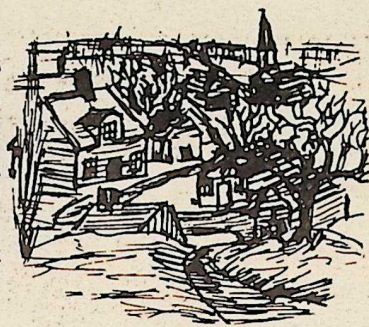
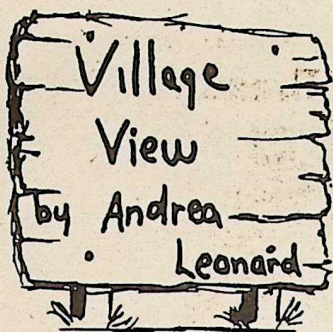




When news is presented with a built-in slant, it can't rightly be called news, for the slant gives it a different character. It becomes opinion, an editorial, a commentary.

This column falls into the latter category. There's nothing wrong or immoral about airing opinions, of course. In this country, we're entitled to do so whenever we get the chance and the spirit moves us.

When newscasts include a distortion of facts by the addition of opinions, however, they cease to remain reports of the news. People hearing such news get a mistaken impression of what's going on around them.

Presenting opinion as news facts colors our thinking, as it's meant to do, and puts the burden of analysis upon the recipient; many people are unable or unwilling to make such an analysis.

Take an example: The morning news the other day included a story about three young men and a young woman who were apprehended by police shortly after successfully pulling off an armed robbery in a Wareham store.

Shortly after the crime, they were caught. While the robbery was in progress, a woman stopped at the store but before entering realized what was happening, went home and called the police. She was able to give them the license number and a description of the car.

During the arrest, the newscaster reported, one of the men had pulled a gun and shot at the police. She was able to give them the license number and a description of the car.

During the arrest, the newscaster reported, one of the men had pulled a gun and shot at the police. They returned his fire. He died.

So far we're all right. Those are the facts. The newsman then stated, "As a result of a phone call made by the woman who witnessed the robbery, a man was killed".

This conclusion is a misrepresentation of the facts and reflects an unreal cause and effect.

The man was shot as a result of his own action, shooting at the police when they stopped the car in which the fleeing foursome were riding. The result of the phone call was that the police were alerted and able to catch the thieves. The phone call did not cause the man's death.

By committing the robbery and by resisting arrest and shooting at the police, the robber exposed himself to being killed.

But we are still not at the crux. The man died as a result of the police shooting and killing him.

Why is this important? Because too often people are made to feel responsible for circumstances arising from actions taken -- proper actions -- which led to further circumstances ending in some sort of disaster.

In the news story there were approximately ten people involved. Four of them were criminals, one of whom died. At least one other person was the victim of the robbery. Another person, she who called the police, was a sixth. Both state and town police were involved in the arrest.

Of these, only four people were doing wrong. The victim was conducting his honest business; the woman who reported the crime was taking responsible action; the police were doing their sworn duty. "Blame" cannot logically be laid upon the witnessing woman.

Cause of the fatality must be placed precisely, if the news is to be accurately reported. In line of duty, the policeman who pulled the trigger of the gun carrying the bullet that killed the thief is responsible.

It's all too easy to confuse the actual and the incidental.

Let's take another example: this one is a fabrication, but it could be a true story.

A woman, dissatisfied with her marriage, engages in a flirtation with a man other than her husband. The other man cares nothing for the woman but is flattered by her attention. In addition, there is a third man involved who says he is desperately in love with the woman. In him, she has no interest.

In the town where these people live a murderer is loose; he's been attacking and killing women who venture out alone at night, often in the neighborhood of the only bridge spanning the river which flows through the town.

The woman leaves her home one night while her husband is out bowling and visits her lover. To reach his house she must cross the river either by the bridge or by a ferry which costs a dime.

At the conclusion of her visit with her lover, she asks him for a dime so she can take the ferry to reach her home, but he refuses to give it to her. Leaving his house, she encounters the man who loves her. He, realizing she has been with the other man, also refuses her a dime.

Finally, she asks the ferryman to let her ride for free, but he will not, so she walks across the bridge and is murdered.

Who is responsible for the death of this woman?

Before you leap to conclusions, consider all the possibilities. Is the husband, who went bowling and left his unhappy wife alone, responsible?

How about her lover? Was a dime a lot to ask of him? Or the man who professed to love her? Was he demonstrating his love when he refused to pay her fare, or was he showing his jealousy?

Did the ferryman have any responsibility? He knew the lurking murderer might be on the bridge. Was it his duty to help this female?

Was the woman herself to blame? There are a number of persons who will judge she was the only one responsible for her death.

The logical fact, of course, is that the murderer is solely responsible.

While five other persons, including herself, certainly had a part in her death, she would have returned home quite safely had the murderer not taken her life.

In both these instances -- the policeman in the first case and the murderer in the second -- the killer was the only person whose action directly resulted in the death of another human.

One was a policeman doing his official duty. The other was a murderer. In both instances the person who died contributed through his own actions.

Strictly from the viewpoint of logic, however, neither the woman who made the telephone call to the police, nor any of the men who wouldn't help the gal take the ferry across the river, can be held responsible.

If the thief -- and if the woman -- had stayed home and behaved, they'd both be alive today; however, neither case are we examining the morals of those involved. We're attempting to find the logical answer to the question of responsibility, and question the newscaster's report of an incident, his use and misuse of the facts.

News would be more palatable if it came unembellished with illogical conclusions derived by reporters whose job is to give the facts.

This column doesn't pretend to provide news. It does present the opinion of one individual view of the world as seen from one small village.

Today you are invited to be amused and entertained by an analysis of the difference between news and opinion.