemporary prophetic politician to position himself in a different manner as the "friends of God" of the early biblical times. De Tocqueville writes that it not necessary for the God himself to speak in order for the people to discover true signs of His will. The examination of the "usual course of nature and the continuous tendency of the events"¹⁴⁶⁷ is enough to reveal the God's will. The important point de Tocqueville is made, is that the prophet does not need to hear the voice of God to interpret it. He can use his powers of deduction as well and by close observation of the world around him mentally compose the picture of what God's plan includes. This is a more suitable method of prophesying in our contemporary conjunction, since the delirious speaking in tongues would not be acceptable in the realm of politics. Rationality, or at least the appearance of it, is crucial in carrying out contemporary policies, and one of the greatest challenges of prophetic politics is to combine the notions of God's will or plan with such rational guidelines of policy, that even an atheist could accept the reason behind them. But if the divine inspiration is depicted to have been communicated by the means of reason instead of "a voice from the burning bush," the prophetic policymaking creates a narrative, which is more inclusive in its nature. God has a dominant place in the narration but rather as the "Nature's God" the Founding Fathers emphasized. He is the prime mover and is evident in the world around us, but does not actually speak to the

¹⁴⁶⁵ Reagan (23.3.1987) Statement on the Strategic Defense Initiative
<http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1987/032387a.htm>

¹⁴⁶⁶ Hvidt (2007) p. 47

¹⁴⁶⁷ de Tocqueville (2000) p. 6-7

prophets, religious or political –or both. His will is rather derived from a close observance of the way the world works. But we can argue that to aid the story recipients to treat the political narration as a prophecy evocations of God’s name are useful.

With this focus of using intellect to interpret God’s will we are back in the realm of the Americanized myths of Manifest Destiny, Founding Father and American Exceptionalism among others. Since these myths are “self-evident,” the prophetic politician can use them as examples of God’s will revealed through intellectual observation. These culturally foundational myths can be accepted as parts of God’s plan. At the same time then it can be said that, “we preach no manifest destiny,”¹⁴⁶⁸ and argued like Reagan that

I have always believed there was some divine plan that put this continent here between the two great oceans to become a haven for all those who had that extra ounce of love for freedom in their hearts and courage to find their way here and build this great force for good in all the world.¹⁴⁶⁹

The latter expression is justified by the American experience. Just rationally evaluating the quality of life in God’s Chosen Nation will reveal how exceptional America is and this is Reagan’s message to be communicated to the people. Here, as in many other places, Reagan uses the expression “divine plan” to soften the impact of his words, which basically claim that God created America for American with a special purpose. God has to be mentioned in the prophetic political narration, but the mentions have to be subtle and if possible, the connection made by the story recipient by connotations to certain expressions.

Mere mentions to God in speeches or writings, however, are not enough to establish the narrator as a prophet. The narrator could as well be characterized as “devout believer” or “preacher” or a number of other, different labels could be pasted on him. Forster uses Dostoevsky as an example of prophetic narration, because in him “characters and situations always stand for more than themselves; infinity attends them, though they remain individuals they expand to embrace it and summon it to embrace them.”¹⁴⁷⁰ These words could be used to describe Reagan as well, while his skills undoubtedly cannot match those of this Great Russian. But individuals are less likely to be seen as only themselves, since they are constituent

¹⁴⁶⁸ Reagan (18.2.1983) Remarks at the Conservative Political Action Conference Dinner
<http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1983/21883e.htm>

¹⁴⁶⁹ Reagan (4.5.1987) Remarks on Signing the Asian/Pacific American Heritage Week Proclamation
<http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1987/050487d.htm>

¹⁴⁷⁰ Forster (1983) p. 123

parts of America, and America itself brings infinity to individuals and individuals in turn to America. America is in Reagan's storytelling so otherworldly, and larger than life, outside our scope of experience, that it is able to assume the stance of a divine being and link individuals to infinity. In that way "the people [who] live on Main Street, U.S.A."¹⁴⁷¹ are turned into everybody and vice versa. John Doe becomes every American, and every America becomes one of the heroes Reagan constantly talked about. "And those who say we're in a time when there are no heroes, they just don't know where to look."¹⁴⁷²

In a State of the Union address, Reagan's first following the assassination attempt of John Hinckley on his life; Reagan illustrates the idolized meaning of ordinary Americans representing the entire nation. "Sick societies don't produce young men like Secret Service Agent Tim McCarthy who placed his body between mine and the man with the gun simply because he felt that's what his duty called him to do. [...] Sick societies don't make people like us so proud to be Americans and so very proud of our fellow citizens."¹⁴⁷³ Reagan was able to take such a tragic event as the assassination attempt and narratively use it as an oration on behalf of America. Naturally Reagan leaves out of the story the fact that the American society produced John Hinckley as well. Hinckley is left out of the story and at the same time left out of America. He is clearly an aberration which has no place in Reagan's mythical America, but it remains a fact that it is quite a narrative feat to turn a tragic event into something that once again glorifies America and as a by-product, made Reagan a hero that was for a long time almost unassailable by anyone.

Individuals are prophetic visions as well as narrator's creations, and their suitability to describe all of us is a central factor in linking us to the infinity by removing us from individual plane into the region where all the rest of humanity is able to join us, or we join them.¹⁴⁷⁴ Again I resort to Reagan's words about the Unknown Soldier, We may not know of this man's life, but we know of his character. We may not know his name, but we know his courage. He is the heart, the

¹⁴⁷¹ Reagan (19.7.1982) Remarks at a Rally Supporting the Proposed Constitutional Amendment for a Balanced Federal Budget. s. 939

¹⁴⁷² Reagan (27.4.1983) Remarks to Daily News Crime Fighter Award Winners in New York City <http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1983/42783a.htm>

¹⁴⁷³ Reagan (26.1.1982) Address Before a Joint Session of the Congress Reporting on the State of the Union. s. 78

¹⁴⁷⁴ Forster (1953) p. 122-124

spirit, and the soul of America.¹⁴⁷⁵ Thus any story world participant or character in a prophetic narration can become more than the actual person. And since Reagan moves constantly between the boundaries of story worlds within his story verse, occasionally taking the role of a heroic character in the stories he narrates, the narration itself provides him with prophetic qualities.

But a prophet is not a word endowed with positive connotations in the world of politics.

The trouble is that too many of the seers and prophets in Washington spend their time talking to each other and not to the American people. If a career in politics teaches one truth, it teaches this: over the long run it's the people who know, who understand, and who decide.¹⁴⁷⁶ As always Reagan himself uses the words "seer" and "prophet" as negative terms. These false prophets get their message wrong, because they are not connected to the American people. They listen to the wrong voice, that of the corrupted and inbred political world, which has been too far removed from normal people. In this Reagan follows the style of Jeremiah whose chief battle was against the false prophets whom Buber calls "court and public servants, professional speakers."¹⁴⁷⁷ False political prophets of Washington form a medium that tells people what the almost demigod of government has decreed, but they do not listen to the voice of the people. Reagan narratively positions himself differently. As for Jeremiah, for Reagan alike, these false prophets are the "worst enemies of his mission"¹⁴⁷⁸ He listens to the voice of God, and communicates His will straight to the people and listens to them in turn. The will of the people is then communicated to the government through Reagan. Government is just an object of false belief. It has no power over people but is a servant to them. The truth, the decision-making capabilities, power to make them, and the understanding are all located in the people.

Reagan never referred to himself as having prophetic qualities. But the prophets in the Bible as well seemed to shy away from using the word "prophet" about themselves. Prophetic books are attributed to fifteen different prophets and none of them ever referred to themselves as *nabi*. Amos disavowed the title and Micah even contrasted his own endowment of power with those of his contemporary

¹⁴⁷⁵ Reagan (25.5.1984) Remarks at a Ceremony Honoring an Unknown Serviceman of the Vietnam Conflict <http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1984/52584c.htm>

¹⁴⁷⁶ Reagan (4.10.1982) Remarks in Columbus to Members of Ohio Veterans Organizations. s. 1260

¹⁴⁷⁷ Buber (1949) p. 176

¹⁴⁷⁸ Ibid.

prophets and seers.¹⁴⁷⁹ Just as well as calling Reagan a prophetic politician, the label of the false prophet can be stuck on him. In ancient Israel a great importance was attached to dreams which were regarded as revelations of future events but the prophets never referred to dreams in their revelations and criticized the dreams of the false prophets severely.¹⁴⁸⁰ In Buber's words, from the mouth of the true prophet men cannot hear "what they wish to hear: they can only hear what they shall hear, that what is designed in this hour and set before them."¹⁴⁸¹

Dreams traditionally were not then a part of the true prophetic message. The message traditionally was more often than not something the people did not wish to hear. Very few of the traditional prophecies were such that they would have been in harmony with the dreams, hopes, and aspirations of the people. It was rather the false prophets who announced things "for the fulfilment of man's wishes. They "dream dreams" and recount them [...] certainly many of them are honest patriots – but that they brew out of the wishes and impulses, common to them and the people, the stupefying illusions."¹⁴⁸² Naturally the prophets who announced "welfare" in the form of *shalom* were popular among the people because we always prefer hearing the good news to bad but above all it was believed that the preaching of good things created good things.¹⁴⁸³ *Shalom* was seen to include well-being in all aspects, not only prosperity in a fertile land but also peace and victory in war. The order Yahweh had established in the worlds of both nature and international politics was interwoven with the moral order he looked for in his people.¹⁴⁸⁴

In a sense Reagan prophesied *shalom* for America. "Given strong leadership, time and a little bit of hope, the forces of good ultimately rally and triumph over evil."¹⁴⁸⁵ In retrospect this might be interpreted as an accurate prophecy, but such interpretations are not elements of this study. The important thing is that Reagan is willing and eager to vision the future, which can be reached through strong leadership over time. It is inevitable for Reagan's story logic that the good will prevail over evil. Reagan takes the prophetic stance initially in condemning the way things are in the present of the narration. But should the people accept his guidance

¹⁴⁷⁹ Blenkinsopp (1995) p. 128-129. See also Lindblom (1962) p. 107

¹⁴⁸⁰ Lindblom (1962) p. 201

¹⁴⁸¹ Buber (1949) p. 176

¹⁴⁸² Buber (1949) p. 179

¹⁴⁸³ Lindblom (1962) p. 203

¹⁴⁸⁴ Cohn (1993) p. 139

¹⁴⁸⁵ Reagan (8.7.1982) Address to Members of the British Parliament. s. 747

and message, the future will contain *shalom*, in it the American Dream will be actualized, under his leadership. It is not enough for the prophet to narrate the future, but also to unwaveringly lead his people into that future.

Let's reject the nonsense that America is doomed to decline, the world sliding toward disaster no matter what we do. Like death and taxes, the doomcriers will always be with us. And they'll always be wrong about America.¹⁴⁸⁶

Reagan disclaims the content of the type of narrative traditionally associated with prophetic figures, who throughout history have been just such “doom criers,” pointing out the faults within societies, and warning them where the road they have chosen leads. Reagan himself tells a similar prophetic message in many places, but in more positive terms. The optimism in Reagan's character characterizes his prophetic message as well, since he does not paint the picture of the ultimate suffering but only the path leading towards it and that is narrated as just the continuation of the current situation. There is always a promise of resurrection or recreation of the paradise lost, not only to be regained, but made even better and more perfect than it ever was. Reagan dissents all prophets with a negative message. “But our opponents' rhetoric of gloom and doom is nothing but a nightmare. It's time for them to wake up and look at the facts.”¹⁴⁸⁷ Reagan portrays himself as the only true prophet of his contemporary America in his story verse and only he among the prophets is and will be “right about America”. He wants to reserve the telling of prophetic narratives exclusively to him and disclaim counter-narratives in that genre. Reagan saw nothing as impossible in the glorious future of America, “There's no limit to the good we can do, for there's no limit to the goodness in America's heart and spirit.”¹⁴⁸⁸ When inflicting and initiating a change in politics, such as taking over the political leadership, the prophetic narration tends to focus on stories of the gloomy present, depicting it as a result of the people straying from the right path. We do not need to concern ourselves whether a deep and fundamental change has occurred or not. Even the illusion of political decision-making changing its direction is enough and this is relatively easy to portray by using a story world to contest the one of the previous administration. The importance is in staging the

¹⁴⁸⁶ Reagan (9.9.1982) Remarks at Kansas State University at the Alfred M. Landon Lecture Series on Public Issues. s. 1119-1120

¹⁴⁸⁷ Reagan (1.10.1984) Remarks at a Reagan-Bush Rally in Gulfport, Mississippi
<http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1984/100184e.htm>

¹⁴⁸⁸ Reagan (19.6.1985) Remarks at the Annual Convention of the United States Jaycees in Indianapolis, Indiana <http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1985/61985c.htm>

change of leadership to change the policies as well. Reagan wanted to bring back the faith in America, create a strong military, reduce taxation and revitalize the economy, or in his words, “to make America great again and let the eagle soar.”¹⁴⁸⁹ His era has been called the Reagan revolution and while it left America with its biggest budget deficit and national debt, we can still argue that there was no New Deal as the outcome of his politics. Yet, the age of Reagan created the foundation of US in military terms as an uncontested superpower. Threats to the freedoms Americans enjoyed were portrayed in his narration mostly during the campaigning for presidency but once he, or any other politician is in power, the narration tends to offer a more optimistic story where the threats have been left behind and the past instead of the present is contrasted with the future dreams.

My friends, our great nation has turned the corner. The shadows are behind us. Bright sunshine of hope and opportunity lies ahead. But I wouldn't take that for granted. So, let me just ask you: Do you feel better off than you did 4 years ago?¹⁴⁹⁰

There is always “bright sunshine” ahead but due to the nature of prophetic politics, it cannot be taken for granted. It depends upon the choices made in contemporary politics and re-evaluation of the status quo, whether it has gone in the right direction or not. In the case of a prophet only the future will tell whether his message was correct or truly worthy of belief. So, not every story about *shalom* is a false prophecy, and likewise all of those prophecies full of fire and brimstone are not “true” prophecies either. Even in the context of the Old Testament the true prophets gave false prophecies, they made mistakes. If the prophet predicts the future, only the future will show if his prophecy was correct.

Kenneth Burke uses Noah to illustrate this, “only because there was a flood does the Bible neglect to picture the morbidity of the man who, during many years of gloomy expectance, built the Ark.”¹⁴⁹¹ Naturally Noah did not as such communicate his vision and thus is not a prophet despite the fact that supposedly he was guided by divine powers. When it comes to prophetic leadership in the political sense the situation is somewhat reversed. Had there been no flood, Noah had been merely a fool. Only the flood confirmed his status as the interpreter of God’s will. Jeremiah argued that the distinction between a true and a false prophet is, if their

¹⁴⁸⁹ Reagan (3.9.1984) Remarks at a Reagan-Bush Rally in Cupertino, California
<http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1984/90384c.htm>

¹⁴⁹⁰ Reagan (26.9.1984) Remarks at the Annual Family Oktoberfest in Milwaukee, Wisconsin
<http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1984/92684d.htm>

¹⁴⁹¹ Burke (1968) p. 113

prophecies become true or not.¹⁴⁹² In political prophecies this is not important, since at the time of hearing the prophecy, the audience has no way of making the distinction. In the case of a prophetic political leader, the eventual truthfulness of his prophecy does not matter. If only he has influenced people to act and behave in the manner he has advocated, he has been able to reach the goals of his policies. If he constructs the prophecy in a suitable manner to begin with, in an exaggerated example, the fact that the world did not end, can be credited to his policies, and the fact that he was able to turn the evil ways of the nation or the people to the good and therefore achieved redemption for the people.

Ochs and Capps argue that a teller may sequence his narratives as experiences, which are situated in an “*unrealized* past as well as unrealized present and future realms.”¹⁴⁹³ The teller can therefore naturally sequence a chain of events, that have never happened, nor are likely to ever happen, but by taking a moral stance, *should* or *could* have happened either earlier, or after the narration. The difference between this type of a narrative and a prophetic narrative actualizes itself in the future only if the event sequence *does* take place. If the unrealized future becomes realized, that is things happen in the way the teller describes, do we retrospectively endow the narrative with the qualities associated with a prophecy. If things do not happen in the way “predicted” in the narrative, we tend to read the narrative as utopian at best or misguided at worst. But the idea of an unrealized past and future helps us understand the Norman Rockwell picture Reagan painted of the America of his youth and the even more shining future just ahead of America. Narratives can occur in story worlds which never have been but *should* have been or out of necessity are depicted as something that will be. “It's an exciting time to live and to live here in Norman Rockwell's America and all across the world.”¹⁴⁹⁴

So, there is no way of telling, whether the *shalom* of Reagan was a true prophecy. And unlike the prophecies of the antiquity that dealt with matters of Israel's existence, the eventual truth-value of a contemporary political prophecy is inconsequential. Since prophetic politics is a tool of political leadership, the

¹⁴⁹² Buber (1949) p. 177-178

¹⁴⁹³ Ochs-Capps (2001) p. 165. Italics in the original.

¹⁴⁹⁴ Reagan (14.3.1985) Remarks and a Question-and-Answer Session During a White House Briefing for Members of the Magazine Publishers Association
<http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1985/31485a.htm>

importance of a prophecy concerns only its effect on the story recipients in making the changes in the “here and now.”

4.2. PROPHETIC GENRES

Nations are born in the hearts of poets; they prosper and die in the hands of politicians.¹⁴⁹⁵

-Mohammad Allama Iqbal

A very important part of understanding the prophetic message is that as he articulates the vision of revelation of God to his community he often needs to interpret something nonverbal in a verbal form. He has to story his vision, so to say. Thus the message communicated may include material from tradition and the prophet’s own reflection. These are presented not as what some past authority has said but what the deity now says.¹⁴⁹⁶ This allows for the prophet to be not only the mouth of God, but he has to create a story about the things in the vision and narrate it aloud. To do that, he has to rely on his knowledge of the narrative tradition he is a part of, and attempt to use it to his best abilities. The prophet becomes the narrator, and he has to choose from different genres the types most suitable for the occasion and the message. While he has all the aforementioned narratives of political justification at his disposal in telling his stories, this subchapter discusses the genres available for the prophet within the prophetic genre itself. I shall argue that many different types of narrative archetypes can be used, and still remain within the flexible boundaries of prophetic narration.

Forster sets aside fantasy and prophecy from other types of stories, but makes a distinction between them as well. “They are alike in having gods, and unlike in the gods they have. There is in both the sense of mythology which differentiates them from other [stories]”¹⁴⁹⁷ For fantasies, the “gods” are fauns, dryads, fairies, and muses, but for prophecies the gods are otherworldly, whether they are the deities of Scandinavia or India, or Yahweh or Allah. Forster sees prophecy not as foretelling the future, but rather as a tone of voice, which may imply any religion, or as he says; “any of the faiths that have haunted humanity – Christianity, Buddhism, dualism, Satanism, or the mere raising of human love and

¹⁴⁹⁵ Iqbal (1992) p. 77

¹⁴⁹⁶ Hvidt (2007) p. 54

¹⁴⁹⁷ Forster (1953) p. 103

hatred to such a power that their normal receptacles no longer contain them.”¹⁴⁹⁸ For prophecy, in the sense used by Forster, it does not matter which faith lies behind the narrative, and this same applies to prophetic politics. To only define a prophet, we need not only be concerned with the prophet’s message, but also concentrate on “the accent of his voice, his song.”¹⁴⁹⁹ But for a political prophet the message carries a considerable meaning as well, because along with the tone of voice, there has to exist the political vision to strive for as well. Dinesh D’Souza says that Reagan “spoke in poetry and governed in prose. [...] he used his skills not to demonstrate his own eloquence but to rally support to his ideas and chose to talk about principles and let the ones who he had won over worry about the details of policies.”¹⁵⁰⁰ In this sense Reagan was a true prophet and a visionary, because his politics was all about the vision and the principles he narrated, and he did not spend a lot of time worrying how that vision would be turned into a reality. He stuck with prophesying a glorious future for America, and that was the essence of his political leadership.

Kelly argues that the First Great Awakening of the 1740’s brought about a new fixture to the American religious scene; the revivalist who brought the aspect of religious imagination to life. The revivalist was the emergence of a new type of American prophet, who used as his vessel of prophecy the Scriptures, ” not so much as a conclusive set of rules for Christian practices, as an immense thesaurus of images, parables, and cautionary texts syncopated by revivalist rhetoric and designed to strike a chord in the hearer’s imagination.”¹⁵⁰¹ So, preached Scriptures, as stories told, have been a part of the American religious life for a long time. The multitude of stories preached, also gave rise to different interpretations of the stories, and this paved the way to establishing new denominations, according to how the Scriptures had been interpreted in the process of storytelling.

What makes the allegorical Scriptures so efficient is that they can be interpreted according to the will of the narrator? The allegorical qualities of the text can be exploited to suit his needs better than a more straightforward text. This is one powerful character of most of the texts we hold sacred in our Occidental religions. They are written in such a manner that certain ambiguousness stays in them, for

¹⁴⁹⁸ Forster (1953) p. 116

¹⁴⁹⁹ Forster (1953) p. 124-125. It needs to be emphasized that ”the voice” does not in Forster’s parlance mean necessarily anything produced by vocal chords but is something that can be found as “a tone” within the text as well.

¹⁵⁰⁰ D’Souza (1997) p. 30-31

¹⁵⁰¹ Kelly (1984) p. 71

example just in allegories, and this allows a freer interpretation of the text itself. Thus a sacred text can be utilized by different people for different purposes by exploiting its openness to different interpretative techniques. When a text is ambiguous enough in its meaning and open to various interpretations, it can be used for numerous contradictory purposes so that the narrator in the course of his narration provides the narratee the preferred interpretation ready-made. A highly allegorical text is plurivocal and easiest to pluck out of its context and endow it with a different meaning to better back up a political pursuit.

Besides using the proper texts and interpreting them effectively the language used has to be suitable as well. The language itself does not need to be strictly religious. Daniel Boorstin argues that Americans have a special way of talking or using language. They have the opposite of small talk as an inherent quality. The “tall talk” means not only half-truths or half-lies, but unusual, remarkable, and extravagant as well, and this is in turn used to describe the entire American experience, as it is seen by the Americans themselves. The language for Americans had to be “elastic enough to describe the unusual as if it were commonplace, the extravagant as if it were normal.”¹⁵⁰² Reagan uses this particular way of talking in his public addresses continuously, and of the reasons why tall talk functions so well for him and other prophetic politicians, is that it “blurred the edges of fact and fiction.”¹⁵⁰³ Tall talk is a perfect way to communicate visions of the future and mythical deeds in the past. Lincoln notes that in Homer’s “Iliad” the stuff of *mythos* is always “a speech of power, performed at length, in public, by one in a position of authority [...] an assertive discourse of power and authority that represents itself as something to be believed and obeyed.”¹⁵⁰⁴ Myths are then powerful speeches and to communicate them, extravagance and power should be used as well.

The other particular quality of the use of language Boorstin offers as characteristically American is the “booster talk,” which he terms the “language of anticipation.”¹⁵⁰⁵ Not surprisingly, this is another feature prominent in Reagan’s storytelling. Booster talk is more than the language used by coaches before numerous sports events around the country. When it is connected to prophetic politics, it takes simply the shape of using the present indicative, instead of future

¹⁵⁰² Boorstin (1965) p. 290

¹⁵⁰³ Boorstin (1965) p. 290

¹⁵⁰⁴ Lincoln (1999) p. 17

¹⁵⁰⁵ Boorstin (1965) p. 296

subjunctive in anticipation. Things which may come to be are discussed as if they had already occurred. Using this mechanism in speech a prophetic politician is able to depict a glorious future, which lies at the end of the road he wishes the country to follow, as if it were really actualized already. An example from Reagan could be “America has always been greatest when we dared to be great. We can reach for greatness again. We can follow our dreams to distant stars.”¹⁵⁰⁶ Booster talk enables the future to be depicted with certainty, as if it were set in stone. Reagan preached the eventual fall of communism for decades, as the most prominent example of his booster talk. Boorstin claims that “as tall talk confused fact and fiction in interestingly uncertain propositions, so booster talk confused present and future.”¹⁵⁰⁷ The skilful combination of both gives the political prophet the tools to manipulate the world of politics into the type of story world he wants to depict, at the same time narrate the future as vague or certain depending upon his political aims.

These uses of very profane language already serve to show, that prophetic characteristics can be found in unexpected places. It has to be stated, nevertheless, that the prophetic narration does not have to be confined solely to the traditional storyline considered prophetic either since, according to Frye,

The oracle develops a number of subsidiary forms, notably the commandment, the parable, the aphorism, and the prophecy. Out of these, whether strung loosely together as they are in Koran or carefully edited and arranged as they are in the Bible, the scripture or sacred book takes shape.¹⁵⁰⁸

It other words, it is not so important for the message to belong to a strict genre; because the tone of voice in prophecy makes story recipients recognize it for what it is. The scripture or the Americanized myth, just like any metanarrative or master narrative, is put together from many different ingredients. Reagan’s narration uses a multitude of parables, and occasionally it seems that his entire storytelling is built upon the use of parables. Ricoeur sees special meaning in them, especially in the case of those told by Jesus, or about him, because of their essential profaneness. Everything a parable contains is ordinary, but its “narrative form is animated by a metaphorical process that transfers its meaning in the direction of existential situations that constitute the parables ultimate referent.”¹⁵⁰⁹

¹⁵⁰⁶ Reagan (25.1.1984) Address Before a Joint Session of the Congress on the State of the Union
<http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1984/12584e.htm>

¹⁵⁰⁷ Boorstin (1965) p. 296

¹⁵⁰⁸ Frye (1957) p. 56, 315

¹⁵⁰⁹ Ricoeur (1995) p. 57

Parables are created around a plot or a *mythos*, in the Aristotelian sense, and the aim of the parable is yet again to open up a new dimension of reality signified by the plot; “the parable redescribes life through the fiction of its story” and “is mimetic because it is mythic.”¹⁵¹⁰ Despite their apparent profaneness and tendency to dwell upon everyday matters parables are able by their narrative function to create story worlds, where the ultimate referent of the parable is actualized.

Now, this is a comparison that isn't always made, but politicians and clergy do have a lot in common. We both have to make speeches and keep our audiences interested, and I know I'm running a risk in telling members of the clergy a story about their own profession, but maybe it will be new to some of you. It has to do with a young minister who was very disturbed because sometime, particularly on those hot Sunday or summer mornings -- Sunday mornings, he'd see his group nodding off while he was preaching his sermon. And he told about his distress to a more experienced and older clergyman who said that he'd had that same problem, but he'd found an answer to it. He said, “When you see them and their eyes beginning to close,” he said, “you just insert a line in your sermon and say, ‘Last night, I held another man's wife in my arms.’” [Laughter] And he said, “They'll wake up.” [Laughter] Well, it happened. There came a hot Sunday morning, and there they were and the eyes were closing, and remembering, he said the line: “Last night, I held in my arms a woman who was not my wife.” Well, the first minister had told him that after he got them awake, he was to then say, “That woman was my dear mother.” And this young fellow said the line and then said, “I can't remember who she was.”¹⁵¹¹

It does not matter that many of Reagan's parables are down to earth and profane on their surface. Even jokes and funny anecdotes can be put to use by the prophetic politician. If some story makes the story recipients smile or laugh out loud, does not mean that a prophetic politician should not use it. Just the opposite holds true. Our contemporary culture pays homage to laughter as a part of the human condition, and the prophetic politician fully in touch with the spirit of the society, cannot assume the role of an austere and unforgiving, even judgemental, Old Testament prophet.

Profane and mundane stories have their place in prophetic narration. As Lyotard notes, the entire Old Testament “is a juxtaposition of little stories. [...] These stories touch upon the most ordinary aspects of life. Far from being heroes, the protagonists are petty tribal chiefs or heads of families, shepherds threatened with scarcity.”¹⁵¹² The Bible is the most sacred text of Christianity and Judaism and it still uses stories of ordinary people to make its moral points. The ordinary aspects of life

¹⁵¹⁰ Ricoeur (1995) p. 57

¹⁵¹¹ Reagan (29.10.1985) Remarks to Religious Leaders at a White House Meeting on Tax Reform <http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1985/102985b.htm>

¹⁵¹² Lyotard (1993b) p, 196

connect us with the sacred. Old Testament stories, like Reagan's narratives as well, are very down-to-earth in a certain manner. Both are about the everyday lives of the people they are concerned with, in one instance the Israelites and in the other American, the "new Israelites." There are heroes in both metanarratives but in both instances the heroes are "everymen." The protagonists become heroes, if indeed they ever do so, by the grace of God being bestowed upon them. It is an outside force which creates greatness and makes ordinary men great leaders and figures. "I never thought of myself as a great man, just a man committed to great ideas."¹⁵¹³ Whether it is the idea of God or Freedom, which creates great men, the process is nevertheless the same.

Even when men do not become great, they are heroes, quiet men of work and toil, whether American factory workers or the poor shepherds of the Old Testament. They are the material that composes the Americanized myths; they are average men who have been mythified in the process of narration to become powerful symbols. As Erickson argues, Reagan tells stories to make his points. "He speaks in parables [...] the American dream is itself a grand parable that translates history into an epic of mythological proportions. This constant transformation of political material into stories is, in fact, the chief distinction of Reagan's rhetoric."¹⁵¹⁴ But it needs to be stated, that it is a two-way process. Stories are at the same time turned into political material. Parables or anecdotes that seem apolitical become political as they reveal "truths" about the world.

Proverbs abound in Reagan's narration as well. They are both profane and sacred by nature. With a profane proverb I wish to imply to those proverbs, used within a certain culture, that derive from "old folk's sayings," and with a sacred proverb to those, that have their origin within a certain religious discourse, for example quotations from the biblical Book of Proverbs. Even these can be considered as a part of prophetic narratives, since the tradition of transmitting the prophecy orally, lead to the practice, that several of the prophetic sayings were given such a form, in which they could be easily kept in the mind of the hearers.¹⁵¹⁵ Proverb was thus an excellent medium for a prophecy. Blenkinsopp sees that proverbs play a significant role in regulating social relations, and more importantly,

¹⁵¹³ Reagan (1993) in Noonan (2001) p. 317.

¹⁵¹⁴ Erickson (1985) p. 5

¹⁵¹⁵ Lindblom (1962) p. 160

in sustaining common values.¹⁵¹⁶ Thus, creating a civil religious story verse needs proverbs because they both sustain and communicate those values which are perceived as common to all. Proverbs play a part in allowing the story recipient to move more fluently between story worlds.

This happens partially because, as Ricoeur argues, the intention of a proverb is to “throw up a bridge between the point of view of the faith and the experience of a person outside the faith circle.”¹⁵¹⁷ As metaphors go, this one about a bridge is suitable, because it implies the possibility to cross the bridge in either direction. Person of faith can enter the profane world of politics with a parable, and a secular person can get drawn by the help of a parable from his experience-based beliefs into the realm of the religious. By telling a suitable parable, or even using a proverb, which had certain meaning to a particular group in a certain occasion to a particular audience, Reagan was able to draw people to enter his story worlds whether they were at that occasion political, religious or mythical. Proverbs commonly point out some specific moral lesson. The importance of taking a moral stance is crucial when particular lived experiences are turned into guidelines for the story recipients to conduct themselves in similar situations in the future. Such narratives are able to provide moral guidance for overcoming obstacles and achieving goodness both for both the individual, and also to the community one belongs to.¹⁵¹⁸

The aforementioned types of narratives are not commonly recognized as religious in their nature. However, one often overlooked type of religious narration in terms of prophecy and often the most commonly used is prayer. Ochs and Capps treat prayers as theological, and moreover, conversational form of narrative. The prayer begins with a preface, where the attention on people present, and supposedly God’s as well, are secured with a summons. Prayers provide setting, introduce a reportable and problematic event, articulate consequent events or circumstances, and close with a coda.¹⁵¹⁹ The conversational aspect is undeterminable, since most of the people do not supposedly actually enter deep conversations with God, but the mere fact of them starting a dialogue, or rather opening the possibility for one, is enough. Since prayers can be held not only in privacy, but in a group such as a congregation of attendees of a prayer breakfast, or even on a nationally broadcasted TV program,

¹⁵¹⁶¹⁵¹⁶ Blenkinsopp (1995) p. 28

¹⁵¹⁷ Ricoeur (1995) p. 59

¹⁵¹⁸ Ochs-Capps (2001) p. 225-226

¹⁵¹⁹ Ochs-Capps (2001) p. 225-228

the element of solitude is further lifted and interaction takes place on a multiparty level. Prayers both communal and private nevertheless attempt to summon God into a dialogic relationship. Furthermore, in communal prayer “those present, prayed for, and prayed to are brought together.”¹⁵²⁰ Or, in the words of Reagan, “The public expression through prayer of our faith in God is a fundamental part of our American heritage and a privilege.”¹⁵²¹ Prayer brings the entire community into a union and strengthens the feeling of togetherness.

I'll confess that I've been a little afraid to suggest what I'm going to suggest-- I'm more afraid not to--that we begin our crusade joined together in a moment of silent prayer. God bless America.¹⁵²²

This is from a speech fittingly renamed as “Time to Recapture our Destiny,” delivered at the Republican National Convention when Ronald Reagan accepted the party nomination for president. When quoted here, the text does not seem as radical as at the moment it was presented. Reagan led the Republican National Convention into a prayer with bowed heads which he ended not with amen, but by asking blessings for America. The event was played on national television, and thus millions of Americans were shown how a presidential candidate turned his campaign into a “crusade,” and linked his personal religious vision with the party’s political destiny. Such a blend of religion and party politics was almost unheard of even in America. Reagan arguably is the person who started among the US presidents the trend of leading the audience and the public in general into prayers in their speeches. As Mika Aaltola writes, the element of prayer lends a sense of introspection and mystical experience to these speeches.¹⁵²³ Many other presidents had used prayers as part of their speeches but leading the audience into prayer was a novelty. But America was to hear a lot of similar concoctions later on during the Reagan presidency. The number of public prayers by Reagan grew constantly during his presidency. While the number of Biblical references and mentions of God remained relatively constant, the rise in the number of public prayers during the second term as compared to the first was an interesting phenomenon.

¹⁵²⁰ Ochs-Capps (2001) p. 231

¹⁵²¹ Reagan (8.3.1983) Message to the Congress Transmitting the Proposed Constitutional Amendment on Prayer in Schools <http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1983/30883c.htm>
¹⁵²² Reagan (17.7.1980) <http://www.reaganlibrary.com/reagan/speeches/speech.asp?spid=18>

¹⁵²³ Aaltola (2007) p. 7

Reagan believed in intercessory prayer which gave him “a strength that I otherwise would not possess.”¹⁵²⁴ Reagan claims to “have benefited from it. I have, of course, added my own prayers to the point that sometimes I wonder if the Lord doesn’t say, “here he comes again.””¹⁵²⁵ Reagan saw prayers as having a meaning, and not only in a political but a truly spiritual sense, but naturally he did not shy away from using narratives in the form of prayer to advance his policies as well. Prayers had a power for him.

It is said that prayer can move mountains. Well, it’s certainly moved the hearts and minds of Americans in their times of trial and helped them to achieve a society that, for all its imperfections, is still the envy of the world and the last, best hope of mankind. And just as prayer has helped us as a nation, it helps us as individuals. In nearly all our lives, there are moments when our prayers [...] help to see us through and keep on the right path. In fact, prayer is one of the few things in this world that hurts no one and sustains the spirit of millions.¹⁵²⁶

America is destined for greatness in Reagan’s narration but it can only be achieved through belief in God. He is the decisive factor that has brought America through every great challenge, because Americans have prayed for him in those times of great stress. Reagan both stresses that anyone should not be too proud to pray, for pride in itself is a sin, and that God certainly listens and fulfils the prayers of the American people. God has helped and continues to help America in a special way as the American’s try to reach the American Dream according to Reagan’s vision.

We have become too proud to pray to pray to the God that made us. Well, isn’t it time to say, “We are not too proud to pray.” We face great challenges in this country but we’ve faced great challenges before and conquered them. What carried us through was a willingness to seek power and protection from One much greater than ourselves, to turn back to Him and to trust in His mercy. Without His help, America will not go forward.¹⁵²⁷

Often prayers are used to request for divine assistance in one form or other. The one praying asks for strength, guidance or a concrete act. Petition is one form of prayer, and can take the role of a direct petition, in such a case where petition concerns oneself, or the larger community one belongs to.

And because faith for us is not an empty word, we invoke the power of prayer to spread the spirit of peace. We ask protection for our soldiers who

¹⁵²⁴ Reagan (13.10.1983) Remarks and a Question-and-Answer Session With Women Leaders of Christian Religious Organizations

<http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1983/101383d.htm>

¹⁵²⁵ Reagan (2001) p. 23. From a letter to Sister Mary Ignatius

¹⁵²⁶ Reagan (18.9.1982) Radio Address to the Nation on Prayer

<http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1982/91882b.htm>

¹⁵²⁷ Reagan (3.2.1983) Remarks at the Annual National Prayer Breakfast

<http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1983/20383a.htm>

are guarding peace tonight -- from frigid outposts in Alaska and the Korean demilitarized zone to the shores of Lebanon.¹⁵²⁸

Often a desired future event is narrated in a prayer, as when Reagan's prays for strength and success in his upcoming summit meetings. These took place in public addresses as well as in the privacy of Reagan's diary. Just prior to the Geneva summit Reagan wrote down a simple prayer "Lord I hope I'm ready & not over trained"¹⁵²⁹ Often the public invocations of prayer were more eloquent, but in both, the acceptance of the American agenda by the Soviets, can be seen as the desired event. When, as in the case of the "Evil empire" speech, Reagan prays on behalf of the Soviets, of later for Gorbachev, the prayer can be considered an intercession on behalf of the one prayed for. Third most common type of prayer is praise and thanksgiving. In many cases these different types of prayers are combined in one way or another and the outcome of this is a more complex narrative to emerge from the act of praying. The narrative and the prayer interpenetrate, since narrative emerges through, and is inflected for prayer, and the prayer in turn takes on features of a narrative¹⁵³⁰

America was founded by people who believed that God was their rock of safety. He is ours. I recognize we must be cautious in claiming that God is on our side, but I think it's all right to keep asking if we're on His side.¹⁵³¹

The choice of words is essential to note here. American's must only "be cautious in claiming that God is on their side". Reagan does not say that the claim should not be made. God is, according to his story logic, then on American side in some issues at least. It is necessary to check and recheck that America does not stray from God's plan for it, but once righteousness is reconfirmed by this self-evaluation, such claims about Divine back-up can be made. In Reagan's stories, God was unquestionably on the side of the settlers, and as long as America remains true to its original set of values and belief, He continues to provide safety for America. This is not an ordinary politician speaking, but rather one attempting to draft a new political theology. The storyline is closer to a preacher or a prophet interpreting the will of God.

¹⁵²⁸ Reagan (24.12.1983) Radio Address to the Nation on Christmas
<http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1983/122483a.htm>

¹⁵²⁹ Reagan (2007) p. 369 Diary entry for 18.11.1985

¹⁵³⁰ Ochs-Capps (2001) p. 231-239

¹⁵³¹ Reagan (25.1.1984) Address Before a Joint Session of the Congress on the State of the Union
<http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1984/12584e.htm>

An early attempt to articulate the relationship between God and America was made by Abraham Lincoln, who once told visiting clergy, that there was no reason to worry whether God was on his side or not, because “the Lord is *always* on the side of the *right*” and therefore his constant prayer was that “I and *this nation* should be on the Lord’s side.”¹⁵³² Lincoln at least expressed anxiety about his and his nation’s position *vis á vis* God. Wilson claims that Lincoln profoundly articulated the moral dilemmas of the nation.¹⁵³³ Reagan on the other hand did not see any moral dilemmas in his mythical America. Since God is on the right side, Reagan asserts that as long as America is on the side of the Lord, all its actions are permissible because it remains on the side that is right.

They [the soldiers who died in Grenada] were not afraid to stand up for their country or, no matter how difficult and slow the journey might be, to give to others that last, best hope of a better future. We cannot and will not dishonor them now and the sacrifices they've made by failing to remain as faithful to the cause of freedom and the pursuit of peace as they have been. I will not ask you to pray for the dead, because they're safe in God's loving arms and beyond need of our prayers. I would like to ask you all -- wherever you may be in this blessed land -- to pray for these wounded young men and to pray for the bereaved families of those who gave their lives for our freedom. God bless you, and God bless America.¹⁵³⁴

The entire Reagan speech to the nation on prime time television, from which this quotation is picked out of, gives us an example of Reagan’s storytelling at its best, combining patriotism and idealism with passion, and most importantly, prayer. The events in Grenada were some of the most important during Reagan’s presidency in his process of creating public faith. This speechmaking and storytelling at the crucial moment was a powerful expression on behalf of the civil religion. Reagan combined patriotism and the sacrifices made, and lead the entire country into a prayer assuming the role of a priest. At moments like this when Reagan refuses to only narrate the events, but wants to play a more active role as a religious figure, are the crucial moments when the nature of his prophetic way of policymaking is at its clearest form.

One of my favourite passages in the Bible is the promise God gives us in second Chronicles: “If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn away from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will

¹⁵³² Lincoln. Cited in Meacham (2006) p. 24

¹⁵³³ Wilson (1979) p. 12

¹⁵³⁴ Reagan (27.10.1983) Address to the Nation on Events in Lebanon and Grenada
<http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1983/102783b.htm>

heal their land.” That promise is the hope of America and of all our people.¹⁵³⁵ Reagan’s quote refers to King Solomon building a temple for God, and God choosing it as his house, so that His eyes and heart shall be perpetually there. Because of that God’s eyes are open, and His ears attentive to prayers made in that place.¹⁵³⁶ In Reagan’s narration God will listen and hear and fulfil the prayers of Americans, if they only humble themselves in prayer, just because America has become the new temple built for God. America has become a sanctified shrine in the shape of a New Jerusalem, and all its citizens need to do is pray and cast aside their sinful ways and God shall perpetually reside among them. William P. Clark claims that Reagan’s favourite prayer was the Universal Peace Prayer of Francis and that he had often shared this prayer with Reagan during the presidency. “Lord, make me an instrument of your peace... where there is doubt, let me sow faith. Where there is despair, let me sow hope. Where there is darkness, let me sow light.”¹⁵³⁷ Reagan saw himself as a man of peace and that was the gist of his favourite prayer as well.

While I have discussed actual prayers in political narration in depth, it has to be said that other forms of narration can be utilized similarly. Mika Aaltola writes that “liturgical language about democracy, free elections, human rights, liberty, and freedom [...] bears close affinity to the prayer as a form of speech: It appeals to something higher in repetitive manner without containing any more diverse functions.”¹⁵³⁸ These liturgies of American values utilize again the acknowledged words and stories, but do not give any more tangible meanings. Even the prophetic books of the Bible are not entire prophetic utterances, but put together by collectors from various materials; “the fundamental elements were oracles, other sayings, and larger prophetic compositions and, in addition, short narratives about episodes in the life of the prophets.”¹⁵³⁹ Very multifaceted narrative material was used to create a unified whole and this aspect has to be comprehended to study the prophetic “genres.”

Thus, prophetic politics is not fixed to certain particular genre in order to be operable. As a matter of fact, one of the central characteristics of prophetic political

¹⁵³⁵ Reagan (6.5.1982) Remarks at a White House Ceremony in Observance of National Day of Prayer. s. 575

¹⁵³⁶ Chronicles 7: 11-16

¹⁵³⁷ Clark. Cited in Kengor (2004) p. 279

¹⁵³⁸ Aaltola (2007) p. 95

¹⁵³⁹ Lindblom (1962) p. 278

storytelling is the ambiguousness of the central character of the story, and the ambivalent state of the story itself as being situated between genres. Frye writes that “the tragic hero is typically on top of the wheel of fortune, halfway between human society on the ground and something greater in the sky. Prometheus, Adam, and Christ hang between heaven and earth, between a world of paradisiacal freedom and the world of bondage.”¹⁵⁴⁰ This metaphor of a wheel of fortune is fitting for prophetic politics, if one can envision the wheel as being able to turn each way once it reaches the perilous equilibrium at the very top. When America is cast as the hero of the story, the prophetic politician as a narrator can portray the society teetering at the point on top of the wheel of fortune at each moment. Citizens are cast as the machinery, which spins the wheel, and has a say in which way the wheel will turn. Each moment is a moment of choice, and if the right choice is made, the movement goes in the right direction for the golden future to be fulfilled.

At the same time the genre of the story itself is undecided. If the citizenry makes the wrong decision, the story may turn out to follow the characteristic path of tragic storyline, where the hero, America, will have an eventual downfall. If the right choice is made, the story continues as romance, and the wheel merely gains more momentum towards the future. In prophetic politics the story told has to be left open for changes of direction and of the genre itself. That is why the fall of the Soviet Union in peaceful way could be depicted as comedy. Had there been a nuclear war, and had America survived, then the story would have been romance. If America had crumbled instead of the Soviet Union, the story could have been told as a tragedy, where some flaw brought forth the downfall of the hero. Prophetic policymaking has to tell a network of stories, which are not easily labelled as belonging to this or that genre. Instead of telling one story, the prophetic politician has to be prepared to tell different stories, should the need arise. The ability of the story to change its genre after every decision is crucial to prophetic politics, because the knots in the storyline may demand an alteration on the prophecy as well. If a vote is cast and a “wrong” decision is made, the prophecy may turn towards highlighting the gloomy visions of future instead of the awaiting glory. It is at these moments when a sunny vision may turn after all into fire and brimstone.

Tomorrow we can vote to go forward with an America of momentum, or back to an America of malaise; go forward with an economy that's robust, or

¹⁵⁴⁰ Frye (1957) p. 207

back to an economy that went bust; go forward with morale up, jobs up, and inflation and taxes down, or back to seeing things the other way around.¹⁵⁴¹

So, to sum up, there are a multitude of different genres at the prophet's disposal, and he is not limited to strictly prophesying, in the rigid sense of the word, when he uses religion or religion-based myths as the foundation of his story world creation. I have just wanted to give a few examples here, but when the "tone of voice" is correct, the prophetic politician can turn almost any type of narrative to work on his behalf, when he is articulating his prophecy. Ricoeur notes that there is a polarity between tradition and prophecy within the Hebraic domain. Reagan's religious story claims to rest on "Judeo-Christian tradition," and thus this notion cannot pass us by. What Ricoeur claims is that tradition rests upon the founding events and certain liberating acts, for which the exodus is paradigmatic; to assure God's love and stability, while prophecy wants to overthrow these bases of certitude.¹⁵⁴² Tradition provides certainties and prophecy erodes them. But the interplay between certain and uncertain is what as a whole gives tension to the prophetic message.

Forster claims that in order for the prophetic aspect to succeed, there is need to for two qualities; humility and the suspension of humour. Without humility we shall not hear the actual voice of the prophet and we see a "figure of fun instead of his glory." If one does not discount the humour, "like the school-children in the Bible, one cannot help laughing at the prophet."¹⁵⁴³ Therefore in order for a prophetic message to be seen as one, the audience must participate in the creation of the narrator's persona as a prophet, or actively read the message as prophetic. The prophetic message has to reach back, either in time or to some primal feelings. It has to be "spasmodically realist" and provide us with a sensation of a song or of sound.¹⁵⁴⁴ This idea is ever present in Reagan's storytelling as well.

A settler pushes west and sings a song, and the song echoes out forever and fills the unknowing air. It is the American sound. It is hopeful, big-hearted, idealistic, daring, decent, and fair. That's our heritage, that's our song. We sing it still.¹⁵⁴⁵

¹⁵⁴¹ Reagan (5.11.1984) Address to the Nation on the Eve of the Presidential Election
<http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1984/110584e.htm>

¹⁵⁴² Ricoeur (1995) p. 56

¹⁵⁴³ Forster (1953) p. 117

¹⁵⁴⁴ Forster (1953) p. 126

¹⁵⁴⁵ Reagan (21.1.1985) Inaugural Address

<http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1985/12185a.htm>

It is not only Reagan's message, which is a prophecy, but the entire American history is a prophecy in action, a prophecy as a part of the Divine plan that is carried out and fulfilled while we are watching. If we wish to read or listen to Reagan without listening to the "song" or the "voice" embedded in and underlining his message, a lot of it will be lost. It depends upon the story recipient whether he wants to read the message as an old man yarning away a quixotic story about an America, that has never existed, and cities shining on hills, and maybe even add to the message the suspicion or early stages of dementia, or interpret it as prophecy, a powerful epic romance, at the end of which victory awaits. When the spiritual theme is acknowledged in Reagan's narration, it becomes essentially more difficult and immensely more important to understand it politically and stick into any particular genre either. There are numbers of spiritual themes as well as numerous genres blended together, the most evident of which is the battle of good against evil, and these have to be taken into account to see the depth of Reagan's prophetic political storytelling. We are not able to grasp the actual words of the "song" which makes his message a prophecy but we can have some idea of the tune that carries them.¹⁵⁴⁶

Now that I have shown that a skilled political narrator is able to use a wide variety of different types of narratives, prophetic and other alike, I shall discuss more in depth one particular genre of prophetic narration, which has shaped American political rhetoric from the Puritan times to today. This is the American jeremiad and while I elaborate the concept, I shall simultaneously argue that Reagan distanced himself somewhat from the jeremiadic style with his visions of glorious future without lurking threats to the American Dream.

4.2.2. THE AMERICAN JEREMIAD

They'll be telling millions of people the true story about hope and better tomorrow. And we'll be telling them about America.¹⁵⁴⁷
-Ronald Wilson Reagan

While Jeremiad is a traditional form of prophetic talk, a particular tone of voice, Sacvan Bercovich argued that the Americans have been able to produce a distinctly their own prophetic mode of expression called the "American jeremiad". This would

¹⁵⁴⁶ See Forster (1953) p. 127-131 to read more about this idea. He interprets "Moby Dick" as prophetic and contrasts it to a boring yarn it otherwise would have been.

¹⁵⁴⁷ Reagan (20.5.1981) Remarks at a White House Reception for Members of the Advertising Council. s. 447

serve as a genre of stories as well. For Bercovich the jeremiad is the single most important contribution of the entire United States of America to political rhetoric. The jeremiad unfolds in three consequent phases; “a delineation of sins, a warning of God’s awful judgement, and always an offer of renewed hope for the nation should people return like prodigal sons and daughters to the path of obedience to God’s divine plan.”¹⁵⁴⁸ One notable difference between the Puritan jeremiad and the consequent versions was that the Puritans saw as their undertaking to prepare the New World as the place where God’s Kingdom was to be established. They had an apocalyptic worldview and thought to be living in the end of times.¹⁵⁴⁹ This naturally added fieriness to the oratory of the jeremiad as well as a sense of urgency.

But as Jesus did not return, the jeremiad had to take a not so immanent view of the New World and the role of its inhabitants. The jeremiad as a narrative form was passed on in the tradition. Supposedly in each generation the definition of the crises and guidance to the road of renewal takes a particular shape and speaks to the social contexts of that particular time-period. The American Puritan jeremiad was the first English-language genre developed in the New World and had a uniquely American twist in it. Bercovich describes that the new version of jeremiad was somewhat different from the original jeremiad, which was “an immemorial mode of lament over the corrupt ways of the world. [...] [Puritans] transformed it into a vehicle of social continuity and control. The lament continued, but here it served to celebrate the trials of a people in covenant.”¹⁵⁵⁰ The American Jeremiad was then a highly political version of narrative, because it exercised control over the population. The new narrative form managed to add a little self-glorification into the lamentation by celebration of the trials the Puritans had to endure.

Jeremiah was a prophet in the Old Testament who lived during the collapse of the kingdom of Judah and created powerful apocalyptic visions to set the Jews on the right path again. Out of all the Old Testament prophets Jeremiah was perhaps the most Theo centric and his personal religious life was characterized by an intimate relationship with God in personal prayer and conversation.¹⁵⁵¹ Jeremiah’s prophetic message was very conservative, and he called on his people to abandon the new and obey the God-given laws. The jeremiad as a form provides a structure for

¹⁵⁴⁸ Gutterman (2005) p. 9

¹⁵⁴⁹ Cook (1995) p. 63-64

¹⁵⁵⁰ Bercovich (1993) p. 79-80

¹⁵⁵¹ Lindblom (1962) p. 178

history that is imbedded with moral significance and responsibility.¹⁵⁵² In other words, the jeremiad offers a ready-made way to emplot history into a story of morality. The original jeremiadic narrative could work as a shaper of history, but the added quality new Puritan's jeremiad enhanced the possibilities to use jeremiad in prophetic politics.

Daniel Walker Howe argues that the characteristic of the jeremiad as a literary form is in criticizing the society for not living up to the ideals of its founders. An interesting characteristic of it is that typically the users set such high standards for the society, that they could not actually be reached in a conceivable manner and thus no matter what, all efforts were useless. But still even today the jeremiad is used commonly in American social criticism.¹⁵⁵³ The American jeremiad exhibits certain nationalistic characteristics. It depicts America as a "city on the hill" and elevates the founders of the country into the status of near deities "blessed by God to create a country on divine principles, demonstrating the unswerving belief that the American people have been and are historically called by God as instruments for God's plan on the human race."¹⁵⁵⁴ But the most interesting aspect of the jeremiad is that there is an inbuilt paradox in it. "While jeremiadic speakers have absolute faith in their divinely assured mission, success always eludes them"¹⁵⁵⁵ Understood thus, the jeremiadic narrator can not ultimately succeed.

This is a factor that has to be taken into account by any prophetic politician, and then it can even be exploited to his benefit. He just has to make the ultimate success of his policies elusive, a mirage shimmering in the horizon and something to strive for. Only when there is no clear point when the success or failure could be verified, the jeremiad will work. There should be no clear and palpable objective that prophetic politics aims at, but every decision made in politics has to be a part of the continuous process toward the fulfilment of politics. While the society moves for ever infinitesimally closer to the ultimate success, it can never be narrated to reach it. The success is always beyond the next bend in to road towards it.

Stuckey is one of the authors who argue that Reagan assumed "the tenor of a jeremiad."¹⁵⁵⁶ There is no such imminent threat in the prophetic politics of Reagan

¹⁵⁵² Erickson (1985) p. 87

¹⁵⁵³ Howe (1988) p. 1070

¹⁵⁵⁴ Smith (1997) p. 815

¹⁵⁵⁵ Smith (1997) p. 815

¹⁵⁵⁶ Stuckey (1989) p. 12

as Bercovich and Gutterman insist has to take place in the jeremiad. The “fire and brimstone” are excluded from the narrative, and it is mostly only the gloomy present, which gets juxtaposed against a future of such glory, that specific threats are not often mentioned. The American jeremiad seems to refer to a method of using a stick and carrot in politics. The Reaganesque version of the jeremiad does not use a stick, but metaphorically waves an abundant cornucopia in front of –but naturally outside the immediate reach – of the citizenry. Thus, Reagan’s prophetic message follows only partially the genre of the jeremiad, which tends to dominate most of American oratory and even literature in general. Especially in political narratives the tenor of the jeremiad is omnipresent. Chernus calls George W. Bush a “master of the jeremiad”¹⁵⁵⁷ and it would be easy to claim that Reagan stuck to the tradition of jeremiad as well, but that is not the whole truth. In the early stages of his political career Reagan used the more traditional lamenting type of jeremiad quite often, but with the Presidency Reagan’s prophecies picked up a new tone.

During Reagan’s GE speeches, or even the 1964 Barry Goldwater presidential campaign speech, his American jeremiad portrayed a darker future, where for example the fate of the world would be decided in ten years, either all would have been communists, or communism would have been entirely eliminated. The jeremiad itself was relatively negative. The optimism which was part of all Reagan’s stories started to infiltrate his speeches cumulatively and gradually, reaching its peak by the second term of the Reagan presidency. Before the Iran-Contra scandal Reagan’s popularity was high, and the tone of the jeremiad itself had changed to closely follow the optimistic vein identified by Sacvan Bercovich. Erickson even argues that it was this optimism of Reagan’s jeremiad which enabled him in 1984 to beat Walter Mondale in a landslide. Mondale stressed the failings of Americans and warned of the dire consequences while Reagan spoke optimistically of a glorious future and the dreams of a perfect America.¹⁵⁵⁸ Mondale was certainly on the right track in his attempt to beat Reagan in the election because he articulated a vision of America as well.¹⁵⁵⁹ The electoral contest was between deciding which vision of America the voters preferred. The voter had to choose his

¹⁵⁵⁷ Chernus (2006) p. 86

¹⁵⁵⁸ Erickson (1985) p. 118

¹⁵⁵⁹ See White (1998) 65-66

favourite from two visionary story worlds, there were two jeremiads to choose from, and in the end Reagan's persona and optimistic vision prevailed.

The distinguishing fact of a jeremiad from other prophetic forms is an imminent sense of destruction as God's punishment to follow. Isaiah preached the oncoming judgement of God and destruction of the entire nation, but there was a way to salvation and to stop that from taking place. If people only repented and turned whole-heartedly to Yahweh all would be saved.¹⁵⁶⁰ In Reagan's "jeremiad" the threat of punishment forms a gap in the narrative. If it lurks behind all the optimism Reagan imbues his story with, it is mostly left unsaid. While for example, the jeremiad of George W. Bush is essentially pessimistic, with immanent doom waiting, should the people not obey his commands, the tone in Reagan's prophecy is more optimistic, with the possibility of failure not even coming up during his presidential storytelling if the people will follow him.¹⁵⁶¹ There is no command involved, rather a sense of enticing the people because the values Reagan preaches are according to story logic, so universal that a good American could not follow his lead. One of the best descriptions of the Reagan era comes from William E. Pemberton who writes that "Reagan [...] lived in the world of sunrises; it was morning again in God's chosen land, he said. He left his conservative followers with a forward-looking, optimistic promise of a future without limits, a sunny vision that proved popular with voters."¹⁵⁶²

It's morning in America, after all. We can begin the first leg of a new voyage into the future, a future in which commerce will be king, the eagle will soar, and America will be the mightiest trading nation on Earth.¹⁵⁶³ Morning has special symbolism in the biblical prophecies as well. The most important content of the visions of the prophet Zechariah was hope, or even the promise of the future. As Cook writes, "with the coming of the sunrise at the end of

¹⁵⁶⁰ Lindblom (1962) p. 369

¹⁵⁶¹ As argued earlier, Reagan's vision of the sunny future for America developed in the course of the storytelling. From the radio speaker who warned of the dire consequences of giving the Panama Canal away, the ardent anti-communist and opposer of détente, the doomcrier of the window of vulnerability, he mellowed down the tone of his jeremiad as each year passed and towards the end of the two-term presidency the future of America began to be depicted with almost no threat whatsoever.

¹⁵⁶² Pemberton (1997) p. xiv

¹⁵⁶³ Reagan (4.3.1983) Remarks and a Question-and-Answer Session With Members of the Commonwealth Club of California in San Francisco <http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1983/30483c.htm>. Wills argues that if it indeed was "morning in America" and America was "on its way back" then it was on its way back from the "Reagan recession, which took more out of the economy in two years than Carter could do in four." Wills (2000) p. 438. But this is just another example how Reagan could manipulate people with his stories since America believed that Reaganomics had just started to take effect.

Zechariah's night of visions, the new era is about to dawn."¹⁵⁶⁴ While Reagan has most often, among others who have used the prophetic manner of leadership in America, been connected to the pattern of the jeremiad, it would be more descriptive to use in his case Isaiah, Zachariah, or Joel in whose prophecies the future salvation are prominent.¹⁵⁶⁵ Was Reagan then a purely jeremiadic prophet?

Buber claims that the difference between Jeremiah and his contemporary Ezekiel is the difference between "pure prophecy" bound up the historical hour and God's direct speaking, and more problematic prophecy "which peeps into the future which, so to speak, is already at hand and so describes it."¹⁵⁶⁶ For Buber then, the "pure prophet" is not imaginative except having full grasp of the present, actual and potential.¹⁵⁶⁷ Based on this Reagan would follow the prophetic style of Ezekiel closer since he wants to peep constantly into the glorious future of America but at the same time, following Jeremiah, he wants to portray himself as completely in understanding the present and only seeing the potential of America. At the same time the prophecies of Micah have as big a role as Isaiah in Reagan's prophecies and he quoted Micah several times.

And I hope they'll meet us in good faith and join us, because this'd be the contribution that this generation of Americans could make to the world that would be remembered for all time to come -- if the great nations would begin turning their swords into plowshares. So, just keep a prayer in your heart for us. We're going to try to do it.¹⁵⁶⁸

Micah envisioned how swords would be turned into ploughshares and was focused on peace among the nations. He prophesied the fall of a king, but mostly his prophecies were about social deprivations. All in all Micah delivered a "prophetic vision of order and mercy and justice" which was democratic and ecumenical in its nature.¹⁵⁶⁹ The element of peace was the reason why Reagan saw Micah as an appropriate source of quotations, but when his narration focused on any of the social of economic dilemmas facing Americans, Reagan did not quote Micah one single time. What I have tried to show with these examples is that Reagan was not bound

¹⁵⁶⁴ Cook (1995) p. 129. Zechariah can be compared to Reagan on some level, since he was an official cult prophet whose practical program centred around rebuilding Jerusalem to usher in the new era of God. Cook calls his program "nationalistically royalist." See. Cook (1995) p. 155

¹⁵⁶⁵ See Cohn (1993) p. 158. He argues that the prophecies of future salvation in Amos, Hosea, Micah and Zephaniah are later, post-exilic insertations and thus not part of the "original" message.

¹⁵⁶⁶ Buber (1949) p. 175

¹⁵⁶⁷ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶⁸ Reagan (26.1.1983) Remarks and a Question-and-Answer Session With Employees at the Digital Equipment Corporation in Roxbury, Massachusetts

<http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1983/12683d.htm>

¹⁵⁶⁹ Meacham (2006) p. 101

to the jeremiadic tone but could at will escape its limitations and sought for more positive tones and futures.

Just this past Fourth of July, the torch atop the Statue of Liberty was hoisted down for replacement. We can be forgiven for thinking that maybe it was just worn out from lighting the way to freedom for 17 million new Americans. So, now we'll put up a new one. The poet called Miss Liberty's torch the "lamp beside the golden door." Well, that was the entrance to America, and it still is. And now you really know why we're here tonight. The glistening hope of that lamp is still ours. Every promise, every opportunity is still golden in this land. And through that golden door our children can walk into tomorrow with the knowledge that no one can be denied the promise that is America. Her heart is full; her door is still golden, her future bright. She has arms big enough to comfort and strong enough to support, for the strength in her arms is the strength of her people. She will carry on in the eighties unafraid, unashamed, and unsurpassed. In this springtime of hope, some lights seem eternal; America's is.¹⁵⁷⁰

Wills wrote about "happy Jeremiah."¹⁵⁷¹ It seems to be a contradiction. I have argued that Reagan's prophetic message is not truly a jeremiad due to its inherent optimism and the lack of punishment. While Smith talks of a slightly different thing he has yet come up with a fitting term for my use; the "Hollywood jeremiad."¹⁵⁷² This term can suitably accommodate the notion of "happy endings" with the prophecy. As in the Golden Days of Hollywood filmmaking there is no way in Reagan's narrative politics that there could be anything else than a truly happy ending. One of the characteristics of the jeremiad which fits Reagan's prophetic politics as well is the notion that the Americanized jeremiad is "a ritual of continuity through generational rededication. It required a set of local precedents, a pride of tribal heroes to whom the community could look back in reverence and from whom; therefore, it could inherit its mission."¹⁵⁷³ This is self-evident in the treatment Reagan gives to the Founding Fathers and the idea of revitalizing America. Reagan can be said to have taken the American jeremiad and treated it as a genre as he treated individual Americanized myths – by twisting it into a slightly new and politically more suitable shape.

America has a big and exciting future, an open future of expanding possibilities your parents never even dreamt of -- and you can be a part of it.

¹⁵⁷⁰ Reagan (23.8.1984) Remarks Accepting the Presidential Nomination at the Republican National Convention in Dallas, Texas <http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1984/82384f.htm>

¹⁵⁷¹ Wills (2000) p. 456

¹⁵⁷² Smith (1997) p. 821

¹⁵⁷³ Bercovich (1993) p. 80

Like they said at the end of the movie "Back to the Future": "Where we're going, we don't need roads," just an eager heart and a clear mind.¹⁵⁷⁴

To continue with the theme of the Hollywood jeremiad, the movie "Back to the Future" provides a good metaphor for Reagan's prophetic politics. The future could only be reached by reaching back in time. But the reach back only concerns allowing values and traditions to be taken as building blocks for a new future which is by no means a return to the past. Paul Peterson notes that Reagan's rhetoric was future-oriented and optimistic and that in his speechmaking he was not so much calling the country to alarm than to emphasize the possibilities of the future. Reagan was a conservative but paradoxically he wanted to conserve "the idea of progress and the fulfilment of human possibilities. [...] Reagan looked backward for his inspiration [...but that] did not leave him yearning for a lost better time and better place. That better time and better place are to be found in the future."¹⁵⁷⁵ There was a mythical golden era in the past, but certainly for Reagan and America "what I consider the best day of my life -- tomorrow. The best is always yet to come."¹⁵⁷⁶

4.2.3. ARMAGEDDON AND APOCALYPTICISM IN PROPHECY

How will we finish our story – the story of another great nation?¹⁵⁷⁷
-Ronald Wilson Reagan

There was still a darker side, the night of vision, if you will, to Reagan's prophecy. It was the story of the Armageddon. This darker option of the future shall be analyzed in the course of the upcoming pages. I shall discuss Reagan's apocalyptic beliefs in depth but also argue that the concept of Armageddon is rare exception where his private thoughts did not to a large degree influence his political narration. I shall point out that prophecies and apocalypses are such different narratives that they cannot be brought to co-exist within the same story web without considerable difficulties. I argue that because prophetic politics is able to inflict changes and keep the political decision-making and the entire political realm in a state of progress, it is

¹⁵⁷⁴ Reagan (6.9.1986) Radio Address to the Nation on Education and Drug Abuse
<http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1986/090686a.htm>

¹⁵⁷⁵ Peterson (1997) p. 72-73

¹⁵⁷⁶ Reagan (3.11.1984) Written Responses to Questions Submitted by France Soir Magazine
<http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1984/110384a.htm>

¹⁵⁷⁷ Reagan (2001) p. 53. Radio address 7.8.1978. Rome was the other great nation alongside America that Reagan refers to. Reagan discusses in this radio address the degeneration of the Roman Empire.

more beneficial than apocalyptic politics, which would only grow the disinterest in politics and cause apathy in the form of waiting for the inevitable outcome.

As early as in the late sixties and seventies Claude Bremond and Tzvetan Todorov pointed out that events which do not actually happen, are as important to understanding the narrative as those events, that were reported to have taken place. Todorov used categories like “optative” which refers to wishes, “obligatory”, which refers to duties and commitments, “conditional”, which refers to promises and threats, and “predictive”, which refers to anticipated events and incidentally, is perhaps the most important of these, when one’s focus is centred on future-oriented narratives, such as the types used in prophetic politics.¹⁵⁷⁸ It is in fact the narrator’s viewpoint which determines if something is disnarrated or predicted. In narrative retrospection states, events, and actions are configured into a “totality with global coherence and significance.”¹⁵⁷⁹ Things which have not happened can be included into the totality with the help of taking the posterior viewpoint. They have to be presented not in isolation, but as true alternatives to that which did happen to be narratively significant. In Margolin’s words they have to be presented “as roads open but not taken.”¹⁵⁸⁰ With the use of the disnarrated, the prophetic aspect of politics can be turned around to concern the past as well along with the future. It can be narrated, that things did in fact NOT happen because of the vision of the prophetic politician.

It was the vision of the future that enabled Reagan and his administration to avoid taking one of these “open roads,” which could have led the people astray. Within the prophetic political narration there has to be another alternative story world, and the characteristics of this story world have to include all the “alternative courses of events or virtual scenarios [...] a zone of possibilities not actualized.”¹⁵⁸¹ Thus while the disnarrated influences the primary story world created by narrator, it also creates a story world of its own, which has to be hinted at in prophetic politics. This alternate story world is a mirror image of the story world which promises progress and an ever brighter future. The disnarrated story world is a gloomy place, where everything that is well and good in the prophetic story world, is lacking or wrong in its nature. It is a story world of need and deprivation, even despair, while

¹⁵⁷⁸ Ryan (1999) p. 118

¹⁵⁷⁹ Margolin (1999) p. 146-147

¹⁵⁸⁰ Margolin (1999) p. 148

¹⁵⁸¹ Margolin (1999) p. 148

the story world of the prophetic political narrative is abundant in every aspect and filled with promise of even better things to come.

Reagan was the person who brought, albeit not that often or willingly, the “a-word” into political discourse, and spoke of the role the Soviet Union might play in it. He was not the only political personality, who helped turn the Soviet Union into a biblical as well as an ideological foe. There was a long tradition of depicting Communism as a threat to Christianity and America. Since the 1970’s the churches had claimed that the Soviet atheism was in the way of converting the world to Christ. The stories Reagan told were connected to those told by end-times preachers who named the USSR as the evil confederation which would bring up the Armageddon.¹⁵⁸² Reagan did not settle for depicting Communism and merely godless, but narrated it to participate in the Armageddon as well. While it was a foe for America, it was also God’s enemy. Reagan used the story worlds of the preachers to assist his political purposes and the preachers used the political stories by Reagan as well. There was a symbiotic relationship between the two. Again, it is impossible to define which came first, since the two grew in connection with each other.

Must civilization perish in a hail of fiery atoms? Must freedom wither in a quiet, deadening accommodation with totalitarian evil?¹⁵⁸³

The concept of Armageddon is mostly evident in Reagan’s presidential speeches in the form what Genette calls the disnarrated. That is an expression coined to mean “events that do not happen though they could have and are nonetheless referred to (in a negative or hypothetical mode) by the narrative text.”¹⁵⁸⁴ Besides being disnarrated, Armageddon leaves a gap in the narrative as well. When one considers the prominence of Armageddon in Reagan’s thinking, and multiple expressions of it during his pre-presidential career, the gap left in the narrative becomes evident. At least on two occasions during the presidency Reagan was forced to talk of his belief in Armageddon¹⁵⁸⁵ and then he did downplay its importance to him. This was not due to the fact that his thinking had changed, but rather evidence of wise political

¹⁵⁸² Phillips (2006) p. 251

¹⁵⁸³ Reagan (8.7.1982) Address to Members of the British Parliament. s. 744

¹⁵⁸⁴ Prince (1992) p. 30

¹⁵⁸⁵ Reagan (6.12.1983) Interview With Garry Clifford and Patricia Ryan of People Magazine <http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1983/120683c.htm> and Reagan (21.10.1984) Debate Between the President and Former Vice President Walter F. Mondale in Kansas City, Missouri <http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1984/102184b.htm> Both will be discussed below.

strategy, because such a storyline might deter people from his story world. The majority of Christians and secularists alike might be abhorred by a president, who believes that an Armageddon is inevitable, and that it comes during their lifetimes. As for those Christian radicals, who support the idea, the message is to be found both in the pre-presidential thinking, and the gaps in the narrative. Even in the above quotation the connection to Armageddon does not exist in the words themselves, but in their ability to lead the story recipient into the exclusionary part of the story world by implications. “Hail of fiery atoms” in which the civilization might perish, refers to Armageddon brought about by a full-scale nuclear war. This time Reagan’s narration is surprisingly pessimistic, since he seems to offer only two possible futures, the one of nuclear Armageddon or adjusting to the repression of totalitarian evil.

Indeed, the idea of nuclear Armageddon is perhaps the one and only thing which can suppress the typically Reaganesque optimism. Erickson argues that the sense of confrontation between the U.S. and Soviet armies as the forces of God and Satan points to the religious theme of Armageddon, which he sees as a motif running through Reagan’s entire epic of America. However, the motif seldom surfaces in the narrative but acts as an undercurrent and only its effects can be seen. One example is the ardent support Reagan was willing to give to Israel. The sides countries will take in the upcoming apocalyptic battle are clear in Reagan’s vision. He has claimed that “Israel is the only stable democracy we can rely on in a spot where Armageddon could come.”¹⁵⁸⁶ He was just as sure about the opposition, “Russia is going to get involved in it.”¹⁵⁸⁷

I think what has been hailed as something I’m supposedly, as President, discussing as principle is the recall of just some philosophical discussions with people who are interested in the same things; and that is the prophecies down through the years, the biblical prophecies of what would portend the coming of Armageddon, and so forth, and the fact that a number of theologians for the last decade or more have believed that this was true, that the prophecies are coming together that portend that. But no one knows whether Armageddon, those prophecies mean that Armageddon is a thousand years away or day after tomorrow. So, I have never seriously warned and said we must plan according to Armageddon.¹⁵⁸⁸

¹⁵⁸⁶ Reagan. Cited in Erickson (1985) p. 85

¹⁵⁸⁷ Reagan. Cited in Erickson (1985) p. 85

¹⁵⁸⁸ Reagan (21.10.1984) Debate Between the President and Former Vice President Walter F. Mondale in Kansas City, Missouri
<http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1984/102184b.htm>

Here Reagan comments publicly on his beliefs concerning Armageddon, because he is forced to do so by the question in the debate with Mondale. He denies that America should prepare for Armageddon and that in other informal occasions he has said that he believes Armageddon will take place during the lifetimes of his contemporaries. Despite these denials, the quotation speaks volumes. Firstly there is the expression “prophecies are coming together that portend that” which implies that Reagan believes in both prophecies, and Armageddon. The denial that “no one knows” whether it is “a thousand years away or day after tomorrow” cannot hide the fact that Reagan believes it shall happen shortly. He also reveals that he has had “philosophical discussions” with people who are “interested in the *same* things.”

While Armageddon is almost disnarrated in Reagan’s public papers, at least some newspapers have quoted Reagan as speaking about it. One example is from the New York Times, 24th October 1984 where Reagan is quoted as saying “Never has there been a time in which so many [biblical] prophecies are coming together. There have been times in the past when people thought the end of the world was coming but never anything like this.”¹⁵⁸⁹ According to the Boston Globe of 2nd May 1984 Reagan had claimed “Jerry, I sometimes believe we’re heading very fast for Armageddon.”¹⁵⁹⁰ At the same time in his private diary Reagan expressed wrote revealingly “Sometimes I wonder if we are destined to witness Armageddon.”¹⁵⁹¹ Since Reagan was a septuagenarian at the time, the use of pronoun “we” seems to imply that he thought privately that the Armageddon would not be that far away in the future. When he heard about the Israelis bombing an Iraqi nuclear reactor he exclaimed in his diary “I swear I believe Armageddon is near.”¹⁵⁹² Reagan was forced to answer a question in public about whether he really believed that Biblical prophecies that portend Armageddon were coming true.

I've never done that publicly. I have talked here, and then I wrote people, because some theologians quite some time ago were telling me, calling attention to the fact that theologians have been studying the ancient prophecies -- What would portend the coming of Armageddon? -- and have said that never, in the time between the prophecies up until now has there ever been a time in which so many of the prophecies are coming together.

¹⁵⁸⁹ New York Times, cited in Knelman (1985) p. 179

¹⁵⁹⁰ Boston Globe, cited in Knelman (1985) p. 179

¹⁵⁹¹ Reagan (2007) p. 19. Diary entry for 15.5.1981.

¹⁵⁹² Reagan (2007) p. 24. Diary entry for 8.6.1981

There have been times in the past when people thought the end of the world was coming, and so forth, but never anything like this.¹⁵⁹³ Here Reagan probably referred to a letter written to Peter D. Hannaford, where he wrote that “Lately I’ve been wondering about some older prophecies – those having to do with Armageddon. Things that are news today sound an awful lot like what was predicted would take place just prior to “A” Day. Don’t quote me.”¹⁵⁹⁴ On the other hand here Reagan clearly tells an outright lie, or shows an amazingly selective memory, since in 1980 on Tim and Tammy Faye Bakker’s PTL network Reagan had told that “we may be the generation that sees Armageddon.”¹⁵⁹⁵

In public Reagan relatively effectively fended off all the questions concerning his fascination with the theme of Armageddon, but privately expressed himself more plainly.

When it [Armageddon] comes, the man who comes from the wrong side, into this war, is the man, according to the prophecies, named Gog, from Meshech, which is the ancient name of Moscow [...] But on the other side, are ten kings from Europe. Well, the European conference, now, is ten nations. And then from the West, comes a young nation, under the sign of an eagle! Now, this was all there, written long before there was any country in the West like ours. These are some of the prophecies.¹⁵⁹⁶

From a quote like this it is easy to deduct a lot about Reagan’s true ideas of Armageddon. In his private, seldom expressed worldview Armageddon is very acute, and takes place between the forces of God and those of the Satan. The West represents God in this ultimate struggle, and the Soviet Union is on the side of the Devil. The mere fact that he has pondered upon the number of countries in the “European conference” to compare them with the obscure prophecies he cites, and the fact that he can portray America as “a young nation from the west under the sign of an eagle,” or Gog coming from Moscow, proves, that his concept of Armageddon is not merely a spiritual battle between light and darkness, but far more concrete in

¹⁵⁹³ Reagan (6.12.1983) Interview With Garry Clifford and Patricia Ryan of People Magazine <http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1983/120683c.htm>

¹⁵⁹⁴ Reagan (1983) a letter in Kinner-Anderson-Anderson (2003) p.278 The letter was dated in February.

¹⁵⁹⁵ Reagan (1980) Cited in Meacham (2006) p. 223, Erickson (1985) p. 85. The abbreviation PTL comes from the words “Praise the Lord.”

¹⁵⁹⁶ Reagan (9.2.1988) Private Interview. Cited in Morris (1999) p. 634-635. This interpretation by Reagan is interesting to say the very least. Gog was mentioned in the prophecy of Ezekiel (Ezekiel 38-39) and is from “Magog” not “Meshech.” And we can rest assured that by the time the prophecy was made, Moscow or Meshech did not exist. The time of the prophecy was too “ancient” even for this “ancient name.” At the same time Ezekiel (or whoever in the author of that prophecy, see Cook (1995) p. 86) wrote that it was God himself who conquered Gog and even Israel was not part of the battle.(Eze, 38: 19-23) and certainly not the kings of Europe. It begs question whether this interpretation was made by Reagan of if some of the religious figures so deeply connected with his life is the originator. For a more thorough discussion on Gog see Cook (1995) p. 85-97

its nature, with the nations of the world taking part in it. Reagan's reference to Gog comes from Ezekiel and one mention in the Revelations, where Gog indeed is the "chief prince of Meshech and Tubal,"¹⁵⁹⁷ but there is no telling how he linked Meshech to Moscow. The prophecies of Ezekiel are against Gog, to warn him that the people of Israel have allies, among them such countries like Persia, Ethiopia and Libya, which cannot be easily fitted into Reagan's political story world. Moreover, these prophecies talk about a time when Israel is in safety and Gog tries to directly attack Israel. Gog comes from the land of Magog and these are only once referred to in the Revelations, only in the passing, as a call for Gog and Magog to rise to the battle.¹⁵⁹⁸ The prophecies about Gog tell us only that he shall try to threaten Israel, and shall be smitten down by the Lord God. The prophecy does not seem to fit Reagan's purposes. It is evident that here, as in so many other instances, Reagan just picks a story and bends it to fit his purposes and his worldview. While Gog is a biblical figure, it is impossible to deduct from the Bible that he "comes from Moscow." Indeed, it seems likely that Gog and his legions are not human beings, but demons, and that God himself will defeat Gog.¹⁵⁹⁹ Reagan manipulates another sacred story to fit it to support his message; that when Armageddon comes, America, "a young nation, under the sign of an eagle", shall be the leader of the opposition against the forces of evil.

If these quotes serve any other purpose, at least they ascertain that Reagan had no illusions of the worst-case scenario outcome of the struggle between America and the Soviet Union in the nuclear age. They certainly show a tendency in Reagan to interpret, and be interested in the prophecies of the Bible, and some more obscure prophecies by the end-time preachers as well, but they also manage to shatter the image of "omniscience" some later biographers have attached to him concerning the end of the Cold War. The Cold War ended in a different way as Reagan feared, and this goes to show that his prophecies were not always accurate. Indeed, it is not my intention to even claim that the future, as evidenced by our contemporary times, were like Reagan depicted for America in his stories, but only that he used prophesying as a tool for his politics.

¹⁵⁹⁷ Ezekiel 38:2, Ezekiel 39:1

¹⁵⁹⁸ Ezekiel 38:2, Ezekiel 39:1, Revelations 20:8

¹⁵⁹⁹ Cohn (1993) p. 217

One reason why Reagan was forced to hold in check his views concerning the Armageddon in his public addresses, was that it just did not coincide with what his policies were all about; optimism and the view of America as the great nation with a mythical manifest destiny.¹⁶⁰⁰ Of course this manifest destiny could have been the task to fight on the side of Christ in the ultimate atomic battle against the Soviet Union and the Antichrist, and thus be an active participant in Armageddon itself, but such views, even if Reagan had held them, would have undermined his credibility, and even worse, his message of a glorious future. Even the Armageddon could not triumph over Reagan's optimism. Armageddon is, after all, the event that has to precede the second coming of the Christ, and Reagan spent a lot of time, effort, and dollars to make to make sure that his America would be ready to combat on the side of the Christ. Reagan's "peace through strength" policy aimed, at least partially, to getting prepared to fight the final battle. "Peace through strength is not a slogan, it's a fact of life."¹⁶⁰¹

To the distress of the reader I have wanted to include this longish discussion on the topic of Armageddon. It has been done because the disnarrated Armageddon, or the gap it usually leaves in the narrative, is an important concept one has to grasp to see behind the façade of eternal optimism, that Reagan radiated in his person as well as in his entire political narration. He was not all that happy-go-lucky and there indeed existed a dark side to his vision of the future as well. The mere fact that the Armageddon did not take place, or that it was mostly silenced in Reagan's storytelling does not imply that it did not have importance in it.

Armageddon is by definition the apocalypse waiting Christians in the future. In that sense, it has a place in prophetic genre, but we can, nevertheless, argue that apocalyptic and prophetic writings are fundamentally different. The apocalypses of the Bible are mostly pseudonymous and bear names of authors who had lived in the distant past. Apocalypses were made to look genuine and often not to supplement prophecies but to surpass them and their authors in importance. And for some reason, most apocalypses received their "visions" not directly from God but with angels acting as intermediaries.¹⁶⁰² But apocalyptic speculations have played a large role in the realm of human experience, and thus in politics as well. The tradition

¹⁶⁰⁰ For the concept of manifest destiny as a mythical creation see Hughes (2003) p. 105-114

¹⁶⁰¹ Reagan (6.3.1984) Remarks at a New York Republican Party Fundraising Dinner
<http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1984/30684d.htm>

¹⁶⁰² Cohn (1993) p. 165

encompasses both the millenarian movements and Marxist-Leninist ideology and since the tradition has not disappeared or even waned, “who can tell what fantasies, religious or secular, it may generate in the unforeseeable future.”¹⁶⁰³ Wallace Martin has written that the atomic war has taken the place of apocalypse as its secular version in our modern times.¹⁶⁰⁴ In Reagan’s narrative politics his SDI project or the dream of total nuclear disarmament¹⁶⁰⁵ was an attempt to try to avoid the coming of the apocalypse. Part of this process naturally is the destruction of the world, in for example the way some Christian millennialists advocate, because the end is not important, but the notion of a new beginning, which can be perfected.¹⁶⁰⁶ But while such a respected authority of apocalypticism as Stephen L. Cook even uses the example of Reagan to show that apocalypticism is not restricted to the deprived and marginalized,¹⁶⁰⁷ I argue that Reagan’s personal apocalyptic ideas were not a part of his public rhetoric or storytelling. They had some influence on his policies, but indirectly. While building up a strong military capability can be argued to have been preparation for the final battle between good and evil or the yearning to use SDI as a milestone into a nuclear free world an attempt to avert the Armageddon, these policy decisions were never justified by apocalyptic rhetoric. Still, Reagan breaks the established pattern, that powerful officials ruling over the political or religious structure do not dream apocalyptic visions.¹⁶⁰⁸ But this one dream or nightmare of Reagan was excluded while a strong sense of millennialism was included in the narration.

Millennialism is another very prominent part of the American religious experience. The rapid and perpetual social change in the American society due to the absence of a class structure gave leeway for the development of millenarian movements.¹⁶⁰⁹ Timothy L. Smith writes that the millennial expectation “was more religious than ideological in character [...] and preoccupied as much with the future of all mankind as with the special role of the United States in securing it.”¹⁶¹⁰ Kelly

¹⁶⁰³ Cohn (1993) p. 228

¹⁶⁰⁴ Martin (1987) p. 87

¹⁶⁰⁵ “my ultimate goal, my ultimate dream, and that is the elimination of nuclear weapons in the world” Reagan (21.10.1984) Debate Between the President and Former Vice President Walter F. Mondale in Kansas City, Missouri

<http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1984/102184b.htm>

¹⁶⁰⁶ Eliade (1963) 75-76

¹⁶⁰⁷ Cook (1995) p. 40

¹⁶⁰⁸ Cook (1995) p. 9

¹⁶⁰⁹ Wilson (1979) p. 105

¹⁶¹⁰ Kelly (1984) p. 129

describes the millennium to be a central dogma of the Christian faith, which states that the sinful world will end and a judgement will be heralded by Christ's return.¹⁶¹¹ While all Gospels talk about the return of the Christ mostly in terms of "they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory,"¹⁶¹² the most common point of reference concerning the millennium is still the highly allegorical and confusing Revelation of St. John along with other allegorical texts from the Book of Daniel and the so called Deutero-Isaiah.

In fact the Book of Revelations is a particularly Christian interpretation of the Old Testament prophets, designed to turn the stories of the ancient prophets to testify the immanent victory of the Christian church. Old Judaic texts are given in it a new meaning.¹⁶¹³ It was already by the latter half of the nineteenth century that millennial awareness had become an outdated concept and an eccentricity to the majority of liberal protestants, but ever since the days of Cotton Mather and other fiery preachers of the original Puritans it has remained a part of the doctrine of the more fundamental sects in America.¹⁶¹⁴ And certainly prophetic politics benefits to some degree from the millenarian way of thought since, once simplified enough, it is concerned with anticipation of better times in the imaginable future that the prophetic politician promises to bring about. Naturally the religious millennium is concerned with something which will happen beyond the realm of the historical future, or at the end of it, but the mechanism that is exploited is the same and the stories told have similar storylines, especially allegorical aspect of them. According to Wilson, at the centre of American millennialism is "an outrageous conviction that this society is but one step from a perfect order."¹⁶¹⁵ Because of this, the millenarian concept of social change is dynamic and insistent that change needs to take place and this is the playground of a prophetic politician who encourages the changes and promises the glorious future to be just that one step away.

American culture is thus always in the making but never complete. It will be completed, according to one of our most cherished cultural myths, at the end of human time, the beginning of God's Kingdom, the coming of the millennium. [...]Our history has been essentially the history of one long

¹⁶¹¹ Kelly (1984) p. 126

¹⁶¹² Matthew 24:23

¹⁶¹³ Cohn (1993) p. 212-213

¹⁶¹⁴ Kelly (1984) p. 126-127

¹⁶¹⁵ Wilson (1979) p. 108

millenarian movement. Americans, in their cultural mythology, are God's chosen, leading the world to perfection.¹⁶¹⁶ These words, unbelievably taken not from Reagan's most patriotic speeches, but from a scholarly work by McLoughlin, define in a few sentences America's religious politics better than anything I have found. They also give new meaning to Manifest Destiny. It can also be seen as more than just the expansion from "sea to shining sea," a task to populate the newly found continent. Manifest Destiny can be connected to the coming of the Kingdom of God on earth, a process which Americans as God's chosen are assisting. This effort to speed up the fulfilment of manifest destiny and millennial purpose has too often led Americans into war. Whenever one chooses to use the concepts "millenarian" and "millenarianism," it has to be kept in mind, that this is a very widespread concept in virtually all of Christianity. It refers to the biblical millennium, a 1000 year post-historical time of peace and plenty, but interpretations vary. For premillennialists Jesus will return and lead the world into this period and for postmillennialists times will be a time of human action and effort and Christ will return at the final phase of the drama. Again, "apocalyptic millenarianism" refers to the idea, where a cataclysmic denouement of history will be the factor giving birth to the new world. All premillennialists are not of the apocalyptic type, indeed, they form only a minority of the whole. More often than not apocalyptic and revolutionary millennialists constitute "the pariah class of contemporary culture. As such they have been banished to the farthest end of the cultural cosmos."¹⁶¹⁷ The problem with premillennialism is that it could not and cannot make explicit contact with the idea of America as a "redeemer nation"¹⁶¹⁸ while the postmillennialists could make use of this provided that the American society's heart remained pure.¹⁶¹⁹ In general, then, postmillennialists are the ones more easily affected by the combining of politics and religion.

Again, the difference of prophetic politics to the apocalyptic worldview becomes clear. Prophecy allows citizens to alter the future by their obedience or disobedience to the prophet's message whereas in apocalypses the future judgement

¹⁶¹⁶ McLoughlin (1978) p. 18

¹⁶¹⁷ Kaplan (1997) p. xi-xii. In this book Kaplan discusses the most radical millenarianist sects in the U.S. and it quickly becomes evident that they cannot act in politics via elected representatives.

¹⁶¹⁸ Tuweson (1968)

¹⁶¹⁹ Kelly (1984) p. 129

is already determined by God.¹⁶²⁰ Prophecy is conditional; it depends on the response of the faithful to the message while the apocalyptic message reflects an unconditional doom.¹⁶²¹ If the idea of an impending doom is inserted to the political prophecy, the outcome will be negative. This is one reason why millennialism is hard to include in a political prophecy. While the citizens can, of course, work for the realization of Christ's Kingdom on Earth, the Second Coming at the same time would put an end to politics. History ends and so there would be no more need for politics either. While the thousand-year reign of Christ can stimulate people to strive forward, it can also make them passive. If the concept of millennium is inserted into politics it should be done with caution. In order to keep politics vigorous, the citizenry cannot be allowed to sink into the expectation of the apocalypse and the perfected world to come after that. Politics has to be concerned with making this world the "earthly paradise." The millennial time and the expectation have to be present, only without the apocalypse, so that the people themselves create the millennial world by making the American Dream a reality.

Hughes has argued that two crucial American myths, that of the Nature's Nation, and that of the Millennial Nation connected with each other in powerful ways. "One looked back toward the beginning of time. The other looked toward its end."¹⁶²² This may provide us with yet another revelation concerning prophetic politics. These two central myths can provide a way to plot the entire American history into a unified story that falls into the Aristotelian requirements. America has been put here in the beginning of time to be found by Americans. "There had to be some divine plan that placed these great continents here between the two great oceans to be found by that kind of people. And that, maybe, is our purpose in life."¹⁶²³ At the same time the Millennial Nation myth looks in the future where America has an important role to play in bringing the golden millennial age to all the nations of the world to enjoy,

But we can be proud of the red, white, and blue, and believe in her mission. In a world wracked by hatred, economic crisis, and political tension, America remains mankind's best hope. The eyes of mankind are on us,

¹⁶²⁰ Cohn (1993) p. 165

¹⁶²¹ Hvidt (2007) p. 47

¹⁶²² Hughes (2003) p. 91

¹⁶²³ Reagan (24.6.1987) Remarks to Participants in the People to People International Youth Exchange Program <http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1987/062487b.htm>

counting on us to protect the peace, promote new prosperity, and provide for them a better world.¹⁶²⁴

Thus the prophet is able to anchor the past into present and treat every moment of the present as if each decision to be made would usher the millennial age closer and closer. Of all the myths American politics relies on, the combination of these two myths provides the best leverage for the prophetic politician. To some degree this also explains why the future was always so bright for Reagan and why he was anticipating it. Combining these myths to a unified American saga gave birth to the notion, again in the words of Hughes, that “by restoring the virtues of the first perfect age, American imagined they would usher in the second perfect age and thereby bless the world.”¹⁶²⁵ But for Reagan it was just about restoring the virtues, not restoring the past golden age as it was. Reagan saw no reason to actually return to the past glory but only to use its values and ideals in the contemporary world. “As a matter of fact, we promised to make a new beginning, to build together a brighter future filled with opportunity and hope.”¹⁶²⁶

It is an interesting paradox that while at the heart of politics lays the eschatological and even millennial hope; the Christian concept of millennium itself should not be a part of prophetic political narration. When the millennium occurs, there is no longer need for politics. Thus it can be used in the narration, preferably as something disnarrated but the progress of closing in on it has to be gradual, based on every decision made but at the same time without actually ever reaching a point where it would take place. Millennial hope can act as a powerful motivator but millennium itself has to remain always at the horizon, elusive and always staying out of reach. This part has to be excluded from the narration which should only imply that it is getting closer day by day. At the same time if one chose to use millennium as a goal of politics, it would fight against the idea of “Judeo-Christianity” since the notion of a transcendental saviour in human form, namely Christ, is not consistent with the Hebrew Bible. As argued earlier, the concept of millennium is purely Christian in origin and thus too exclusive in a multi-faith society.¹⁶²⁷ Thus, the millennial hope of politics should depict a secularized version

¹⁶²⁴ Reagan (9.9.1982) Remarks at Kansas State University at the Alfred M. Landon Lecture Series on Public Issues. s. 1120

¹⁶²⁵ Hughes (2003) p. 155

¹⁶²⁶ Reagan (19.7.1982) Remarks at a Rally Supporting the Proposed Constitutional Amendment for a Balanced Federal Budget. s. 940

¹⁶²⁷ See Cohn (1993) p. 159

of the millennium. It should not involve anything apocalyptic or even herald the return of Christ, but only mean a “golden age of freedom” when democracy encompasses the entire globe. In this sense the millenarian age propagated by Alexander Campbell and the Disciples of Christ would work on behalf of prophetic politics, since as we have seen earlier, the millennium would not necessitate the return of Christ and thus there would be no apocalypse. It would only be a thousand-year period of happiness for the church. When the prophetic politician uses millennium in this manner, he reaps the benefits from the religious connotations of the millennial hope, but manages to avoid the negative meanings imposed by the notion of apocalypse. To exaggerate somewhat, the millennium a prophetic politician should advocate in the American concept is not a thousand-year reign of Christ but of America.

4.3. PROPHECY AND TEMPORALITY

The time is now, my fellow citizens, to resolve to recapture our destiny, to take it into our own hands.¹⁶²⁸
-Ronald Wilson Reagan

As Hvidt notes, Judean prophecy has a characteristic feature of looking back to the canonical prophets with the aim of interpreting their writings in a prophetic way and attempting to use their teachings in the current situation.¹⁶²⁹ For the same reason the Founding Fathers are so important in Reagan’s narration. In the messages of the biblical prophets the link to tradition was evident as well. Their ideas concerning God, the election of Israel and the moral demands of the God were not new. “They were old ideas, but applied by the prophets in a new way.”¹⁶³⁰ This section will explore the manipulation of temporality in prophecies. The past is a source of values and a golden age. The present, the “now,” is the time to make choices to bring the future glory days into existence. At the same time this different temporalities will have to blend together. I argue that essentially we are talking about mythified time. Some of the ideas in this section have already been hinted at during the discussion of myth in the flow of time. Here they will be discussed more in depth. While the

¹⁶²⁸ Draft, Folder Hannaford/CA HQ – R. Reagan Speeches – 7/1/1980, Acceptance Speech (Research) – Convention (2/2) Box 25, Ronald Reagan 1980 Campaign Papers, Series I, Ronald Reagan Library.

¹⁶²⁹ Hvidt (2007) p. 44

¹⁶³⁰ Lindblom (1962) p. 314

temporalities fuse together into a continuous *kairos*-time, for the purposes of clarity this section is roughly divided so that the first part will discuss how the past and present are handled and used to augur the future. The second part will concern itself how the actual future needs to be narrated into existence. I wish to emphasize already here that the political prophet is not a modern Nostradamus and thus is not attempting to predict what will happen in the future. He just narrates the past and present in such a manner that if the decisions that support his politics are made, the future can be nothing else than the glorious epoch he promises. In this sense he ushers in the future and instead of foretelling it, attempts to shape it.

The foundation of prophecies used for political purposes is that they have to be future-oriented, while remaining anchored in the past. Political prophet has the possibility of becoming the hero of his citizenry as well. Joseph Campbell's hero with a thousand faces" is to some degree what the politician should aim for. Whether this mythical hero slays a dragon, or performs any act of heroism, he always attacks the status quo which binds today into the past.¹⁶³¹ Reagan's storytelling attempts to get the people to forget the recent past just before his reign.

My opponent and his allies live in the past. They are celebrating the old and failed policies of an era that has passed them by, as if history had skipped over those Carter-Mondale years. On the other hand, millions of Americans join us in boldly charting a new course for the future.¹⁶³² The task of the hero is therefore to "release" the future, or actually to make possible the switch from immobility into progress. What existed, according to the story logic before his administration took over was "that moment of misfortune and malaise, that 'Reign of Error.'"¹⁶³³ The present moment of narration is "America of pride and power: powerful at home, powerful in the councils of the world, powerful in our ability to maintain the peace."¹⁶³⁴ Tomorrow, on the other hand, is such that "America's future can be determined by our dreams and by our visions. Together, we've opened new doors to discovery, opportunity, and progress."¹⁶³⁵ While new doors are opened and future released, it is however worthwhile to note that the hero

¹⁶³¹ Campbell (1968) p. 337

¹⁶³² Reagan (12.10.1984) Remarks During a Whistlestop Tour of Ohio
<http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1984/101284d.htm>

¹⁶³³ Reagan (12.10.1984) Remarks at a Reagan-Bush Rally in Dayton, Ohio
<http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1984/101284b.htm>

¹⁶³⁴ Reagan (21.10.1984) Remarks at a Reagan-Bush Rally in Kansas City, Missouri
<http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1984/102184a.htm>

¹⁶³⁵ Reagan (22.10.1984) Remarks to Employees at a Rockwell International Facility in Palmdale, California
<http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1984/102284b.htm>

may also take the place of the beast he has slain and become the tyrant of tomorrow.¹⁶³⁶ Another political narrator may arise and portray the politics, now matter how much progress is being made, as stagnated and immobile in his storytelling.

Campbell goes on to claim that the hero of old myths is dead in our modernity. The society people live in is, according to him, no longer grounded on religion, but increasingly secularizing socio-political constructions. The society no longer aims at creating “a heaven on earth” and mythologies are supposedly understood as lies.¹⁶³⁷ I argue that America, as Reagan narrated it, is a society where the myth is alive and tries to fulfil its promise of being the New Eden. Likewise Reagan’s political storytelling is highly future-oriented, and in a very Campbellian sense wants to allow the promise of a glorious future to become reality. There is a bind to the past, the past of New Deal, of the Founding Fathers, of the Puritans, and naturally the past of the Biblical times. This bind however exists only on the level of attitudes and beliefs and not actual reality. Reagan wanted to revive the old religious beliefs, myths of the past, and heroes. He attempted to bring them back into the American discourse of his era. Myths and beliefs are so essential to Reagan’s narratives that the society must be brought to believe in them, in God, and in an America endowed with mythical qualities.

So, a return into the times long ago is advocated by Reagan, but only as the groundwork on which to build the tomorrow. Some of this future-orientation has its roots in Reagan’s religiosity. Reagan believed in the Armageddon, and the Kingdom of God that would result from it. At the same time he believed in perfecting the contemporary world for Americans, despite his belief in Armageddon. Religion, at least in the western three major religions, sees time as an arrow and history as teleological process, working to reach some destined end point, and not cyclical, like many of the eastern religions. The teleological conception of time causes the western religions to look in the future and believe in progress and this belief was at the core of Reagan’s prophetic politics. As Schurmann asserts; “If God exists, and people have souls, then visions will arise that give people direction.”¹⁶³⁸ Thus it is possible for prophetic politics to arise only in Christian, Judaist or Islamic religion

¹⁶³⁶ Campbell (1968) p. 337, 353

¹⁶³⁷ Campbell (1968) p. 387-388

¹⁶³⁸ Schurmann (1995) p. 203

due to their non-cyclical concept of time. If everything is vain in the worldly plane, and the object of life is only to escape the wheel of karma, there is no need for grand visions of golden futures. Wallace Martin writes that our Western world has lost its “its devotion to the biblical plot of life, death, and rebirth, it finds earthly substitutes for God and a divine plan: empire and nation become objects of devotion.”¹⁶³⁹ In the case of Reagan’s mythical America, this is not entirely true.

In Reagan’s prophetic storytelling the biblical plot runs on a parallel path to the more secular plot concerning the perfection of the American society towards its Dream. They act both as separate storylines, with their own hooks to catch the story recipient into the tangles of the entire mythical story web. Our self-conception as a society can be achieved through the use of a unifying, foundational story that connects our past, present and future into a teleological process leading towards a future perfection. This mythical metanarrative of the society can be composed of innumerable different stories, but under the umbrella of the metanarrative they have to be connected and understood as a single unfolding and developing story. In the words of Polkinghorne, the self “is not a static thing nor a substance, but a configuring of personal events into a *historical unity which includes not only what one has been but also anticipations of what one will be.*”¹⁶⁴⁰ One of the key features the prophet must have, be he a religious or a political figure, is the ability to provide the people he is leading with a unified view of themselves and their existence with an idea of a joint purpose. This requires the communicated message to include events historical into the configuration of the future. Both the past and especially the future must be inherent in the prophetic message. There is no vision of the future that is separated from the past and present but the future must be narratively created (with an almost solid existence instead of being merely one possible idea that might actualize) by tying together a continuous teleological timeline that connects the past to the present and the choices that must be made to follow “on the right path” into the “right” future.

The world-creation in prophetic politics often happens through the process of reconstruction of memories. The object of politics is not so much to reform our morals as it is to reform our memories. It is through the reshaping of memories that

¹⁶³⁹ Martin (1987) p. 87

¹⁶⁴⁰ Polkinghorne (1986) p. 150. Italics mine.

our morals are reformed.¹⁶⁴¹ One of the important things in the structures of prophetic political narratives is their orientation towards time and history. “Does a practitioner of prophetic politics encourage a reconciliatory approach to history, to the linear and definitive links between past, present, and future? Or [...] utilize and promote redemptive view of history?”¹⁶⁴² The prophet must orient himself in time and bind the *kronos* time into his story, but at the same time he often distorts the idea on linear time, when he seeks to narratively change the history in order to alter the future. The past, as it is perceived, has led to the present, and the linearity of time and the notion of causality allow the prophet to decipher the meanings of past events, and predict a future according to the “laws” of causality. Should he choose to do so, he can alter the past by narrating it in a different manner. Thus, the actions of the past lead to a different present, and this allows the prophet to give alternative meanings to the states, events, and actions in his present. Because the past is altered, the present can be described as something entirely different to the common description. The idea of causality also allows the prophetic politician to describe and narrate a plausible future. Since he has already altered the past to create a certain kind of present, it is easy to offer solutions, and predict their eventual outcomes. According to Joseph Ratzinger, now better known as Pope Benedictus XVI, “a prophet is not a soothsayer: the essential element of the prophet is not the prediction of future events.”¹⁶⁴³ The prophet is supposed to tell the truth on the strength of his contact to God; “the truth for today, which also, naturally, sheds light on the future.”¹⁶⁴⁴

In the words of Gutterman, “a storyteller, situated between a people’s past and future, the prophetic figure takes on the role of defining the identity and vision of a community or nation. Interpreting and retelling the history of a people, the prophet articulates the “crisis” of the present moment and the promise as well as the dangers of the future.”¹⁶⁴⁵ Or in the words of Reagan the same is exemplified by; “We want to reach a future where the American eagle soars. He [Democratic candidate Walter Mondale] would take us back to the day of the sore eagle.”¹⁶⁴⁶ But

¹⁶⁴¹ Gutterman (2005) p. 33

¹⁶⁴² Ibid.

¹⁶⁴³ Ratzinger (2007) p. vii

¹⁶⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁶⁴⁵ Gutterman (2005) p. 49

¹⁶⁴⁶ Reagan (15.10.1984) Remarks at a Reagan-Bush Rally in Macon, Georgia
<http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1984/101584b.htm>

Gutterman's exact words are important; "situated between past and future." The prophetic political storyteller is not a figure situated in the present, since the present is ambivalent. Each tick of the clock transforms future into the past. Present is just a time for choosing, when political decisions have to be made and each of these moments enables a different future to come into existence. The present is always a moment of instantaneous choices, and the eyes of the prophet look only to the past and the future. "For one tick of the history's clock we gave the world a shining golden hope. Mankind looked to us. Now the door is closing on that hope and it could be your destiny to keep it open."¹⁶⁴⁷ The prophet scans the future in order to identify things which he perceives a threatening to the fulfilment of his vision or rather the Divine plan he communicates. "The prophet is thus poised to charge listeners with a mission to transform the world."¹⁶⁴⁸

Our vision is not an impossible dream; it's a waking dream. As Americans, let us cultivate the art of seeing things invisible. [...] The dream of America is much more than who we are or what we do. It is, above all, what we will be. We must always be the New World -- the world of discovery, the world that reveres the great truths of its past, but that looks forward with unending faith to the promise of the future. In my heart, I know we have that faith. The dream lives on. America will remain future's child, the golden hope for all mankind.¹⁶⁴⁹

4.3.1. NARRATING THE PAST

I'm convinced that in 1980 America faced one of those historic choices that come to a nation only a few times a century. We could continue our decline, perhaps comforting ourselves by calling it inevitable, or we could realize that there is no such thing as inevitable, and choose instead to make a new beginning. The American people chose the way of courage, and on this January day 3 years ago, this administration and all of you began to make a new beginning.¹⁶⁵⁰

-Ronald Wilson Reagan

Northrop Frye sees similarities between a historian and a poet because essentially both imitate actions in words. The difference lies in the fact that the poet "makes no

¹⁶⁴⁷ Speech: Alf Landon Lecture, Kansas State University, Manhattan, KS, 10/26/63 Box 44 Subseries E, Reagan, Ronald: Pre-presidential papers, Series I Speeches and writings, Ronald Reagan Library

¹⁶⁴⁸ Gutterman (2005) p. 50

¹⁶⁴⁹ Reagan (30.8.1984) Remarks During a Visit to the Goddard Space Flight Centre in Greenbelt, Maryland <http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1984/83084a.htm>

¹⁶⁵⁰ Reagan (20.1.1984) Remarks to the Reagan Administration Executive Forum <http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1984/12084a.htm>

specific statements of fact, and hence is not judged by the truth or falsehood of what he says.” The poet “imitates the universal, not the particular; he is concerned not with what happened but with what happens.”¹⁶⁵¹ The poet (or the prophetic politician, who chooses narrative leadership as his style) does not have to tell the truth of what happened on a certain case or event in actuality, but only describe what usually happens, what tends to occur. Of course he will formulate his story in such a manner that he seems to narrate the events as a historian, but still blends fact and fiction together in the actual narration and takes poetic liberties in that.

Those rebels may not have had fancy uniforms or even adequate resources, but they had a passion for liberty burning in their hearts [...] The morning of the surrender must have been very much like this one today. The first real chill of autumn was in the air. The trees were burning brilliant with the hues of red and gold and brown. The sky was bright and clear. Quiet had finally returned to the countryside. How strange the silence must have seemed after the thundering violence of war. And then the silence was broken by a muffled beat of British drums, covered with black handkerchiefs, as the Redcoats marched to surrender. The pageantry was spectacular. The French in their spotless uniforms lined one side of the road. The ragged Continentals were brown and dreary on the other side. [...] On that day in 1781 a philosophy found a people and the world would never be the same. [...] The beacon of freedom shines here for all who will see, inspiring free men and captives alike and no wall, no curtain, nor totalitarian state can shut it out.¹⁶⁵²

In this “recollection” of the British surrender Reagan posits himself as a spectator to the event and tries to transmit the way things looked like. Just as in his early days as a sports caster, he uses words to paint pictures of events just as he himself had been there that day. This is a characteristic feature in his storytelling. By creating scenes and communicating them to his audiences he simultaneously recreates and mythifies history. This enabled making the audience “see” the scenes portrayed in his words in a new way. In his words the “pageantry was spectacular”, “the first real autumn chill was in the air,” “the morning *must* have been like the one today”. It does not matter how that day actually “was” in the times past, since Reagan gives it a new birth in his narrative by recreating it again. With references between the time of narration and the time of narrated, and by depicting the scene he cues the listeners to his speech to “see” the narrated events through his words. In other words Reagan removes the audience from the time of narration, and transplants them into the story

¹⁶⁵¹ Frye (1969) p. 114

¹⁶⁵² Reagan (19.10.1981) Remarks at the Bicentennial Observance of the Battle of Yorktown in Virginia. s. 968 Italics mine

world of the past times, which he himself creates. It does not matter what that day centuries ago was like, because it had been created anew by the means of storytelling, and because of that can be seen as a greater than life experience. The scene Reagan depicts is removed from the context of history and taken as a separate scene into a separate foundational myth to back up Reagan's narration of the historicity and world-changing importance of the event depicted. When the poet, or the prophetic politician, narrates the history in this manner, it turns into something else. And in the process it is important to attempt to take the story recipients out of the world of narrating and make them create the narrated story world themselves. The prophetic view of history always adds certain qualities in it and in general, mythifies the history.

What distinguishes the prophetic view of history is that the prophets regarded the history of Israel "as a coherent history directed by moral principles and in accordance with a fixed plan."¹⁶⁵³ Here the concept of metahistory steps into play. Although the most famous man to write about it was Hayden White in his book "Metahistory,"¹⁶⁵⁴ it had actually been coined by a Canadian historian F. H. Underhill, who used it to describe such works as those of Arnold Toynbee. According to Frye, it is in the form of metahistory that most history reaches the general public, or becomes a bestseller. The historian proper confines his imitations of action to human events, always looks for a human cause, and avoids the miraculous or the providential. The historian proper works inductively, and tries to avoid any informing patterns, except those that can be seen in the facts themselves. The metahistorian, like the poet, works deductively by seeking to impose a certain pattern on his subject. If he writes a tragedy, he imposes a tragic pattern. He chooses a certain historical, legendary, or contemporary theme to use to give his story of history perspective.¹⁶⁵⁵ The Puritans were the trailblazers in the American tradition since they used the Bible not only as a model of history but also as means of emplotting history. Bible gave them the perspective towards history and provided a pattern for their stories as well. And it was this turning history into a story that laid the foundations of America as God's New Promised Land. For most respectable historians poetry is feigned history, or that they at least are two different things, and

¹⁶⁵³ Lindblom (1962) p. 325

¹⁶⁵⁴ White (1973)

¹⁶⁵⁵ It would be temptation to use the French word for a story, "*histoire*" here to further illustrate my point, but I refrain from it for reasons of clarity.

metahistory is the bastard offspring of the two. But, should we choose to “weed” metahistory out altogether, such works as those by Tacitus, Josephus, or Thucydides would have to be eliminated as well. It would be wiser to follow Frye’s suggestion and envision metahistory as having to poles, one in history proper and the other in poetry.¹⁶⁵⁶ While the metahistorian is a poet he is a “secular theologian” as well. He has to describe and re-describe and the covenant that makes people a people and be always ready to explain how his country has achieved its uniqueness.¹⁶⁵⁷

Due to the long debate about history being “objective truths told” or “subjectively told stories about the past” we might consider using Genette’s diction to describe historical stories as well. The idea Hayden White, among others, related to when he compared stories and history was advocated by W. B. Gallie, when he in a 1964 study looked at narrative as a form that history shared with fictional literature. A historical text is understood by the people in the same way that they follow a fictional story.¹⁶⁵⁸ At the same time the creative process is very similar in both.

Before the historian can bring to bear upon the data of the historical field the conceptual apparatus he will use to represent and explain it, he must first prefigure the field – that is to say, constitute it as an object of mental perception. This poetic act is indistinguishable from the linguistic act in which the field is made ready for interpretation as a domain of a particular kind.”¹⁶⁵⁹

To somewhat clarify White’s words, the world of history must be prepared for interpretation in precisely similar manner as the story worlds of any fictional story. The initial creative process of a historian, and a teller of tall tales, is just the same. Reagan was always willing to emplot the history and also to try to attempt to “prefigure the field” for future metahistorians as well. “We’re witnessing a rebirth of concern and involvement that historians may describe as a reawakening of the American Spirit.”¹⁶⁶⁰ Reagan tries to provide a plot for his present. It is an interesting aspect of Reagan’s storytelling that he constantly tries to give guidance into how the story of his presidency should be interpreted. He does this by distancing himself from the moment of actual narration and choosing the retrospective view of the historian. He posits himself in the future and by looking at

¹⁶⁵⁶ Frye (1969) p. 117-119

¹⁶⁵⁷ Mead (1977) p. 74

¹⁶⁵⁸ Polkinghorne (1988) p. 51

¹⁶⁵⁹ White (1973) p. 33

¹⁶⁶⁰ Reagan (27.4.1982) Remarks on Private Sector Initiatives at a White House Briefing for National Service Organization Leaders. s. 522

the history makes an interpretation. He does this not only in order to actually influence future historians but to present his audience with a ready-made interpretation to be accepted. Since he uses the prophetic role it is easy for him to take the viewpoint of the future since, after all, it is the future America is moving towards under his guidance.

Whatever history finally does say about our cause, it must say: The Conservative movement in 20th century America held fast through hard and difficult years to its vision of truth. And history must also say that our victory, when it was achieved, was not so much a victory of politics as it was a victory of ideas, not so much a victory for any one man or party as it was a victory for a set of principles – principles that were protected and nourished by a few unselfish Americans through many grim and heartbreaking defeats.¹⁶⁶¹

Zelinsky claims that America has never been on familiar and companionable terms with its history and that the past and the present do not blend seamlessly.¹⁶⁶² It is thus a task of the prophetic politician to create narrative binds between the past and present and use these storylines to bind the future as well. To do this, he must create a story with America as the main character and draft a plot for its course through time.

Martin notes that history has to be emplotted and storied in order to be in any way communicable. History as such is only a huge mass of events, actions, and states and to produce anything graspable for such a limited mind as a human's, the historian has to put in place beginnings, middles, and ends for this jumble of states, events, and actions. If the historian refuses to make choices concerning where exactly he starts the telling, there can be nothing to tell. Historian has to story the events of history in order for them to be in any way written down, orally told, or in any other way communicated. The flow of history has to be controlled by setting dams and breaking it into temporal units with beginnings and endings.¹⁶⁶³ The seams Zelinsky mentioned disappear and fade as history gets storied. In the early times of American historiography, the historians had a sense of mission to explain how the country achieved its uniqueness, and the concept of national unity became the interpretative credo.¹⁶⁶⁴ In other words, the unity worked as the theme for the emplotment of the American history, as they tried to weld together a common

¹⁶⁶¹ Reagan (20.3.1981) Remarks at the Conservative Political Action Conference Dinner. s. 275

¹⁶⁶² Zelinsky (1988) p. 93

¹⁶⁶³ Martin (1987) p. 73

¹⁶⁶⁴ Zelinsky (1988) p. 145

national heritage. The reason to emphasize some of the mythical moments in American history, such as the founding, or the time of the Puritans, and connecting them to present-day America lies in Bruce Lincoln's argument, that individual who feel attached to the same moment in the past can be brought together to feel attached to each other.¹⁶⁶⁵ Thus narrativizing the past in a manner that people can associate with, creates a sense of unity in the present as well. This is why the foundational myths are of crucial importance even after over two centuries have passed from the days they took place in.

Reagan provides us with an intriguing example of how one can emplot the American history. While here the plot is child-like and refers to only a small segment of the American experience, such an exaggerated version can point the way for more subtle ways of "storying" the history. Because every time some historical issues are communicated to us, they are in a storied form.

Well, to start with, the whole struggle for tax reform in our country is a kind of drama, with good guys and bad guys and even a damsel in distress. But like all dramas, it occurs in a certain context, and here's ours: Our economy, the American economy, has never been stronger, never been bigger, and never been better. [...]Well, the heroes are the citizens across this country who are asking for tax justice. The villains are the special interests, "the I-got-mine gang," and the damsel in distress, well, that's a lass named endless economic growth, and she's tied to the tracks and struggling to break free.¹⁶⁶⁶ If the historian, then, stories the history, is there any difference between events that are narrated in fiction or in history? It might seem that there is, but philosophically a fact or an event is such only under a description and any event can be described in numerous ways.¹⁶⁶⁷ While there certainly is something called historical reality, it gets sullied as soon as humans try to process, store or communicate it. It no longer is a "fact" but only an interpretation, a narration about what took place. Thus the prophetic politician with his manipulation of history commits only a similar crime as every historian does. Lincoln argues that "such strategic tinkering with the past introduces the question of myth [...] employed much in the manner of ancestral invocations or, alternatively, in that of revolutionary slogans."¹⁶⁶⁸ Interestingly in Reagan's narration these were not alternative revolutionary options. The ancestral evocations were present in the myths of the Founding Fathers and revolutionary

¹⁶⁶⁵ Lincoln (1989) p. 23

¹⁶⁶⁶ Reagan (24.9.1985) Remarks to Citizens in Athens, Tennessee
<http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1985/92485b.htm>

¹⁶⁶⁷ Martin (1987) p. 73

¹⁶⁶⁸ Lincoln (1989) p. 21

slogans were connected to the American Revolution they initiated and Reagan with the Republican Party continued.

My hope today is that in the years to come – and come it shall – when it's your time to explain to another generation the meaning of our past and thereby hold out to them the promise of the future, that you'll recall the truths and traditions [...] that define our civilization and make up our national heritage. And now, they're yours to protect and pass on.¹⁶⁶⁹

History has a specific meaning in Reagan's narration. The meaning of the past cannot be found in the events themselves, but it has to be explained. This process of explanation can be called interpretation as well, and according to Jerome Bruner, interpretation gives new meanings and points of emphasis.¹⁶⁷⁰ By employing a certain perspectival interpretation of the American history, which Reagan himself practises, can others as well pass on his "promise of the future". By narrating the past, the future can be defined as well. Sticking to the values embedded in the American Way of Life, past events are interpreted so that the future can become the glorious epoch Reagan's vision has outlined. He seems to, however, realize, that his narration alone is not enough to alter the perception of the past sufficiently to alter the future as well, and therefore calls for assistance to make the chosen value-embedded perception of the past the accepted norm, and part of the civil religious structure.

So, we've got to teach history based not on what's in fashion but what's important -- why the Pilgrims came here, who Jimmy Doolittle was, and what those 30 seconds over Tokyo meant. You know, 4 years ago on the 40th anniversary of D - day, I read a letter from a young woman writing to her late father, who'd fought on Omaha Beach. Her name was Lisa Zanatta Henn, and she said, "we will always remember, we will never forget what the boys of Normandy did." Well, let's help her keep her word. If we forget what we did, we won't know who we are. I'm warning of an eradication of the American memory that could result, ultimately, in an erosion of the American spirit. Let's start with some basics: more attention to American history and a greater emphasis on civic ritual. And let me offer lesson number one about America: All great change in America begins at the dinner table. So, tomorrow night in the kitchen I hope the talking begins. And children, if your parents haven't been teaching you what it means to be an American, let 'em know and nail 'em on it. That would be a very American thing to do.¹⁶⁷¹

¹⁶⁶⁹ Reagan (17.5.1981) Address at Commencement Exercises at the University of Notre Dame. s. 435

¹⁶⁷⁰ Bruner (1986)

¹⁶⁷¹ Reagan (11.1.1989) Farewell Address to the Nation

<http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1989/011189i.htm>

Most of Reagan's farewell address to the nation is a call of civil religion. He calls Americans to reflect upon the true nature of America. He calls for "informed patriotism," but the content of the information is the creed of civil religion. While Reagan revolution according to the story has brought "new patriotism" on the rise, it has not yet been "reinstitutionalized". Reagan's generation, he tells, got the meaning of being America from their families, schools, and communities, or if all else failed, from popular culture. Now everybody is not sure, that it would be right to teach "an ambivalent appreciation of America" to children, and children themselves need to tell their parents, that they have not done the teaching properly.

All this does not read like "informed patriotism." It is essentially about telling such stories that cue their listeners to love their country and what it is told to stand for unquestioningly. Reagan talks about teaching history based not "on fashion, but what's important." There is no room for objectivity. "What's important" are not essentially the "facts" of history, but things like reason behind the pilgrimage to America, or the meaning of 30 seconds over Tokyo, or Jimmy Doolittle. If these are considered to be the "important" things in American history, the history gets written in such a subjective sense that not even Arnold Toynbee could have imagined it.

Certain things need to be taught according to Reagan, and those are the dogma of civil religion, things that teach, coerce, and even force one into loving "my country, right or wrong." Reagan emphasizes the need to "do a better job getting across that America is freedom – freedom of speech, freedom of religion, freedom of enterprise." If the Reaganesque view of history does not get sedimented into the accepted version of history, Americans will "forget what we did" and will not know "who we are." Lest the civic religious teachings of history get institutionalized into the way people think, the "erosion of American spirit" is what ultimately could happen. Reagan himself slips into his speech what he actually calls for, "more attention to American history and a greater emphasis on civic ritual." The civil religion is one of the most important aspects in all of Reagan's storytelling, and can be raised to the level of fight against communism. His love of America, American Way of Life, and the American Dream are the things he wishes he could leave imprinted in the collective memory of the American people.

As Katherine Kohler Riessman argues, "the "truths" of narrative accounts is not in their faithful representations of a past world, but in the shifting connections

they forge among past, present and future”¹⁶⁷² All narrators, including Reagan, interpret the past in their stories, rather than producing the past as it was. Genette makes in “Narrative Discourse” a notion which fits well Reagan’s narrative. Its most persistent function of recalls is “to modify the meaning of past occurrences after the event, even by making significant what was not so originally or by refuting a first interpretation and replacing it with a new one.”¹⁶⁷³ In Reagan’s narrative this is evident in the fact that history is twisted to fit into Reagan’s world view and the importance or non-significance is determined in the course of the narration.

Reagan viewed narrative as a legitimate mode of historical representation, and this is because the communicative function of narrative is so central to all of his politics. If history, along with other things, is seen as communication, then it boils down to being a message about a referent, and its content is both information and explanation. The past takes the place of a referent, and the narrative account provides the explanations necessary. The correspondence of the story to the events it describes is at the level of the conceptual content of the message.¹⁶⁷⁴ Reagan’s view of narrative history differs from its social scientific counterpart by dramatizing events and novelizing historical processes and thus aiming to produce meanings peculiar to American culture as opposed to “real” events.¹⁶⁷⁵ History has to be emplotted, restructured, and narrated anew even in Reagan’s opinion, so that what is “important” gets to be told. Only when history is emplotted can a multitude of separate events be brought together, and a unified meaning established. If events in history were separate, their meaning would diminish and by enforcing causality on them, their extraordinary meaning is created.

Frank Kermode claims that narrative gathers up meaningful episodes from the flow of time and that the methods used in this process were cultural. He argues that in Western culture these methods continue to be draws from the Biblical notion of temporality, which is as concerned as Aristotle with beginnings and endings. Biblical time is not an uninterrupted flow as in *kronos*-time, but broken into

¹⁶⁷² Kohler Riessman (2004) p. 35

¹⁶⁷³ Genette (1980) p. 56

¹⁶⁷⁴ White (1987) p. 40 White goes on to claim that “The narrative form is only the medium for the message and has no more truth value or informational content than any other formal structure.” Ibid p.40 This does no longer apply to Reagan’s storytelling since narrative form provides most of the content of the message as well by turning it into something myth-like. White admits that arguments may be imbedded in narratives in the form of explanations, but insists on seeing them as “commentary” instead of a part of the narrative. White (1987) p. 43

¹⁶⁷⁵ White (1987) p. 44

moments of *kairos*, which are imbued with special significance. The beginning of a *kairos* moment is identified as an event that makes a difference in the life experienced, and the ending comes about with a resolution that returns the life into routine.¹⁶⁷⁶ There are special moments in time that interrupt its normal flow. The essence of prophetic politics is to portray the moment of every political resolution, be it a vote for the president, or within the senate, or any personal decision, as taking place in such a *kairos* moment. Every resolution returns normality, when it has been done to support the policies narrated. The *kronos*-time is only an illusion in prophetic politics, since every moment is turned into a *kairos*-moment, and the routine does not return since there is always a new decision to be made. This leaping from decision to decision, and continuously living on the culmination points of *kairos*-time allows the prophetic politician to avoid stagnation. The progress which stands in the focal point of his vision is continuous if, and only if, decisions favourable to him are made in each moment.

The fact that the Americanized myths are retold over and over again raises a question of memory and it is indeed one of the roles and tasks of the prophet to “empower people to engage in history.”¹⁶⁷⁷ As well as mediating between the God and his chosen people the prophet must act as a temporal mediator as well. In each of his retellings of any foundational myth the prophetic politician he alters the shifting relationships between the past, present and future.¹⁶⁷⁸ Time cannot be still, temporality must remain fuzzy, different moments of *kronos*-time must overlap and the flow of time become erratic as the future and past are in a flux and blend together. According to Wilson the change through time is a central but problematic characteristic in the Biblical or Hebraic tradition and that meaning gets identified through “dramatic figures who act out intentions common to the collectivity through particular events fraught with special significance. [...] Particular subjects, at propitious moments behave in ways to move the present toward the future out of the past.”¹⁶⁷⁹ This is the task of the political prophet as well. He must grasp the right moment to move the society into its glorious future. Aaltola claims that “the most important part of these culturally charged meanings derive from the Christian notion of time and, more specifically, from the concept of miraculous moments.

¹⁶⁷⁶ Polkinghorne (1986) p. 79

¹⁶⁷⁷ Brueggemann. Cited in Gutterman (2005) p. 14

¹⁶⁷⁸ Gutterman (2005) p. 14

¹⁶⁷⁹ Wilson (1979) p. 27

Christianized time is pregnant with expectation, with expectation of something extraordinary to happen.”¹⁶⁸⁰ In prophetic politics the expectation is always there, any moment could be miraculous. But time is a resource for the prophetic politician to manage. Occasionally time has to be slowed down, the time of narrating takes longer than the actual events in the “real” world. At other times time is sped up so that years or decades pass as their narration takes only a short while. The suspense has to be built up by the narrator since it does not exist in time itself. The time has to be supercharged; it has to be turned into *kairos* time.

America today is at a turning point. For too long we’ve been stalled in history, repeating mistakes of yesterday because our leaders have been afraid to share a new tomorrow.¹⁶⁸¹

Always in Reagan’s storytelling each and every moment is pivotal in America. Each day presents a choice to make. Mistakes of “yesterday” point to a past that is not set precisely within clear limits in time. It is, however, a relatively recent past marked by being “stalled in history.” Time does not advance normally during that gloomy period. It becomes sluggish. During periods of strife, such as Reagan’s “yesterday” which refuses to get pinpointed anywhere on *kronos*-timeline, time may be impossible to measure. Temporality becomes fuzzy and that is the aim of the narration as well. But even in that temporality, there were the *kairos*-moments. Only the opportunity to turn politics around to a better direction was not taken. One cannot help noticing, that Whittaker Chambers wrote about “our fate to live upon that turning point in history.”¹⁶⁸² For him this idea of a turning point in history refers to whether all of the world will turn communist or free. The same idea springs forth from Reagan’s speeches.

We have reached a turning point in time. It is our destiny – destiny of our party – to offer a banner for the people of all parties to follow. Choose the colors well, for they are not in a mood to follow the sickly pastels of expediency – the cynical shades of those who buy the people’s votes with the people’s money.¹⁶⁸³

Decisions have to be made, the world spins on an axis and the balance can shift either way. Thus every moment, every choice at least partially determines the direction of the future; freedom or communism. At the moment of choosing time is

¹⁶⁸⁰ Aaltola (2007) p. 166

¹⁶⁸¹ Reagan (2.3.1982) Remarks at a rally for Senator Malcolm Wallop in Cheyenne, Wyoming. s. 252

¹⁶⁸² Chambers (1952) p. 7

¹⁶⁸³ Speech: Young Republicans’ Convention, Omaha 6/23/63 Box 44 Subseries E, Reagan, Ronald: Pre-presidential papers, Series I Speeches and writings, Ronald Reagan Library

suspended. The moment of choice freezes the time in anticipation of the decision, which will release it again. As early as 1968 Reagan told an audience that

in the days just ahead [...] you and I are going to write a page in history. It can describe the rise and fall of the United States of America or it can be a recital of our finest hour. Men will live a thousand years in the shadow of our decision.¹⁶⁸⁴

Whereas Whittaker Chambers was utterly convinced that in the end Communism will prevail Reagan did not see this as an option. For him, the glorious future of America was a certainty.

America has a great future ahead. We have a future of more opportunity, more growth. We have a future of a stronger America and a freer world. And that's what we're building toward, and this is what we can achieve. The last 6 years have been only the beginning. We're just starting to climb to the mountaintop, where we can look out over the promise of our future.¹⁶⁸⁵

The narrator of history has to then choose his facts from the stream of historical events. After that he has to choose the genre of story he wants to tell about those particular states, events, and actions he has chose to be a part of the story. The emplotment of these has to fall in line with the actual sequence of events to sufficient degree and only then the story will have *vraisemblance*, or, even better, it could be seen as a true historical representation.¹⁶⁸⁶ According to Jameson, history is neither a text, nor a master narrative, but “inaccessible to us except in textual form” and we must approach both history and our contemporary reality as well “through its prior textualization, its narrativization in the political unconscious.”¹⁶⁸⁷ First and foremost in Reagan’s mind is the renarration of the American history so that religiosity is the factor that brings coherence into the entire story of American history.

Any serious look at American history shows that from the first, our people were deeply imbued with faith. Many of the first settlers came for the express purpose of worshipping in freedom, and the debates over independence and the Constitution make it clear that the Founding Fathers were sustained by their belief in God. It was George Washington who said, “Of all the dispositions and habits which lead to political prosperity, religion and morality are indispensable supports.”¹⁶⁸⁸

¹⁶⁸⁴ Reagan (13.6.1968). Cited in Kengor (2004) p. 326

¹⁶⁸⁵ Reagan (3.12.1986) Remarks at a White House Briefing for Women Entrepreneurs
<http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1986/120386b.htm>

¹⁶⁸⁶ Alker (1996) p. 297. See also Ricoeur (1981) and Hyvärinen (2006) p. 27

¹⁶⁸⁷ Jameson (2002) p. 20. Same idea is expressed page 67 as well.

¹⁶⁸⁸ Reagan (1.6.1984) Written Responses to Questions Submitted by Indro Montanelli, Editor of *Il Giornale*, on Foreign and Domestic Issues
<http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1984/60184a.htm>

“Narratives which often turn earlier presents into mere pasts tend to create a single line of development out of a multiplicity.”¹⁶⁸⁹ The very complex and detailed history of America is turned in Reagan’s narration into one unifying and simplifying sketch of a story, where alternate interpretations disappear from the view of the audience. Historical discourse can be separated into two levels. First is that of the accounts of events already established as facts, and on this very level the “competing narratives” can be assessed, criticized, and ranked. The second level is constituted by those poetic and rhetoric elements, which transform a list of facts into a story.¹⁶⁹⁰ It is hard to question Reagan’s ability to turn historical events into the form of a story, but the level of competing narratives is where his political storytelling is most influential. He portrays the American history as a narrative, which has no alternatives, no competing counter-narratives, and manages to silence the competing narratives surprisingly well.

I’m convinced that historians will look back on this as the time that we started down a new and far better road for America.¹⁶⁹¹ Polkinghorne claims that the narrative framework itself creates meanings. Narratives display purpose and direction in human affairs by configuring sequences of events, and making individual events comprehensible by identifying the “whole to which they contribute.” By the mere “inclusion in a narratively generated story, particular actions take on significance as having contributed to a complete episode. In this sense, narrative can retrospectively alter the meaning of events after the final outcome is known.”¹⁶⁹² Here are two very essential notions. Firstly, a political narrator can use the narrative framework and its inherent qualities to portray any event, no matter how minor in its political meaning, as crucial to politics. The narrator has to link the event he wants to portray as important into the causality of the narrative. If this minor event can be linked to the sequence-chain, it will turn out to be a part of the something much bigger, the final outcome of the entire narrative being told. In this way one single vote with relatively minor importance in the Senate can be portrayed as a part of the “struggle against totalitarianism.” Secondly, as has happened to the life story of Ronald Reagan, the fall of the Soviet Union has

¹⁶⁸⁹ Morson, Gary. Cited in Ochs-Capps (2001) p. 5

¹⁶⁹⁰ Dolezel (1999) p. 251

¹⁶⁹¹ Reagan (14.12.1983) Remarks and a Question-and-Answer Session With Editors of Gannett Newspapers on Domestic and Foreign Policy Issues

<http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1983/121483e.htm>

¹⁶⁹² Polkinghorne (1988) p. 18

been to a large part credited to him, and thus his visions of the future the majority of political thinkers of the time laughed at, have become important political choices. Meanings of small things can be altered after the story has reached some kind of closure, and it can be retrospectively seen as a “whole,” and retold with added emphasis enabled by 20/20 hindsight on matters. The retrospectively told story, with the help of hindsight, can be fundamentally different from the various stories told by the past actors, since the historian does not narrate past actions as much as retells past stories with the help of the current perspective.¹⁶⁹³

So, freedom's story is still being written. The brave defence of Fort McHenry by our patriot army was one of its first chapters. But the story will continue as long as there are tyrants and dictators who would deny their people their unalienable rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.¹⁶⁹⁴ Since I necessarily have had to at least partially take the view of a historian into my research topic, it is worthy to keep in mind the words of Hayden White, “The demand for closure in the historical story is a demand [...] for moral meaning, a demand that sequences of real events be assessed as to their significance as elements of a moral drama.”¹⁶⁹⁵ Many authors writing on Reagan’s presidency seem to find their closure in the fall of the Soviet Union, and the moral meaning in Reagan’s battle against communism. They therefore focus their attention on those events that seem significant in this battle between “good and evil.” But any event can have multiple meanings within a story web. As White had earlier noted, “the same event can serve as a different kind of element of many different historical stories [...] the death of the king may be a beginning, an ending, or simply a transitorial event.”¹⁶⁹⁶ Prophetic politics uses cultural resources, but also shapes them by politicians acting out their roles in the drama of politics. The largely mythological gallery of past religious and political figures provides a great tool for this as the politician, like Reagan, can resurrect the past “American Saints” to speak on his behalf and thus gain authority and charisma for him. According to Aaltola it is “important to note that a politician drawing from these resources is inclined to perform and recreate the fundamental narratives of his or her culture.”¹⁶⁹⁷ The foundational myths are

¹⁶⁹³ Polkinghorne (1988) p. 69

¹⁶⁹⁴ Reagan (14.6.1985) Remarks at a Flag Day Ceremony in Baltimore, Maryland
<http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1985/61485f.htm>

¹⁶⁹⁵ White (1987) p. 21

¹⁶⁹⁶ White (1973) p. 7

¹⁶⁹⁷ Aaltola (2007) p. 22-23

performed over and over again but they are also created anew and both their form and content are liable to get altered in these retellings.

We shouldn't be dwelling on the past, or even the present. The meaning of this election is the future.¹⁶⁹⁸ By projecting the meaning, in this case of the election, of any choice to be made, out of its contemporary context and into the future, Reagan is able to at least attempt to escape the failures of his politics that were manifest in the time on the campaign. It is in religious terms an attempt at expiation from the sins. The Reagan administration had continuously promised a “brighter tomorrow” and when it had not actualized, the electorate should according to his storytelling turn its interest into the future to come. There has been practically a promise of deliverance by the administration, but no actual delivery due to the vagueness of promises. After all, how can one define whether Reagan's America really “turned the tide of history away from totalitarian darkness and into the warm sunlight of human freedom”¹⁶⁹⁹ or if America has been moved “into a great promised land of freedom, dignity, and happiness.”¹⁷⁰⁰ If there had been more tangible promises, would failure or success have been verifiable objectively. Since there were failures, such as increasing taxation and growing national debts there was a need for redemption. The unifying factors of the failures of economic policies, for example, were individual policy decisions and not a part of the grand vision Reagan had for America. He could quite effectively narrate himself around these failures, but had they been part of the all-encompassing vision, would the failures have collapsed the entire story logic and taken the plausibility of the story world with it. Now the failures could be depicted as minor and not deadly sins as such.

The sin of failure must be, if not forgotten, at least postponed into the future in order for the policies to be successful, or at least able to continue into the more glorious “tomorrow” which seems to bear resemblance to the Mediterranean expression “*mañana*” which will perhaps be sometime in the future but most probably not tomorrow. The goal of policies has to be set so far in the future and the goals made intangible in order for prophetic politics to truly succeed. That is where

¹⁶⁹⁸ Reagan (21.10.1984) Debate Between the President and Former Vice President Walter F. Mondale in Kansas City, Missouri

<http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1984/102184b.htm>

¹⁶⁹⁹ Reagan (21.1.1985) Inaugural Address

<http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1985/12185a.htm>

¹⁷⁰⁰ Reagan (25.1.1985) Remarks at the 1985 Reagan Administration Executive Forum

<http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1985/12585a.htm>

mistakes are often made. The content of a political prophecy has to promise something that will only actualize in a manner that cannot be verified or falsified.

As we work to make the American dream real for all, we must adhere to traditional values, keep our faith in God, and put our trust in people, rather than in the Government, to solve the problems before us. [...]Through a recommitment to our fundamental values, we can achieve a collective vision for a rising America -- now, and for the future.¹⁷⁰¹

When narration is what Uri Margolin calls “concurrent narration,” events are narrated in present tense, as if happening simultaneously with the process of narration. The stages of narration are matched with the stages of the narrated, and the narration itself becomes the “gradual figuring out what the case is as it evolves.”¹⁷⁰² One cannot in fact live a story and narrate it at the same time, the attempt to do so results rather in ongoing reporting. “My friends, we live in a world that's lit by lightning. So much is changing and will change, but so much endures and transcends time.”¹⁷⁰³ Reagan’s idea of temporality is very clearly expressed here. The world is “lit by lightning” refers to the suddenness of change, the mere fact that we get glimpses of our world while for microseconds the darkness is chased away by a flash only to return again. And when the next flash takes place, everything looks different. There is nothing steady, the pace of life is hectic, and progress is continuous. But yet the old-fashioned, old-time wisdoms, visions and values are omnipresent and remain unchanged between flashes of lightning. The idea of a lightning flash is also fitting to describe the importance of the present moment in a political prophecy. The “now” is just a fleeting moment, and the world may seem entirely different when the next flash comes by. “Well, everything we do is a fragment of history, a passing moment in time.”¹⁷⁰⁴

Nevertheless even the “now” has meaning in a political narration. The past needs to be a beautiful picture, and while today can be depicted a merely a bleak moment in time, Reagan’s internal optimism, which was part of his fascination for Americans, did not consider even the present as hopeless. “Now” is a special time in Reagan’s narration as well.

¹⁷⁰¹ Reagan (6.2.1986) Message to the Congress on America's Agenda for the Future
<http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1986/20686c.htm>

¹⁷⁰² Margolin (1999) p. 151

¹⁷⁰³ Reagan (21.1.1985) Inaugural Address
<http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1985/12185a.htm>

¹⁷⁰⁴ Reagan (5.6.1985) Remarks at a Fundraising Luncheon for Senator Don Nickles in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma <http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1985/60585b.htm>

There are generations that preside over transition periods like this, when there are great changes in the world. And we've been one of those. And no generation in history, no people have ever fought harder, paid a higher price for freedom, or done more to advance the dignity of man than our generation. And I'm not going to apologize to anyone for what we've done with our lives so far.¹⁷⁰⁵

Garry Willis put the point fittingly when he argued that Reagan saw America clearly poised “between the Good Old Days and the Brave New World. We pass from one perfection to another, through an interspace it were best not to advert to.”¹⁷⁰⁶ But some of the glory of the future is at least occasionally reflected on the here and now as well.

Memory is far from infallible and when it comes to the “good old days” it leaves out a lot of the not so good. [...] Now, don't get me wrong my memories are pretty happy and I enjoy closing my eyes now and then for a re-run or two. But I also find life exciting and good today, *in truth better in most respects*.¹⁷⁰⁷

The narrated world is continuously in the process of becoming. It takes shape as it is narrated. It is not a bounded world, but only turning into one and no pattern, plot, or narrative theme can be used to describe such an evolving story.¹⁷⁰⁸ Just because of this, concurrent narration should be avoided in political narratives. Stories should be told with a view into the future or the past, and almost ignore the present. Since the present can only be described or reported, and not storied in such a manner that a coherent plot could be progressively built, the narrator has no control upon how the story will evolve. The present is important only as a moment when decisions have to be made, which will determine the future. This helps us understand why the weakest moment of Reagan's entire storytelling was the period when he had to narrate the Iran-Contra scandal, while the entire process was still ongoing. This also explains Reagan's extensive isolation from the press during the process when hearings of Oliver North and Admiral John Pointdexter were still continuing. Reagan was not in control of the way the plot emerged from one moment to another. Only when the hearings were over, did Reagan again participate, and contribute to the story because by then, it was easier to set all events within a narrative macrostructure and turn them into a coherent whole, or in other words, retrospectively emplot the events that had or had not taken place. Mike Deaver states it as his belief that during the

¹⁷⁰⁵ Reagan (6.7.1982) Remarks and a Question-and-Answer Session with Senior Citizens in Los Angeles, California. s. 907

¹⁷⁰⁶ Willis (2000) p. xxiii

¹⁷⁰⁷ Reagan (2001) p. 94. Radio address in August 1975. Italics mine.

¹⁷⁰⁸ Margolin (1999) p. 153

entire course of the Iran-Contra affair Reagan was telling the Americans all that he knew and precisely what he knew. Of this Deaver has no doubt, because he “never heard Ronald Reagan tell a lie – not once. I think it would have been impossible for him to do so.”¹⁷⁰⁹

Edmund Morris claims that “there never was a politician more interested in the past,”¹⁷¹⁰ but I strongly disagree with him. It was the actual events and people in recent history that Reagan took no interest in. On the contrary he was very keen on the past, but the past of his interest was the mythical past and recreating such a history with stories.

History's no easy subject. Even in my day it wasn't, and we had so much less of it to learn then. [Laughter] But one of the most valuable benefits of a study of the past is that it gives you a perspective on the present. I think it's probably true that every generation, every age, is prone to think itself beset by unusual and particularly threatening difficulties and to look back on the past as a golden age when issues were not so complex and politics not so divisive and when problems didn't seem so intractable. Sometimes we're tempted to think of the birth of our country as one such golden age: a time characterized primarily by harmony and cooperation and reason.’¹⁷¹¹

Christianity is traditionally a prophetic religion just as Judaism before it and Islam after it are. At the same time these religions are traditionalist since their institutions, mores and leadership are all legitimated by an appeal to the past.¹⁷¹² Prophetic elements need to connect the future with the past. According to Reinhold Niebuhr we have created a new religion, which is thoroughly this-worldly, although it has nothing in common with the secularized this-worldliness of modern culture. “The religion of modern culture is [...] a superficial religion which has discovered a meaningful world without having discovered the perils to meaning in death, sin and catastrophe. History has an immediate, an obvious meaning because it spells progress.”¹⁷¹³ And the central core of Reagan’s message for progress for America in all walks of life. An appeal to the past is made for the values which have kept America on the path of progress and will do so in the future as well.

¹⁷⁰⁹ Deaver (2003) p. 121

¹⁷¹⁰ Morris (1999) P. 394

¹⁷¹¹ Reagan (10.9. 1987) Remarks to the Winners of the Bicentennial of the Constitution Essay Competition <http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1987/091087a.htm>

¹⁷¹² Blenkinsopp (1995) p. 11

¹⁷¹³ Niebuhr (1986) p. 7

Ours is not a negative administration trying to turn back the clock. That's what some of our opponents would like to do – to go back to the bankrupt policies of the past.¹⁷¹⁴

Reagan's sights are set in the future. There is no return to past failures or even past moments of glory. The values and traditions of the past have to be carried through today into the future, which will be something better than even the golden past. The past is crucial in any prophetic narrative, but it has to be a past distant enough to be mythified and turned into something with a profound meaning and purpose. Then the mythified past can be used as the soil where the political narrator plants the seeds of his story and cultivates it to grow a future greater than one can even wish. As Reagan put it, "The heritage of our past will bring forth the harvest of our future."¹⁷¹⁵ But the national character and the American Dream Reagan kept reformulating can be altered also by altering the past, narrating it in a different manner so that the harvest of the future may bring different crops. In that sense the past will bring about the future by making demands. Because the past has been altered and created anew, this will reflect on what must be done in the future.

I preach no manifest destiny, but I do say we Americans cannot turn our backs on what history has asked of us. Keeping alive the hope of human freedom is America's mission, and we cannot shrink from the task or falter in the call to duty.¹⁷¹⁶

To sum up the argument about the importance of the past and present in prophecy it suffices to say that pasts, presents, and futures should co-exist and mingle in a prophecy to such a degree that the temporality within the prophetic narrative becomes fuzzy. The prophetic politician has to be able to swim in the stream of time, occasionally go with the flow of *kronos* time, at other times halt it during the fleeting moments of *kairos* but be prepared to take a leap into the future with his visions as well.

I spoke in the State of the Union of a second American revolution, and now is the time to launch that revolution and see that it takes hold. If we move decisively, these years will not be just a passing era of good feeling, not just a few good years, but a true golden age of freedom.¹⁷¹⁷

¹⁷¹⁴ Reagan (15.3.1982) Address before a Joint Session of the Tennessee State Legislature in Nashville. s. 298

¹⁷¹⁵ Reagan (19.8.1984) Remarks at the Missouri State Fair in Sedalia
<http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1984/81984b.htm>

¹⁷¹⁶ Reagan (4.9.1984) Remarks at the Annual Convention of the American Legion in Salt Lake City, Utah
<http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1984/90484a.htm>

¹⁷¹⁷ Reagan (1.3.1985) Remarks at the Annual Dinner of the Conservative Political Action Conference
<http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1985/30185f.htm>

I have argued that the importance of the prophecy is in the changes it brings about in the present by using the past as a foundation and the future to beckon the citizens onwards.

As we work to make the American dream real for all, we must adhere to traditional values, keep our faith in God, and put our trust in people, rather than in the Government, to solve the problems before us. [...]Through a recommitment to our fundamental values, we can achieve a collective vision for a rising America -- now, and for the future.¹⁷¹⁸

But when we look at the Israelite prophets it remains unclear what effects they had on the policies at the time they narrated their prophecies. We can say that the prophets who preached judgement were hated and persecuted and much of the history of Israelite prophets is a history of martyrdom.¹⁷¹⁹ Hosea was dismissed as a fool, attempts were made to silence Amos and Micah and Isaiah retired after unsuccessfully intervening in foreign policy.¹⁷²⁰ It is therefore not politically beneficent for the prophetic politician to include too much of the sense of judgement into his message but focus on the benefits, the welfare, which would come to the nation if his prophecy is obeyed. This was the crucial part of Reagan's message, but he was active in envisioning the "golden age of freedom" in America's future as well. This is always a tricky task for the prophet, political and religious alike.

4.3.2. NARRATING THE THINGS TO COME

I know that the past was great and the future will be great,
And I know that both curiously conjoint in the present time.
-Walt Whitman¹⁷²¹

Your generation stands on the verge of greater advances than humankind has ever known. America's future will be determined by your dreams and your visions.¹⁷²²

-Ronald Wilson Reagan

Traditionally the main features of the ordinary prophecies of Amos, Isaiah, and Jeremiah among others were derived directly from the history and the religious and

¹⁷¹⁸ Reagan (6.2.1986) Message to the Congress on America's Agenda for the Future
<http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1986/20686c.htm>

¹⁷¹⁹ Lindblom (1962) p. 203-204

¹⁷²⁰ Ibid. see also Blenkinsopp (1995) p. 154

¹⁷²¹ Whitman (1981) p. 194

¹⁷²² Reagan (30.5.1984) Address at Commencement Exercises at the United States Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs, Colorado
<http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1984/53084a.htm>

moral consciousness of the prophets. Whenever they predicted the future the contents of these predictions were of a very general nature, related to contemporary historical circumstances and above all, “not very detailed so that normally their fulfilment need not be limited to specific events.”¹⁷²³ While we often tend to confuse the concept of a “prophet” with that of the “future teller,” even in the traditional biblical context the importance of the prophecies was in interpretations of values and history. The future is notoriously difficult to predict and thus the prophet should refrain from doing it. Unfortunately, the prophetic politician has to use the future as the motivator for his people. My definition of the prophetic politician is a leader and he has to lead his people into the future. Thus, pointing out social injustice at the present is not a sufficient task for him, and rarely our present is such an inspiring moment in time, that it could motivate the citizenry enough. Thus, a glorious future has to be waved like a cornucopia in front of the people to make them struggle to make it actualize. In this section I will discuss further how it can be done and why should it be done.

Wallace Martin makes a crucial mistake when he claims that “narratives concern the past. [...] Whereas most sciences involve prediction, narrative involves retrodiction.”¹⁷²⁴ Martin is too stuck with the historical conception of a narrative. Genette notes that a narrative need not be necessarily retrospective in its nature, although this is by far the most common temporal determination. In most cases the story precedes its telling, but there is a long tradition of “predictive” narrative such as prophetic, apocalyptic, astrological or for example oneiromantic. The notion of predictiveness does not arise directly from language, as in the use of certain tense, since predicative narrative can be conjugated in the present tense as well as future. Likewise the predicative narrative can be what Genette chooses to call “interpolated” narrative. This means narration in several instances can occur in such a way that the story and the act of narrating are entangled so, that the act of narration shapes the story as well.¹⁷²⁵ Since the prophetic politician is a political leader, his stories as tools of leadership change the future. Narrating itself changes the story and the world as well.

¹⁷²³ Lindblom (1962) p. 199

¹⁷²⁴ Martin (1987) p. 74

¹⁷²⁵ Genette (1980) p. 216-217

In Margolin's terminology "prospective narration" refers to the future tense narration of that which has not yet occurred, be it prediction, prognosis, projection, wish, or even a prophecy. "Here, the temporal *cum* modal, rather than the aspectual, is the decisive factor."¹⁷²⁶ There is nothing as yet to be experienced or indeed recounted, while the prophetic type of narrative tries to portray the future as predetermined, but only if the right choice is made in the present. As we have seen earlier, the only kinds of worlds we are able to create or produce is possible worlds.¹⁷²⁷ So, while the virtual, unactualized story world of the prophetic narrative is depicted to be as good as real, it in actuality remains "a mere potentiality or possibility being projected, entertained, and described, not a range of actual facts [...] to be experienced and narrated."¹⁷²⁸ Much is possible, but nothing has been decided as yet. One's sights are only set in the narration of the future. Thus the great demand for a prophetic narrator, whether political or not, is to create a story world that would not *feel* only virtual to the story recipient. While castles are spun from clouds, they must feel at the moment of narration as rock-solid. The unpredictability of the future must be denied within the narrative, and this poses a great difficulty for any narrator. One mechanism he can use is to rely on the principle of causality. It is the act of choosing, making a political decision in this moment, which freezes the future into place. Before the moment of choice, there is a multitude of alternative futures and the choosing is the act that actualizes one. Before, there is uncertainty, but choosing sets a certain course in motion that cannot be altered. "Our destiny is not our fate. It is our choice."¹⁷²⁹ Reagan's prophecies do not include predeterminism. Nothing in the future is determined, and the choice today can change the way the future turns out to be. This does not prevent Reagan from visioning and depicting the future, but the future according to his vision will come to existence only if his policies are followed. The glorious future is a birthright, but it is not guaranteed. A lot of working and dreaming big is required to make Reagan's prophecy come true.

¹⁷²⁶ Margolin (1999) p. 153-154

¹⁷²⁷ Dolezel (1999) p. 253.

¹⁷²⁸ Margolin (1999) p. 154

¹⁷²⁹ Reagan (30.3.1981) Remarks at the National Conference of the Building and Construction Trades Department, AFL-CIO. s. 306

All we can do to earn what we've received is to dream large dreams, to live lives of kindness, and to keep faith with the unfinished vision of the greatness and wonder of America.¹⁷³⁰

In the words of Livia Polanyi narratives “tell about a series of events which took place at specific unique moments in a unique past time world.”¹⁷³¹ This is a very accurate description for those of Reagan’s narratives that deal with the American history. Everything in the long ago was unique in its nature. The American Revolution is as unique as an event as the Declaration of Independence is as a document and a result of a creative process. All of the American Experience is unique to Reagan. But when discussing the features of the present or describing the glorious future of America the tenses in Polanyi’s citation need to be replaced with present and future tenses. There is nothing which would prevent this logically, only the focalization of the narrative turns towards the unique things to come and anticipating them. After this slight modification her words ring true even in the narratives of Reagan who focuses on predicting the glorious future.

The predictive side of narratives is and for effectiveness should always be present in prophetic politics. Naturally one main focal point of a prophetic narrative has to be in the past to interpret it in the most suitable manner, but to lead effectively, whether politically, or in some other manner, the sights of the narration must be focused into the future. Narrative leadership is future-oriented, but has its roots in the past and in the process of storytelling both the past and the future become very fluid concepts for the benefit of the narrator. The biblical prophets saw history as a field of divine action and the events of history showed God at work. History itself was a revelation for the prophets. “They fixed their eyes upon the great moments of history, interpreted them to their people as true manifestations of the essence and will of Yahweh, and drew from them conclusions which might also be applied to less significant historical occurrences.”¹⁷³²

Genette points out that the use of temporal prolepsis, or anticipation, is not very common in our western narrative tradition. The plot does not often seem to be constructed along the lines of predestination. We are used to events unfolding along the story and the omnipresence of possibilities for plot changes. There are both internal and external prolepses. External prolepses are often in the form of epilogues

¹⁷³⁰ Reagan (14.11.1988) Remarks and a Question-and-Answer Session With Area Junior High School Students <http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1988/111488c.htm>

¹⁷³¹ Polanyi. Cited in Ochs-Capps (2001) p. 161

¹⁷³² Lindblom (1962) p. 323

and “serving to continue one or another line of action on to its logical conclusion.” Internal prolepses are closer to anticipations that “offset future ellipses or paralipses.” and can be iterative by nature.¹⁷³³ The prolepses Reagan uses are most commonly external in character since for him history unfolds towards its inevitable turning point in the fall of communism and the eventually resulting freedom of all peoples in the world. “History is a ribbon, always unfurling. History is a journey. And as we continue our journey, we think of those who travelled before us.”¹⁷³⁴ This idea of teleological future is characteristic to Reagan’s narration and the oncoming fall of communism occurs in his narration with such frequency that it can be considered to be an iterative prolepsis. After all, we have to keep in mind that Reagan never expressed any doubt about communism being “a spent force, a sad, bizarre chapter in human history whose last pages even now are being written.”¹⁷³⁵ For Reagan it was just a question of time and the ardent anti-communist policies he carried out were just a tool to speed up the destruction of the Soviet Union. But since its existence was the main justification for his build-up of the military, the threat of the Communist world had to play a part in his political storytelling. Actually his narrative treatment of the Soviet Union provides one weak spot in his entire story logic. Occasionally the Soviet Union has “built up such a massive force”¹⁷³⁶ and at other times it is weak and merely “sad, rather bizarre chapter in human history.”¹⁷³⁷ The story verse provides us with a justification why Reagan was able to fluctuate between different meanings of the Soviet strength. When he was emphasizing the capabilities of freedom, the Soviet Union could not pose a threat due to its totalitarian nature. When Reagan wanted to enhance American power especially in military terms, the threatening nature of the old adversary popped up. But if we look at all of Reagan’s narratives in a comprehensive manner, mostly Soviet Union and Communism along it was doomed to fail and could not forestall the march of freedom that his America led. Prolepses are crucial to prophetic

¹⁷³³ Genette (1980) p. 67-79

¹⁷³⁴ Reagan (21.1.1985) Inaugural Address

<http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1985/12185a.htm>

¹⁷³⁵ Reagan (22.4.1986) Remarks at the Heritage Foundation Anniversary Dinner

<http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1986/42286f.htm>

¹⁷³⁶ Reagan (13.5.1986) Remarks and a Question-and-Answer Session With Students of John A. Holmes High School of Edenton, North Carolina

<http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1986/51386d.htm>

¹⁷³⁷ Reagan (20.3.1981) Remarks at the Conservative Political Action Conference Dinner. s. 277

narratives since they spell out what is going to happen in the future. One might argue prophesying becomes impossible without the use of prolepses.

Commonly events may be narrated only after they have actually happened in the form of ulterior narration but occasionally and less frequently anterior narration can be used as well. In the words of Rimmon-Kenan

It is a kind of predictive narration, generally using the future tense, but sometimes the present. Whereas examples abound in the Biblical prophecies, complete modern texts written in the predictive vein are rare. Instead, this type of narration tends to appear in narratives within narratives in the form of prophecies, curses or dreams of fictional characters.¹⁷³⁸

It has to be acknowledged that Reagan's entire storytelling is not composed with anterior narration, but certainly many prophetic elements in his storytelling abide to this distinction. All the dreams of future peace, the realisation of the American Dream, the visioning how future generations may perceive the Reagan era, and numerous other examples abound in Reaganesque text as well in anterior narration. Rimmon-Kenan's "narratives within narratives" could be translated as narratives within the metastory or the narrative framework/discourse just as well. The entire web of stories and storylines is not spun as prophetic, but besides small anecdotes and isolated segments the prophetic anterior narration is evident in many of the stories told within the entire story web. Not everything a political prophet such as Reagan can or even should be interpreted as prophetic. There are only certain elements in the entire narrative framework which are prophetic but they manage to create the sensation that the country is indeed moving toward the glorious era of the future.

Edmund Morris claims that even Reagan's tendency to reminisce about his days as the Governor of California, or the Hollywood days, was "not a looking back so much as an eager application of history to today and tomorrow."¹⁷³⁹ According to Cannon, Reagan used his optimistic imagination to transform his childhood and rest of his past into an idyll, and later managed to create an America that never was, founded on an imagined version of the past. This vision had meaning to others because of its sheer power and Reagan's personal belief in it.¹⁷⁴⁰ And this vision remains not only tied to the past but the same vision is projected into the future as well without advocating a return to the past at all. Even the future America can be

¹⁷³⁸ Rimmon-Kenan (1983) p.90

¹⁷³⁹ Morris (1999) p. 9

¹⁷⁴⁰ Cannon (2003) p. 81

depicted like the America of the past which actually never existed at all in the real world but had substance only as a mythical story world. The great hopes and expectations for the times to come are partially explained by Rantapelkonen who argues that it is indeed the raising of these hopes and expectations that is the task of the president.¹⁷⁴¹ Even when Reagan seemed to dwell in the past golden age of America, he was already dreaming of the glorious tomorrow. Willis articulates this by claiming that for Reagan, “we were suspended between two glowing myths: the religious past and the technological future.”¹⁷⁴² Or, to use the words of Reagan himself,

The dream of America is much more than who we are or what we do; the dream is what we will be. We must always be the New World, the world of discovery, the world that reveres the great truths of its past but that pushes on with unending faith toward the promise of the future. In my heart, I know we have that faith. The dream lives on. America will remain future's child, the golden hope of all mankind.¹⁷⁴³

Storytelling often is perceived only as retrospective activity intended to delineate the meanings of past actions, but it is at the same time self-making and world making activity where identity and context of the past, present and future are delineated and a unified conception of reality is projected into the world.¹⁷⁴⁴ Reagan’s first Secretary of State Alexander M. Haig saw Reagan’s political views to include the notion that “to make foreign policy for a powerful state is, to a degree, to make the future.”¹⁷⁴⁵ Politics that concern today, must not limit themselves to making today better, but essentially to create, primarily narratively, but also in a more concrete manner, the future.

Some people in high positions of leadership tell us that the answer is to retreat, that the best is over. For 200 years we’ve lived in the future, believing that tomorrow would be better than today and today would be better than yesterday. I still believe that.¹⁷⁴⁶

These were the closing words of Reagan in his 1980 debate with the third party candidate John Anderson, and the essence of Reagan’s prophetic politics is given here in its clearest form. Prophetic politics is really about “living in the future” and for the future instead of the past, or, as would seem natural, the present. There is a

¹⁷⁴¹ Rantapelkonen (2006) p. 191

¹⁷⁴² Willis (2000) p. xxiv

¹⁷⁴³ Reagan (5.9.1984) Remarks and a Question-and-Answer Session at the “Choosing a Future” Conference in Chicago, Illinois <http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1984/90584a.htm>

¹⁷⁴⁴ Gutterman (2005) p. 22

¹⁷⁴⁵ Haig (1984) p. 13

¹⁷⁴⁶ Reagan (21.9.1980) Cited in Clymer (1981) p. 144

strong Christian influence to be seen in this. The life of politics is eschatological, and rewards are not to be reaped today, but tomorrow, in the future. While after death a good Christian may expect a place in heaven, prophetic politics offers its vision of future as almost heaven on earth, but only if people orient themselves to the future.

We all believe in America's mission. We believe that in a world wracked by hatred and crisis, America remains mankind's best hope. The eyes of history are upon us, counting on us to protect the peace, promote a new prosperity, and provide for a better tomorrow.¹⁷⁴⁷

It is a part of the prophetic narration that the better tomorrow awaits and that history can be eradicated anytime. During Reagan's twenty minute walkabout around the city of Moscow during the 1988 summit with Gorbachev a reporter was able to confront Reagan with a question about whether he still thought he was in an evil empire and Reagan denied. When asked why he replied "I was talking about another time in another era."¹⁷⁴⁸ Times and eras seem to fluctuate very rapidly since the "evil empire" speech had been just five years earlier. Twenty years earlier Reagan had been even harsher by arguing that

In another decade, the world will be headed either in the direction of freedom or slavery. Peaceful co-existence on Russia's terms is a satanic, diabolical device of the enemy to blunt our sword while he moves into position for the kill. Freedom is never more than one generation away from extinction. We must save it now or spend our sunset years telling our children and our children's children what it was like when men were free.¹⁷⁴⁹

This only serves to indicate that making a choice at any given moment of time may indicate a beginning of a new era and all in the past is forgotten. History can be erased and the country can always start from a clean slate as they did when the Puritans first came to the New World. Since Gorbachev made decisions on the future of Soviet Union it once again according to the idea of prophetic politics started a new era after the decisive moment of choosing. Some criticized Reagan of being guilty of "vaporization" in the terms of George Orwell. This meant that "Big Brother" wants to change a historical or present facts and contradictory evidence to the new thesis is made to disappear. This is exactly the essence of Reagan's politics and as Reeves notes: "that skill, that gift was at the heart of Reagan's formidable politics. He imagined a past. He imagined a world. And he made people believe in

¹⁷⁴⁷ Reagan (14.9.1983) Remarks at the Fundraising Dinner of the Republican National Hispanic Assembly <http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1983/91483d.htm>

¹⁷⁴⁸ Reeves (2005) p. 473

¹⁷⁴⁹ Speech "Encroaching Control, no date. Box 43 Subseries E, Reagan, Ronald: Pre-presidential papers, Series I Speeches and writings, Ronald Reagan Library

the past he imagined, and a future, too.”¹⁷⁵⁰ Herein is the concentrated core of prophetic politics explained simply and relatively easily. It is about creating or imagining a vision of the past and a vision of the future and portraying the actual point in time and politics as the moment that could chart a course to the actualization of that vision. When the choice is made to follow the vision, nothing in the past matters, except the imaginary past told in the narrative. Past is like a vast array of stories, a bag the politician can dip in on choice and bring up features that support his storytelling and his story world. All else can be omitted and silenced.

Knowledge of the past is one of our most treasured possessions, for only with an accurate picture of where we have been can we see where we must go. [...] We must ensure that the gains of the past are not lost in the future and in so doing we can look to tomorrow with confidence.¹⁷⁵¹

Past is a mirror for the prophetic politician to hold in front of the society, and with his narration he can provide an interpretation of what he sees and a vision of what is to become of the society. This vision is created upon his knowledge of past experiences. But for the purposes of politics the mirror has to be like of the carnival funhouse mirrors. It has to distort the past to make it look better so that the society could see a reflection of itself that is closer to the Durkheimian ideals than the reality. This metaphorical mirror distorts the present and the future as well. The negative aspects of the present, such as the homeless, do not show in the mirror and when it comes to the future, it is reflected in all the glory it is possible to narrate to possess. But always, the future can be seen only as a reflective image of the past. It is by no means similar to the past but by decoding the past, the future can be deduced.

I do recall that on one occasion Sir Winston Churchill said in exasperation about one of our most distinguished diplomats: “He is the only case I know of a bull who carries his china shop with him.” But witty as Sir Winston was, he also had that special attribute of great statesmen – the gift on vision, the willingness to see the future based on the experience of the past.¹⁷⁵²

Vision as an attribute of great statesmen keeps popping up from Reagan’s storyline. Traditionally visions have been divided into corporeal, imaginative and intellectual. In the first, the prophet sees or hears things with his normal senses, in the second with “the eye of the soul” and in the third revelations are the influx into the mind of

¹⁷⁵⁰ Reeves (2005) p. 473

¹⁷⁵¹ Reagan (2.2.1981) Message on the Observance of National Afro-American (Black) History Month. s. 68

¹⁷⁵² Reagan (8.7.1982) Address to Members of the British Parliament. s. 743

thoughts and ideas.¹⁷⁵³ While Reagan himself saw the “shining city on a hill” through the eye of his soul and American people provided him with an influx of ideas, vision in prophetic politics is not only these things. In Reagan’s story world a true visionary uses the experiences of the past to conjure up a vision of the future. History is important to interpret to picture the future and thus the storyline implies to the beneficiary nature of the statesman being an elderly figure, because then he or she has personally witnessed more of the past. With a clear view of the past according to prophetic political narration one is able to gain glimpses of the future as well. It is, after all, one of the main tasks of the prophet to communicate to his followers, what the future has to offer.

Having said all this I want to emphasize again that prophecy is not foretelling. The traditional *nabi* is not connected to the future as one who predicts it. His role is to set the audience before the choice and decision, directly or indirectly. “The future is not something already fixed in this present hour, it is dependent upon the real decision, that is to say, the decision in which man takes part in this hour.”¹⁷⁵⁴ The prophetic politician does not predict the future; he has no idea of the individual events that will take place. There is a certain eschatological element involved in prophetic politics and this directly implies to a certainty concerning a future state of perfection. But there is no such end to history as Francis Fukuyama predicted¹⁷⁵⁵ involved in Reagan’s narratives. While, being a millennialist, Reagan has beliefs concerning the millennium to come; the narration focuses on a future where progress has no tangible endpoint. The ultimate utopia is narrated as attainable but in practice there is no way to determine whether it has been reached or even could be reached. Thus the promise of the future utopia beckons the people forward but itself moves further all the time. Thus, while there is the ultimate state of bliss as the objective or destination, progress can be depicted as practically an eternal force and balancing of the certainty of the future utopia and the uncertainty concerning how much more needs to be done before it would actualize creates a politically favourable environment where the citizens strive forward without cessation.

¹⁷⁵³ Lindblom (1962) p. 36

¹⁷⁵⁴ Buber (1949) p. 2-3

¹⁷⁵⁵ See Fukuyama (2006) who sees the historical process as having an end.

While the prophetic politician then does, is not predicting exactly what the future will hold, but rather providing the story recipients with a rough outline what could be expected of the future. What he does, is envision a future, depict it and lead the people toward this vision which, according to his narration, may become true. What this vision should be like is well articulated by Boer, who writes that each and every political system “operates in terms of an ideal or utopian projection of what it might be. The key to realizing that ideal is overcoming some obstruction or other.”¹⁷⁵⁶ But the obstruction is important since such a limit makes the system work. “Should the ideal be realized, the system would collapse.”¹⁷⁵⁷ In a sense every vote, every decision, every election is an obstacle and it is important for the prophetic politician to keep new obstructions appearing constantly so that new choices have to be made in striving toward the ultimate utopia. As Bruce Lincoln argues, “extremely important” myths are not set in the past but in “the future, a mythic future that – like the mythic past – enters discourse in the present always and only for the reasons of the present.”¹⁷⁵⁸

There is a long tradition even within the bounds of the academic world to view Reagan as a type of “arch-conservative,” whose agenda consisted of dragging America back into the golden age of the past. My argument is that Reagan on the contrary wanted to make “America a rocket of hope shooting to the stars.”¹⁷⁵⁹ Kenneth Burke calls the process where one introduces new principles while theoretically remaining faithful to old principles “casuistic stretching.”¹⁷⁶⁰ This process was a key factor in Reagan’s success of introducing radical and especially in the economic realm liberal policies and still managing to appear as a conservative. Rebecca Klatch has written about the conservative worldview and has divided it into two contradictory components, the social and the *laissez-faire* conservative. The aforementioned want to regenerate religious belief and renew faith and morality. The latter see the erosion not in terms of moral decay but erosion of liberty which threaten the individuality.¹⁷⁶¹ Reagan was an advocate of both of these beliefs but he assured that, after all, “We’re here to take a step into America’s future. We’ll talk

¹⁷⁵⁶ Boer (2009) p. 115

¹⁷⁵⁷ Boer (2009) p. 115

¹⁷⁵⁸ Lincoln (1989) p. 38

¹⁷⁵⁹ Reagan (5.9.1984) Remarks and a Question-and-Answer Session at the “Choosing a Future” Conference in Chicago, Illinois <http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1984/90584a.htm>

¹⁷⁶⁰ Burke (1984) p. 229

¹⁷⁶¹ Klatch (1991) p.363-364

today about the 21st century. That seems like the distant future; but in the life of a person, much less the life of this still young nation, the 21st century is but a few moments away.”¹⁷⁶² I argue that Reagan cannot truly be even called a conservative. His ideology was at the same time definitely based on conservative values, but more importantly the expectations of the future were by no means reactionary and concerned in recreating the past but instead focused on the progress in all areas of life, scientific progress and human development included.

You know, we've been hearing a lot lately from politicians who keep talking about how dark the future is. Well, I think the narrowness of their vision stems from a kind of blindness to the adventure that technology continues to offer us. Those folks have such a strangled sense of possibilities. But in space, the possibilities are endless. It's good news for all mankind and for our country.¹⁷⁶³

Already in 1978 Reagan hinted in a radio address expressing his concern over Russian “Hunter-killer” satellites that “we have embarked on a catch-up program which will have us armed with very sophisticated space weaponry sometime in the early 80’s”¹⁷⁶⁴ Mary Stuckey writes that the SDI has distinctly Reaganesque features being extremely optimistic, built upon faith in the capabilities of America to accomplish, and looking to future and a better world in imprecise ways. SDI was also “noncomplex, [it] provides images of expansion and exploration, and it supports the American myth of salvation “by a single hero.””¹⁷⁶⁵ Reagan’s vision of the SDI project was tainted with his optimism since it would provide destructive force towards the missiles but without anyone getting hurt. Wills has compared it to the “Lone Ranger’s silver bullet which he used only to knock guns out of the bad guys’ hands.”¹⁷⁶⁶

The space-based projects created a new frontier for the American hero to conquer and to excel in, since in our modern world the frontiers are no longer

¹⁷⁶² Reagan (17.2.1987) Remarks to Business Leaders at a White House Briefing on Economic Competitiveness <http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1987/021787b.htm>

¹⁷⁶³ Reagan (21.7.1984) Radio Address to the Nation on Commercial Space Initiatives <http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1984/72184a.htm>

¹⁷⁶⁴ Radio address, Folder Speeches and Writings – Radio Broadcast, Taping date – 1978, February 20 “Spaceships” Edited Typescript 2/4, Box 19, Reagan, Ronald: Pre-presidential papers, Series I Speeches and writings, Ronald Reagan Library. Reagan had an infatuation with “science fiction” weaponry. Another favourite of his was the neutron bomb which could act as the “ideal deterrent – one that would never have to be used” and he described it “simply it seems like the “death ray” weapons of science fiction.” One example of this type of speech can be found in Radio address, Folder Speeches and Writings – Radio Broadcast, Taping date – 1978, March 13 “War” Edited Typescript 2/4, Box 20, Reagan, Ronald: Pre-presidential papers, Series I Speeches and writings, Ronald Reagan Library

¹⁷⁶⁵ Stuckey (1990)

¹⁷⁶⁶ Wills (2000) p. 427

necessarily geographical but symbolic constructions. “There are new worlds on the horizon, and we're not going to stop until we all get there together. America's best days are yet to come.”¹⁷⁶⁷ As well as relying heavily on technological advantage and dreams of progress, like SDI, in the area of identity politics, some of Reagan’s other policies, notably the vision of nuclear disarmament and “Reaganomics,” were very liberal indeed.¹⁷⁶⁸ In the words of Willis Reagan was “too swoony over wonders of science and technology”¹⁷⁶⁹ to be labelled as a conservative. There is no need to label Reagan as anything, or at the very least, some of the old labels have to be re-evaluated. It is not only Reagan’s storytelling that focuses on the future. In many cases his policies supported scientific invention¹⁷⁷⁰ and he argued that America is in

a new age of invention and exploration, a time when the vast capacity of the human imagination is opening new universes for exploration. ‘To see the universe in a grain of sand’ is no longer a poetic metaphor, but the daily reality of the silicon chip. [...] We, too, stand on the shores of something as vast: of an economic and technological future immense with promise.¹⁷⁷¹

In the era of Reagan conservative values were, again according to his narration, to be used in reaching for the future promises of a new age. This new era of American history would be charted by old value systems but ripe with new invention, growth and even thought. Even the metaphor of standing on a shore of the sea is not enough since despite its vastness, even an ocean ends somewhere. As the progress in all walks of life has no limits, except those of imagination, the possibilities of the future as narrated to be as limitless as space itself which is depicted as the next wilderness America has to tame and the new frontier to prove ones worth in.

Visionaries see infinite possibilities for economic growth in America’s next frontier – space.¹⁷⁷²

This idea of Reagan abides well with Murray Edelman’s argument that in the age of technological advancement the symbol of science works as an almost religious

¹⁷⁶⁷ Reagan (26.10.1984) Remarks at a Reagan-Bush Rally in Fairfield, Connecticut
<http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1984/102684b.htm>

¹⁷⁶⁸ For example see Wilentz (2008) who tends to take a liberal perspective but gives a relatively positive reading on Reagan’s policies

¹⁷⁶⁹ Willis (2000) p. x

¹⁷⁷⁰ As an example we can use Reagan’s steadfast support of NASA and the US space program. Even in the aftermath of the Challenger tragedy Reagan told how “sometimes when we reach for the stars, we fall short. But we must pick ourselves up again and press on despite the pain.” See

¹⁷⁷¹ Reagan (13.6.1988) Remarks at the Annual Meeting of the Atlantic Council

<http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1988/061388b.htm> His support was evident in funding as well. See Reagan (19.4.1988) Remarks at the Electronic Industries Association’s Annual Government-Industry Dinner <http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1988/041988e.htm>

¹⁷⁷² Reagan (2.3.1984) Remarks at the Annual Conservative Political Action Conference Dinner
<http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1984/30284g.htm>

promise of a rewarding afterlife.¹⁷⁷³ When we discuss the emphasis Reagan put on progress in his narration, we actually do return back to the realm of religiosity. It has been argued that the modern idea of progress is just the secularization of eschatology.¹⁷⁷⁴ According to this theory, progress, economic and scientific alike, are means to bring about the millennial utopia and help usher in the glorious future for America. While most commonly religion and science are seen as antagonists from the perspective of an “everyman”, they are closely related when it comes to building political beliefs. Science is as much a belief system as religion is since for the “uninitiated” what happens at the cutting edge of sciences requires belief, and is not deductible. Science is better equipped than religion in enticing the secular portion of the citizenry to believe and give justification for politics. In Reagan’s era space was the final frontier, which is an embedded myth into the American consciousness, but also a frontier in the sense that the USA led development of space technology, which was truly the cutting edge of science. Belief in the future of technology was to believe in America in a very religio-political sense. Reagan brought back the belief in the near omnipotence of science. Herberg argued that by the 1950’s an “age intoxicated with utopian dreams about the boundless possibilities of “scientific progress [...] has been succeeded by an age more sober” but added that “one cannot live by sober, limited pragmatic programs for restricted ends; these soon lose whatever meaning they have unless they are embedded in a transcendent, actuality-defying vision.”¹⁷⁷⁵ This was crucial to Reagan’s prophetic politics. He wanted to use science, among other means, as a way to create an “actuality-defying” grand vision of future for America to pursue. His political purposes, expressed in his vision of America’s future, were not restricted by anything, except, perhaps, the limits of human dreaming and imagination.

Our space program has done so much to bring us together because it gives us the opportunity to be the kind of nation we want to be, the kind of nation we must always be -- dreaming, daring, and creating.¹⁷⁷⁶

To anyone who would still argue that Reagan was a traditional conservative who wanted to return America to past greatness one of his most favourite quotations

¹⁷⁷³ See Edelman (1977) p. 153

¹⁷⁷⁴ See Campbell (1998) p. 46 on this discussion.

¹⁷⁷⁵ Herberg (1960) p. 63

¹⁷⁷⁶ Reagan (28.1.1984) Radio Address to the Nation on the Space Program
<http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1984/12884a.htm>

should be enough cause for re-evaluation. Reagan loved to quote Thomas Paine who could be labelled anti-conservative and a radical thinker in his time.

One of the Founding Fathers of our nation, Thomas Paine, spoke words that apply to all of us gathered here today. They apply directly to all sitting here in this room. He said, ``We have it in our power to begin the world over again."¹⁷⁷⁷

These words, “we have it in our power to begin the world over again,” are not words a man stuck dreaming of return to past glories would use. What this refers to is not an apocalyptic worldview but a testament to the unlimited power to perfect the future that is an in eradicable part of Reagan’s storytelling. Past inspired Reagan, but only as a moral guideline for a better future. It is worth noticing that Thomas Paine in his “Common Sense,” which is the origin of this quote, continues that such an opportunity has not been there since the days of Noah. He claims that the “birthday of the New World is at hand.”¹⁷⁷⁸ In many ways the text of Paine follows the American Jeremiad with warnings of what could happen but the idea of giving birth to a whole new world, to erase history with its tarnishes and to begin with a clean slate, a *tabula rasa* for America is what connects Reagan tightly to Paine and yes, to prophetic politics as well. In Reagan’s case the erasing of the past was a way of perfecting the original sinlessness so that America would be purified. The world does not have to be destroyed for it to begin all over again. The colonization of the new continent and the founding of the United States of America were attempts of their time to start the world all over again. There were times when there was an active attempt to erase the past and start anew. For this reason so many Americans choose to use the Puritans or the happenings of 1776 as the beginning of their story. The beginning can and even has to be perfected to make the entire story better and this enables the perfection of the future as a direct continuum in the course of the history. There is a sense of absolution in this new beginning and a possibility to forget past mistakes and stride into the future with confidence. Narrative is always controlled by time and the recognition that temporality is the primary dimension of human existence.¹⁷⁷⁹ We are creatures of time and thus the stories we tell cannot completely escape temporality although temporality can and often is manipulated for some purposes within the narrative.

¹⁷⁷⁷ Reagan (24.9.1984) Address to the 39th Session of the United Nations General Assembly in New York, New York <http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1984/92484a.htm>

¹⁷⁷⁸ Paine (1776)

¹⁷⁷⁹ Polkinghorne (1988) p. 20

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In 1994 Reagan addressed the American public for the very last time in a letter which revealed that he suffered from Alzheimer's disease. This letter was short, frank and candid, but it clearly revealed that the Great Communicator still existed. At the end of the handwritten letter are the words:

When the Lord calls me home, whenever that may be, I will leave with the greatest love for this country of ours and eternal optimism for its future. I now begin the journey that will lead me into the sunset of my life. I know that for America there will always be a bright dawn ahead.¹⁷⁸⁰

Even when Alzheimer had begun to affect his life, this optimism was an ineradicable part of Reagan's nature even to such a degree that, according to Michael Deaver, he survived politically only by having people around him protecting him from himself.¹⁷⁸¹ While optimism was on the one hand a liability in politics, it was certainly the most important factor that enabled Reagan to communicate his prophecy of an ever more glorious future to come for America. While Reagan lived long ridden with the Alzheimer's disease his public appearances practically faded away. There were a few speaking occasions, which proved to be somewhat humiliating, since Reagan was no longer fully *compos mentis* due to the disease and thus he practically disappeared from the public to be taken care of by his loving Nancy. Thus we can say that the farewell letter was the coda of Reagan's long life story, or at least the version that he narrated for his beloved America. It is fitting that in his farewell letter he for the last time affirmed his faith in America's future. Reagan remained true to his prophecy to the end.

Now it is time to start drawing this story to its closure as well and write a coda. I have used repetitive tellings and even tautology to point out the obvious. Those religious beliefs, myths we tell ourselves about ourselves, ideologies we support and politics we follow, culture that encompasses us, are all interconnected in numerous ways. But I cannot stress enough the importance of noticing the obvious in this context. Stories and their use bind all these things together. Each of the individual topics is best communicated –and perhaps only communicable – through narrative form. At the same time the use of narratives allows all these

¹⁷⁸⁰ Reagan (5.11.1994) In a farewell letter to the public, Skinner-Anderson-Anderson (2004) p. 832-833

¹⁷⁸¹ Pemberton (1997) p. 17

aspects of our beliefs and values to bind together into a Gordian knot, which is at best difficult to untangle. But to untangle them we must so that we can escape the belief that our politics are carried out based on cool calculation and rational decisions based on pure intellect. Belief, whatever is its objective, is still a huge factor in the way we perceive ourselves both as individuals and as societies. We must analyze our political actions by questioning the foundational basis of our thinking. We must be able to dissect the web of myths and beliefs to understand how they influence the ideologies and policies we choose when we accept certain parts of our existence as “common sense” and act under the illusion of rationality.

We must preserve the noble promise of the American dream for every man, woman, and child in this land. And, make no mistake, we can preserve it, and we will. That promise was not created by America. It was given to America as a gift from a loving God -- a gift proudly recognized by the language of liberty in the world's greatest charters of freedom, our Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, and the Bill of Rights.¹⁷⁸²

I have attempted to prove that myths, political and ideological stories, and religious beliefs in the shape of narratives are tightly interconnected into a web where each supports the other; myths originally based on religious beliefs, cultural stories supported by ideologies which are in turn founded on myths *et cetera*. The combinations are stupefying and need to be put under further scrutiny in future studies in order to understand the forces in play in driving our contemporary politics. This has been my attempt and my intention. As in every story, the meaning is ultimately constructed in the interaction you, dear reader, have with the text. If your dialogue with this narrative has sparked an interest on the myths of our political world and their creation, I have succeeded. If you determine that there is not sufficient proof in what I have written, my narration has not been successful. We live in an age of increased rationalization inflicted every sphere of our lives and it is important to understand that our beliefs and the “common sense” of mythical thinking affects the policymaking. We should not restrict ourselves to use mere game theory or other ultra-rational approaches in the study of politics.

My primary objective in this study has been to initiate a discussion of studying political narratives from the perspective of dominant narratives. The stories politicians use as tools of their leadership are important to study, since they can shed light on the political myths that shape our everyday lives. The scholars of political

¹⁷⁸² Reagan (1.8.1983) Remarks at the Annual Meeting of the American Bar Association in Atlanta, Georgia <http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1983/80183a.htm>

narratives have focused mainly on the narratives of the “underdogs.” They have given voices to the silent and persecuted minorities and told the narratives of the existence of these subgroups. This is naturally important, because often any change of the status quo is initiated in margins of political life, but if the stories told do not escape their position in the sidelines and get elevated into the limelight, no change can occur. If Martin Luther King Jr. had not been able to articulate, communicate effectively and popularize his dream, the dream would not have actualized. Not all dreams of change are as altruistic as that of Dr. King. Now would be a good time to focus on the study of those politically dominant narratives that have actually caused these people to end up as victims of oppression. All of the narratives the political leadership has told are important to study because they are potentially such powerful narratives that they can alter not only our worldview but the world as well. Stories can be used to justify political decisions and as we have seen, very often these stories get their justification from other stories. Thus, the need to examine the myths and beliefs that affect our seemingly rational political world could not be more important to study. Our common sense and our beliefs can be exploited for disastrous political purposes or used as a force for good, but the mechanisms need to be uncovered.

It is also the Reagan presidency, which still demands and deserves more studies. We will not need another biography, unless the author can find new evidence concerning the years before Reagan entered politics and is able to debunk some of the mythical aura surrounding Reagan. I have tried to initiate a discussion about the particular version of American civil religion Reagan created in his storytelling by arguing that his version is a story verse. It is not a unified belief-system but a flexible and constantly changing web of stories, retold and reformulated to please as many Americans as possible. It is clearly evident that this particular aspect would be worth a more thorough work of research and preferably from a scholar with a profound understanding of religious studies. Out of all the modern presidents, Reagan’s use of religious themes in his politics is most dominant. Reagan’s religiosity and his construction of civil religion would be fruitful areas of further research, because theoretically the same empirical object has an infinite number of properties, and each theoretician can select those that best suit

him while leaving the others aside.¹⁷⁸³ Thus in theory the material can be used and reused time after time when one selects new aspects to look for. In the same manner the material can be used to illustrate multiple concepts and points the scholar wishes to make.

In fact, almost any area of Reagan's presidency is worth a new study if the approach is from the perspective of narratology. While Reagan's rhetoric has sparked numerous studies, narrative as a form of argumentation differs from rhetoric. They are two separate means aiming to convince the audience. Lou Cannon has argued that Reagan's presidency was a "role of a lifetime"¹⁷⁸⁴ and concentrated of viewing Reagan's presidency as acting of a role. Seeing and studying Reagan foremost as a narrator can draw from these two approaches but is able to create new results. Cannon as well as almost every close Reagan aide has emphasized the importance of stories and storytelling on Reagan, but for some reason academic studies have not seen him as a storyteller and narrator. By employing the tools of narratology we might be able to gain insight of most areas of Reagan era policy from socio-economic aspects to the spheres of foreign policy and identity politics. I have in the course of this study chosen to remain relatively tightly bound to the connections of religion and politics and the policies poetic leadership can create based on this connection, but another scholar could easily focus on any other area of polity and approach it through the narratives Reagan told.

After having spent literally years immersed in the story verse of Reagan the man behind the stories still remains a mystery to me. His character is an enigma, a puzzle almost impossible to solve. A researcher cannot decipher what the true personality of the man behind the image of the "All-American" president with his amicable smile is. We can easily home in on his enacted and narrated persona or the public image but as soon as we try to close in on the "real" Reagan, the stories block out path. Reagan spun a carapace of stories around him and that is difficult to penetrate. Anything Reagan wrote about himself cannot be accepted at face-value since he embellished facts to create more compelling stories. We can still research the political life of Reagan with relative ease, but even then the narrative framework partially obscures much of the information we would wish to gain.

¹⁷⁸³ Todorov (1981) p.xxii Todorov refers to Iliad and the Bible as examples

¹⁷⁸⁴ See Cannon (1991)

Reagan divided the opinion of the public and the people who worked for him as well. People either loved him or loathed him and the middle way is hard to find. Thus the memoirs of people like Edwin Meese III or Michael Deaver do not provide hard evidence, since they tend to sanctify Reagan. There are naturally the ones who opposed him or the ones who were more distanced from him in political decision-making. The aforementioned type seems to find it as difficult to remain objective towards Reagan as his most passionate followers and the latter type might not have so much of an insight to offer. One very fruitful study on Reagan would be one that would focus on his life before politics. To focus on Reagan's life in places like Tampico and Dixon, or to interview people he went to Eureka College with or worked with in Hollywood could shine new light on the very obscure persona of Reagan. Unfortunately with each passing year the number of these people diminishes. Through their observations we might be able to gain insight to decipher the mystery Reagan remains. Too many serious scholars have among others made the mistake of treating what Reagan said about his life as facts and that has caused us to think we know the real Reagan. The ones who do not fail to take into account the almost mythical stories Reagan told about his life seem to agree that only his wife Nancy Reagan was able to penetrate the protective shell Reagan had created. And even she has hinted that there were places she could not enter within him. The true person of Reagan is interesting and worth a study. While in this dissertation the person of Reagan that I have mostly been discussing is the storyteller and political narrator I have attempted to make an occasional peek into the man behind the words as well.

What arises from the stories told by Reagan, however, in most cases is the Reagan himself behind the stories. But it is not the real Reagan, but the narrated version of him. When he recounts his life experiences, he is also creating a self. To tell about experience is to make oneself known to the story recipients, and thus a new addition is made to the identity of the teller whenever he tells about his life.¹⁷⁸⁵ Ronald Reagan's life story blends into one with the sacred story of the American dream and so does his love for America and the American Way of Life. He loved America not only for having been taught to, but because of everything America offered him. His life story is the story of the fulfilment of the American dream. He

¹⁷⁸⁵ Riessman (1993) p. 11

was a poor son of an alcoholic Irishman from rural Midwest, who nevertheless seemed to have success in every walk of life.¹⁷⁸⁶ His success was living proof that the American Dream had a true foundation as a cultural myth. Even Reagan did not think that the dream was perfect, but everybody had an equal chance. He knew that life was full of injustice and hard to live, but at the same time he saw the American system as ripe with promise. The mere fact of Reagan's personal "rags to riches" story could act as a proof that his great vision of American Way of Life and Dream could be fulfilled, and by being an example of this, his story metamorphoses into a part of the American civil religion he tried to create. If proof of dream he envisioned, communicated, and even prophesied was manifested in him, he himself was able to gain a position as one object of faith in the civil religion. While his life story becomes a micro narrative within the entire mythical superstructure, he is transformed from mere speaker and minister of the faith in American Dream into an object of faith almost in the same manner a saint in Christianity is.

Along with being a mere narrator he is a part of the story as well in a complex manner. On one hand he is a hero, since his life story "proves" the truth of the myth and he acts as a character in that mythical story. On the other hand his role as a manifestation of the American Dream makes him an ingredient in the story world as well. He becomes a part of the circumstances, part of the storyline, and such an essential part of the foundation of the story world that he is hard to separate from the myth he narrates, while leaving its plausibility intact. This makes the creation of a story world about the American Way of Life easier for Reagan, since his character, the story cum flesh, appears in front of the people and makes it hard for any doubting Thomas to question the essential possibility of the American Dream's fulfilment. To use a Biblical comparison, the actual moment of seeing Reagan speaking and preaching a sermon of civil religion is like hearing the voice and seeing the burning bush. "My candidacy is based on my record and for that matter my entire life."¹⁷⁸⁷

¹⁷⁸⁶ Interestingly the only "evidence" of Jack Reagan's alcoholism or "sickness" comes from his son's first autobiography and subsequent speeches. Wallis claims that Jack Reagan's drinking was never a public disgrace and his hard drinking is debated. If so, why did Reagan want to share the embarrassing story of his father's alcoholism with millions of people. Maybe Reagan just was an unembarrassed moralist. See Wallis (2000) p. 41-43

¹⁷⁸⁷ Speech Draft re: Bicentennial, 7/6/76. Box 44 Subseries E, Reagan, Ronald: Pre-presidential papers, Series I Speeches and writings, Ronald Reagan Library

All his life Reagan was involved in a continuous process of self-creation by narrative means. A son of a drifter through the Midwest found a home for a while in Dixon, Illinois but again recreated himself while moving from regional celebrity in Des Moines to stardom in Hollywood. After his career faded there, he created himself anew as a political player first in his GE speeches, then as the Governor of California and then on a nationwide scale first as a political speaker on the radio and ultimately the President. Yet surprisingly the American public found in Reagan “unchanging American values and beliefs. He seemed to provide a solid foundation of ancient verities for people disturbed by their society’s rootlessness.”¹⁷⁸⁸ The fact that a man without roots could appear in a rootless and unstable world as a figure of permanence was in itself a tribute to Reagan’s skills as a storyteller and creator of narrative identities both for himself and Americans.

Some of Reagan’s aides interpreted his *laissez faire* management style so that they imagined that they could completely manipulate him. Once when his presidential campaign seemed to be at a standstill many Republicans blamed his aides for resisting Reagan and running the campaign the way they wanted. There were vociferous demands for letting “Reagan be Reagan.” His amazing self-confidence allowed him to occasionally be led because he yet understood that ultimately he was running the show. At the same time he saw his role still as an actor and a narrator so that he would give the performance to a script written by others. But the values and the ideas behind the script were originally his. The vision, creating it, articulating it and most importantly communicating it was the task Reagan received for himself and he let others to do the implementation of his vision.

The values Reagan represented and communicated were old indeed. As he said, some sprung from his interpretation of the Constitution; others had been carved in stone during his personal political awakening during his Hollywood years, and ultimately got their final form in the crucible of his GE years. They were the values behind his politics and as time would show, modern and even futuristic policies were able to enchant Reagan, as long as they would work on behalf of his old values and ideals. The Laffer-curve behind Reaganomics just as well as the dream of SDI could be employed in support of Reagan’s politics just because he saw these modernistic concepts to strengthen the age-old values. In a sense it is frightening

¹⁷⁸⁸ Pemberton (1997) p. 17

that the president of a superpower did not seem to make the slightest alteration to his values for the last thirty years of his life.

What I have attempted to do in these pages is to prove, that Reagan's storytelling-centred leadership and the use of both religion and national myths made him the type of leader I call prophetic politician. A prophetic politician can, once and for all, be summarized here. He is a political leader, who uses the stories sanctified by religion, foundational myths, cultural values and other dominant stories as tools of his leadership. His type arises from the mass of political candidates at a time of profound cultural reorganization. He is a response to the need for profound changes in the way people see themselves and political discontent. A prophetic politician always promises profound changes into the way the country is run, but the actual scope of change can be minimal, if he is able to cloak that fact with his narratives. In prophetic politics the manipulation of time is a crucial factor. No single moment can be portrayed as mere chronological time that just rolls on. Every moment, every decision must be portrayed as a moment of *kairos*, when profound change can be initiated. Only when the entire political process is portrayed as *kairos*-time can politics seem interesting to the citizenry. Every moment has a meaning and every moment is a choice for the citizen to determine his future, or, at least that is the illusion communicated in a political prophecy. After every choice a new one is waiting to be made and every choice will bring the society closer to the utopia prophetic politics promises.

Time has to be taken out of time and mythified so that the golden age that lies in the past can be contrasted with the dreary present. In the now of politics things are always gloomy and lacking promise for better to come. At the same time the present is also full of possibility for the better. Today is ripe to make the decisions to plant the seeds that can be later reaped in the form of the glorious future of abundance beyond anything ever seen before. The way to reach this future is, naturally, to make the right decisions as the prophetic politician presents them. There is in every moment the possibility to start everything all over again. The golden past with its values could be a harbinger of the glorious future and the present and the recent past are just moments of choosing the glory of the future.

Prophetic politics is by no means confined to exist within the bounds of civil religion, but it could not exist without civil religion. Prophetic politics exploits the need of the people to believe and only by evoking the myths of a golden past and the

millennial or eschatological utopia can it project and communicate the future glory. It is not restricted to any particular religion but the religiosity in general and even occasionally attempts to hide the connections it has with religion and merely to work through the “common sense” and “transcendent values” which have been strongly influenced by religion and mythical beliefs.

The role of a prophetic politician has to be specifically drafted for each individual politician. Some are more suitable as pastors of the nation and some can be spokesmen of behalf of socio-economic justice. Both the political situation and his personality are factors to be taken into account when defining the role. He has to address the sources of discontent of the electorate to get elected and most importantly produce and communicate first the agenda for changes to be made and the state of bliss to be reached when the agenda is fully implemented. In the process of drafting his vision and how it could be fulfilled he needs to take particular care to present the ultimate goal of his policies and intangible. Only when no-one can clearly argue that his vision has not been fulfilled can the politics progress continuously. The global spread of democracy or the actualization of the American Dream for Americans and subsequently the rest of the world as well could be used as the objects of the vision. Thus, it can be narratively proclaimed that every decision makes the fulfilment of this utopia closer and the prophetic politician is still able to hide the elusiveness of these goals. I have argued that Reagan is a good example of a prophetic politician.

While I have shown how Reagan put this role to work for him, I have also tried to extrapolate the concept of prophetic politics to initiate discussion. I argue that prophetic politics can be a powerful force within a society. This is exemplified during a time of national crisis, when the unity of the people becomes crucial. In the optimal case, the prophetic politician can exert a strong leadership the people choose to follow and he can chart a course for the nation of the crisis. The nature of the crisis is not important. It can be a crisis of values, national identity, war, economic recession, or almost anything which requires unity. At the same time prophetic politics can be a great hazard both domestically and internationally. This risk is heightened in a context of a superpower, either regional or global. In these cases the national myths and beliefs can be seen in a distorted manner as truly universal values all of mankind should embrace. In this type of occasion prophetic politics may be exploited as a tool of hegemonic politics. It is just because a political

narrative can inflame passions, that prophetic politics is potentially a tool for both good and evil. When the cloak of rationality is cast aside, unbounded passion can easily escalate to zealotry.

I argue that the role of well-told stories in politics needs to be studied more effectively if only in order to develop counter-stories for the prophetic politics of zealots and dictators. The story about the “war on terror” which was developed after September 11 2001 is potentially just as harmful to the world at large than those of militant and radical Islam and in order to diminish the effect of leadership by narratives one must be able to formulate contesting narratives which can be offered as plausible alternatives. Prophetic politics can be beneficial to democracy in a pluralistic society but if there are no other narratives on offer, they can be the gravest threat to democracy as well by working as centres of gravity which distort the free flow of ideas. Interestingly enough, de Tocqueville wrote, that it is precisely when a nation takes on a shape of a democratic social state and the society tends towards a republic, that the unification of religion with authority is most dangerous.¹⁷⁸⁹ The Western societies have long been fearful of the Ayatollah and similar religio-political leaders in the Arab states and have remained ignorant of the possible perils within our own context.

While the study of civil religion has almost depleted itself, there should be an attempt to revitalize it just as there are constant attempts by politicians to revive civil religion itself. Our age of information and globalization has by no means eradicated our need to make sense of our lives and existence through the traditional means of different belief systems. Perhaps the complexity of our world has even increased our need to find simple explanation to create meanings for us. But our age and times has eliminated the possibility that there could be one truly unifying civil religion that could shelter the beliefs and values of the people with their wide variety of cultures, subcultures, traditions and beliefs. I have attempted to show that a narrative creation of civil religion could produce an illusion of a truly unified belief system. This would be based on civil religious story worlds, crafted by each individual and small community from themselves. If the narratives creating this religion are elaborate enough, the story world construction could hide the fact that the story worlds are not alike each other, while they would seem and feel for the

¹⁷⁸⁹ de Tocqueville (2000) p. 285

people that they are transcendent. Such a story world-based civil religion could in the best case bring closer the objectives of civil religion. That is, to create a unified society that provides meaning for its constituents by making them believe in the existence of their imagined community. It could create a better national identity and solve some of the issues of domestic policy created by the lack of the feeling of togetherness. From the viewpoint of the state, a unified state would be stronger and its policies could have a widespread acceptance among its population.

Diana L. Eck's research shows, how America during the immigration boom in the last three decades, has in the terms of religious diversity exponentially grown to be perhaps the world's most religiously diverse nation. In addition to the multitude of Christian denominations, there are in the beginning of the 21st century more Muslims than Episcopalians or Presbyterians in the USA. That is, about six million, which is the number of Jews living in America.¹⁷⁹⁰ It is interesting to note that at the same time religious diversity has exploded, the religious voices most commonly heard within the public sphere have their origins in evangelical and occasionally fundamentalist Christianity, as exemplified in the Moral Majority or the Christian Coalition. These organizations have been very eager to attempt to dominate the religious dialogue with their interpretation of "Christian America," and indeed, to an outsider it often sounds like America is more devoutly Christian than ever. I am not arguing that there are not today many liberal voices resounding and gaining influence among the public or even that during Reagan's administration other religious voices would have been silent. It is rather a case of only the ones screaming at the top of their lungs being heard and recognized out of the commotion. Nevertheless, the more reasonable and toned-down voices from the diverse field of religions have to be included within the American story to gain a more comprehensive understanding.

Since the motto of the republic is *E Pluribus Unum* or, "from many, one," the process, where civil religion is created, has to find a way to include and get these other world religions to participate in the recreation of the nation. Religion, even civil religion, is never a finished product, which could be transferred from one generation to another in sacred texts, doctrines and rituals, which in turn would remain unchanged. All religious traditions are dynamic, and even civil religion

¹⁷⁹⁰ Eck (2001) p. 2-3

cannot try to remain unchanged throughout changing times.¹⁷⁹¹ The era of Reagan portrayed one type or version of civil religion, which could not be used to unify all faiths of contemporary America. But certain aspects of Reagan's religious politics can be used to recreate, or perhaps merely retell in a new manner, the story of the American Dream, which lies at the eye of the storm of tumultuous concept of civil religion. Perhaps a narrative-based civil religion can be created, but this requires another "awakening." Perhaps this time it would be awakening from the American Dream, as it has been for a long time conceived, and a rearticulation of that dream.

In a strange and somewhat paradoxical sense the religious pluralism in America, which implies to a great diversity of religious beliefs, can be used as a beneficial factor in a narratively created civil religion. As Mead wrote "Pluralism means that two people may bring quite different conceptual orders to an event both experience. In this sense they live in different worlds, and they simply do not, and cannot "see" the same thing in it."¹⁷⁹² He continues that "two persons may use the same words and phrases and each may think the other is talking about the same thing he is, when actually their minds are not meeting at all."¹⁷⁹³ This difference of thought can be used by the prophetic politician, since it simultaneously allows his calculated words to be non-sectarian enough that each and every religious or even atheistic person can interpret them in a manner, which builds a story world he can accept and not see that he is living "in different worlds" than others.

A story verse could prove to be a useful tool for prophetic politicians to use in this construction of unity out of separate "different worlds". A story verse as a superstructure could narratively bind the story worlds together. Our world has become so complex and multifaceted that it is next to impossible to achieve a completely unified view within even a single nation on any imaginable topic. Thus the only thing we can aim for is an illusion of unity to rally the people behind. This illusion can only be provided with a story verse, where each citizen constructs his own story world and due to the vagueness embedded in political narration and its important concepts will fail to realize its actual individuality. Only by an illusion of a unified belief system and vague values such as "freedom" which each citizen is able to define as he wills, can be people be brought together to rally behind these

¹⁷⁹¹ Eck (2001) p. 9, 29

¹⁷⁹² Mead (1975) p. 33

¹⁷⁹³ Mead (1975) p. 33

intangible and impalpable causes. There can perhaps be no unity, but the illusion of unity provided by the story verse may be enough.

In the course of this dissertation I have made the choice of not rubbing the reader's nose into the concept of story verse continuously, albeit I consider it to be an important addition into the analysis of political narratives. I have decidedly written about "story worlds" when discussing Reagan's prophetic political narratives. This is because Reagan used only one story world at a time, as a politician has to do. However, the idea of a story verse hovers always in the background, these other story worlds either exist only as potentialities waiting to be actualized by narration or have been previously narrated into existence and are waiting for a time when it would be politically advantageous to put them into use.

There is a great danger to international relations and world politics is the civil religion of a superpower degenerates into mere self-idolatry, as it occasionally has done in the American context. The "original sinless" Reagan saw as part of being American or the concept of Innocent Nation Hughes discusses are potentially harmful. Niebuhr argued that self-idolatry is disastrous and a reason for prophecies alone. "The struggle between the prophets and the pride of Israel, in which the prophets sought vainly to prove to Israel that a nation might have a special mission and yet not be immune to the divine judgement, contains ultimate insights which are completely lost in the modern life."¹⁷⁹⁴ This sense of being still a part of God's judgement while being "the redeemer nation" is still extinct from the political sphere of the United States. To create a civil religion which could include even the most devout Christians America has to shift away from the notion that they are always moral, always right and into admitting mistakes and yes, even sinfulness.

To explain the often expressed dilemma about the dual nature of America in world politics as a "promised land" and "crusader state" or even "sojourners in the wilderness" Walter A. McDougall proposes an interesting notion straight from Hollywood. That is the "Sergio Leone position" of seeing that the USA has always been the good, the bad and the ugly at the same time. This tripartite role allows for the USA to be at the same time idealistic, hypocritical and realistic in its foreign policy.¹⁷⁹⁵ Maybe this ambiguousness of America helps us to understand why since the end of the Cold War no new George Kennan has surfaced with a doctrine all

¹⁷⁹⁴ Niebuhr, cited in Kelly (1984) p. 158

¹⁷⁹⁵ McDougall (1997) p. 3

Americans could agree to. Along with the collapse of the old enemy the prophetic assignment is harder to find today. For a short while it seemed that the War on Terrorism could have provided a new enemy and create a niche for prophetic leadership in global politics but the enthusiasm waned. The prophetic path is difficult to follow globally but easier in domestic and internal politics when it can rely more on civil religious background. Reagan found his vision is reaffirming the American identity; Obama aims to reform welfare systems. The prophetic assignment according to McDougall is easily defined; to decide which American traditions to reaffirm and apply and which to discard as irrelevant or even repugnant. He claims that a prophecy should “measure the present against past revelation and so to augur possible futures.”¹⁷⁹⁶ I argue that that this happens with storytelling as the vessel.

As I have proved Reagan’s story worlds were elaborate constructions and by joining together into a story verse they managed to ensnare a huge amount of the population, but the ones who could not be persuaded to enter, are the ones who could not abide Reagan. They did not see the “magical, intoxicating power of America” Reagan narrated. They did not accept his vision of mythical America but saw a septuagenarian telling tales instead of leading the country as the head of state. They are the people who called Reagan an “amicable dunce” or even worse. But whatever Reagan was, he was not an idiot. He was an exceptionally gifted storyteller and a visionary. His visions were based on the mythical past which never existed but were no less powerful because of that. Reagan was an old man whose ideas and ideology were set in stone long before he became president, in some cases even before he was a governor. The basic ideology remained unaltered through the decades. Yet Reagan had a child-like belief in progress, both in terms of humanity and technology. As he had argued, his generation went from horse buggy to space shuttles and Reagan had a child’s fascination on what else science could do for the mankind. This love of technology and his eternal optimism kept him from ever being stalled in his search for the “morning in America” and certainly does not allow for us to label him as a conservative. Reagan wanted to conserve an America for future generations and that America would have all the mythic qualities he narrated the past to be endowed with, but the America he wanted to leave behind

¹⁷⁹⁶ McDougall (1997) p. 3

was in process. America would always, always progress and strive for the ultimate best as long as the people could dream of new things and better times.

All along these pages I have discussed Reagan's optimism numerous times. His worldview was romantic to the extreme and he created a fantasy version of his mythical America around him and lived in that bubble of dream world. Should I be asked to define Reagan with only one adjective, my choice would for these reasons be "quixotic." Thus the words of Cervantes from the epitaph of famous knight are suitable to describe the meaning and influence Reagan had on the politics of his time and our contemporary moment. Ronald Reagan indeed "had the fortune in his age to live a fool and die a sage."¹⁷⁹⁷ With this description I mean no disrespect, but merely wish to again point out that his life story has undergone a substantial change in the retellings. Reagan created himself anew in his stories of the mythical America he was a part of and while his opposition saw him as merely a fool, historians have accredited him with much more value.

The political scientist Larry Berman states that Reagan had a greater impact on the American political system than no other president since Franklin D. Roosevelt. Berman argues Reagan was able to demonstrate that the demands of the presidency were not after all unmanageable and that they need not engulf the president. When Reagan left office his overall approval rate was 68 percent which is just another statistic that goes to show that Reagan was psychologically suited for the presidency.¹⁷⁹⁸ Stuckey makes a piercing observation when she claimed that presidential rhetoric of the future would be strongly affected by the Reagan years. She argues that "no one has analyzed candidates' public speech in terms of *values* rather than policy, or *vision* instead of programs." To a certain degree all the candidates say the same things and that these can be safely ignored since everyone talks of patriotism, national unity and the American way of life but "each candidate presents these symbols in different ways and that understanding the presentation and reception of these messages is important to an understanding of U.S. national politics."¹⁷⁹⁹

The lasting part of the Reagan legacy is that in the future politicians will have to convey difficult problems in emotionally satisfying and simple terms and

¹⁷⁹⁷ Cervantes (1957) p. 432

¹⁷⁹⁸ Berman (1990) p. 1. Berman also notes that the fact that Reagan indeed was psychologically suited for the job "raises some rather ironic issues with respect to the presidential job description."

¹⁷⁹⁹ Stuckey (1990) p. 95-96. Italics mine.

this task is to become both difficult and emotionally dishonest, since the world has gotten and will get even more complex.¹⁸⁰⁰ All this having been said, all these pages written (and hopefully even read) I wish to conclude with a quotation from Reagan himself, which I hope illustrates my point that research in the field of the American dream is by no means exhausted.

And if I could leave you with one last thought from my heart, it's that the American dream is a living thing -- it's always growing, always presenting new challenges, new vistas, and new dreams.¹⁸⁰¹

¹⁸⁰⁰ Stuckey (1990) p. 97

¹⁸⁰¹ Reagan (20.9.1984) Remarks at a Reagan-Bush Rally in Cedar Rapids, Iowa
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