

Research Report

Storytelling Revival: Contributions to a Cultural and Historical Contextualisation

written by Luis Correia Carmelo
Federation for European Storytelling



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STORYTELLING REVIVAL: CONTRIBUTIONS TO A CULTURAL AND HISTORICAL CONTEXTUALISATION

It's hard to define the artistic practices arising within the context of this storytelling revival, which saw the reappearance of the oral storyteller in contemporary societies. This may well be down to an apparent paradox: if, on the one hand, the ubiquity of the act of telling stories tells us that we are all storytellers, or in other words, *homo narrans* (which detracts from its technical value and therefore requires the recognition of a specialised and professional practice), on the other hand it enables the “storyteller” archetype, or in other words, an almost mystified series of skills, to be appropriated by a large variety of artistic languages (which requires the recognition of the specific characteristics of the act of telling stories orally).

These definition issues hamper any attempt to understand the cultural and historical processes behind the storytelling revival, with one of the main obstacles the varied interpretations of the concepts of “storytelling” and of “storyteller”. In addition to this, quite naturally, any delving into history finds itself undermined by the recent nature of the phenomenon and, very importantly, by the absence of historical references to the marginalised practices of orality.

Some authors propose that the storytelling revival originates in the counterculture movements of the 1960s (Görög-Karady 1990, Patrini 2002, Wilson 2006). Others have a more comprehensive vision of the phenomenon, identifying historical evidence, including anything from the romantic movements of the 19th century to the key role played by public libraries (Pellowski 1990, Heywood 2001). In fact, “story telling hours” were already established, at least in the Anglophone context, by the early 20th century and the practice of telling stories was already a professional activity, as shown by some authors (Bryant 1905, Shedlock 1915, Cather 1918). On the other hand, already in the second decade of the 20th century, works such as *A Renaissance in Storytelling*, by Seumas MacManus (1912), talk of a revivalist storytelling momentum long before the counterculture movements of the 1960s.

However, we can also outline an even more far-reaching history. Anne Pellowski, for example, lists what she suggests to be representations of oral storytelling throughout history (Pellowski 1990: 3-16). According to the author, the first record of this activity can be found in the *Westcar Papyrus* (*Papyrus Berlin P 3033*), in which the princes of Egypt entertain their father, Pharaoh Cheops, by telling him stories. Nevertheless, this text should not be seen as a “historical record”, first and foremost because it dates from the first half of the second millennium before Christ, or in other words, it was written many dynasties after the narrated events. On the other hand, it must be acknowledged that the *Westcar Papyrus* is, above all else, a work of fiction, conforms to a model and belongs to a vast literary tradition:

Daniel (especially MT chs. 1-6) should be set against the background of the story-collection genre. The genre occurs in the well-known compositions of fourteenth-century European literature, such as Chaucer’s *Canterbury Tales*, Booccaccio’s *Decameron*, and Gower’s *Confessio Amantis*, but its precursors are found in the literatures of ancient Near East and India, as well as classical Greece and Rome. Among these antecedents one notes, for instance: the “Tales of Wonder” in the Egyptian *Papyrus Westcar* (containing perhaps the

oldest frame narrative ever, dating to the first half of the second millennium B.C.E.), the *Aetia* of Callimachus (third century B.C.E.), Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (1-8 C.E.), and other famous but less datable compositions, such as Aesop's *Fables*, the Indian *Pañcatantra*, and the *Book of Sindibad* (Holm 2005: 150-151).

In this regard, these texts do not represent specific occasions, and they do not make mention of a single actual practice of storytelling. They primarily repeat a widely available literary formula, which undermines an overly literal interpretation.

Pellowski also mentions the *Old Testament*, in which Jotham, when preaching in Shechem against the chosen king, tells a story (Judges 9:7), or also the Hindu *Grihya-Sutras*, manuals detailing domestic religious ceremonies, in which Pellowski finds many references to the practice of telling stories (Pellowski 1990: 4). However, these references only highlight the definition issues resulting from the ubiquity of the act of telling stories, and do not reveal an actual artistic and professional specialised storyteller. In most of the examples given by Pellowski, the act of telling stories is muddled up with everyday life, and carried out within the context of other social, political or religious practices.

Simon Heywood also proposes a historical contextualisation of huge scope: "Story is as universal as language" (Heywood 2001: 218). The author thus proposes a wide-ranging history, from the literary tradition of frame narratives, already mentioned, or an orally transmitted vernacular tradition, to the tradition of modern fairy tales and to compilations of folktales. This is how, using literary and vernacular textual sources, that Heywood outlines a history of storytelling. However, telling the "textual" history of these stories tells us little about the practices, about the events and about the agents responsible for their oral transmission. In other words, it tells us little or nothing about performance and about its performers and audiences. And this remains one of the great mysteries of the practices of orality of the past.

When considering this it is important to make reference to an old misconception about the stories told to children by old nannies that gave rise to the concept of ‘old wives’ tales’, or *aniles fabulae* in Latin tradition. Heywood does not hold back from mentioning it, as, in fact, it represents one of the few references to agents responsible for the oral tradition. Anne Pallowski gives us several examples, beginning with the choir of *Lysistrata*, by Aristophanes: “I want to tell you a fable they used to relate to me when I was a little boy” (Pellowski 1990: 5). With regard to practices of telling children stories, the author also cites Plato’s *The Republic*:

we begin by telling children stories which though not wholly destitute of truth, are in the main fictitious; and these stories are told them when they are not of an age to learn gymnastics... the beginning is the most important part of any work, especially in the case of a young and tender thing; for that is the time at which the character is being formed and the desire impression is more readily taken (Pellowski 1990: 6).

In this reference, telling stories has nothing to do with entertaining adults, as in some famous frame narratives, but rather with caring for and instructing youngsters. This appears to be, in the larger sense, its most accepted role. In any case, all these examples are nevertheless under the paradigm of *homo narrans*: they present everyday occasions in which the act of telling stories is undertaken by someone from the household or community.

None of these narrators, from the young princes of the *Westcar Papyrus* to the educators of *The Republic*, as well as the ‘old wives’ of Latin tradition, are specifically identified as storytellers. On the contrary, they are just individuals, who, in a given context, to varying degrees of competence, perform this task. None of these examples presents a storyteller socially recognised as such, a professional who carries out a trade and who, in a pharaoh’s court or to a group of children, performs his or her art.

When faced with this lack of historical references to an actual, real and identifiable storyteller, the tendency arises to look for them in other figures acknowledged by history and by anthropology. This is how certain professionals of the past whose trade seems to somehow include the act of telling stories are presented as the forebears of contemporary oral storytelling artists. A wide variety of figures thus appear under the heading of “storyteller”: from Greek *aoidoi*, Celtic bards or Germanic *scops*, to Medieval troubadours, in all their permutations, the practices of which may seem similar to those kept alive by African *griots* (Hale 1998) or Serbo-Croat singers (Lord 1960).

It is in this sense that Anne Pellowski proposes a storytelling typology, which she calls *bardic storytelling* (Pellowski 1990). However, it should be acknowledged that there would be incredibly few examples of contemporary artists fitting this classification within storytelling revival movements. Unlike these, the bards of the past were adept at playing musical instruments and used them as part of their performances. Secondly, they “sung” their narratives, although they were also able to make use of “recitation”, as proposed by Paul Zumthor (1990: 141-152). Accordingly, these practices require specific technical skills, not always, or rarely, present in the work of “new” storytellers. Some of these contemporary artists may use song, but they normally do so in a manner whereby it is immersed within the narration in prose. On the other hand, if the narration is accompanied by music, by one or more musical instruments, these are normally played by another performer and not the actual narrator. Finally, when the actual narrator is playing the musical instrument, the narration will generally be dictated or “recited”, although there are exceptions confirming the rule, such as artists dedicated to traditional ballads circulating within storytelling revival networks.

Another element contributing to the distance between these musical traditions and contemporary storytelling practices: they have texts in verse. As in the cases studied by Milman Perry and Albert Bates Lord (1960), these traditional poets resort to formulae to improvise in verse, a fundamental skill to their practice (Zumthor 1990: 136-140). And this way of doing, with its own techniques and expressions, despite representing an important reference in the imagery of some “new” storytellers, is not significantly present in the general picture of contemporary storytelling.

It is thus difficult to establish parallels between the art of these bards of yesteryear and the practices of “new” storytellers. The legacy of these “singers” of stories appears, in fact, to lie in other contemporary artistic expressions: the tradition of African *griots* prevails to some extent in the world music market, represented by names such as Mory Kanté, Toumani Diabaté, Ballaké Sissoko, Foday Musa Suso, among others; the art and social pertinence of bards of geographies of European cultural descent, as acknowledged by Zumthor (ibidem), has remained present in folk music through the work of singer songwriters such as Bob Dylan, Jacques Brel or Chico Buarque, among many others, who still “tell stories” accompanied by a guitar. Indeed, any approximation between the contemporary storyteller and these romanticised characters of epic oral traditions or of medieval poetry is only possible through the narrative nature of their texts. They all tell stories, but they do so very differently.

Another historical figure that could get us to admit the existence of a professional entertainer whose practice included oral storytelling is:

A jocolator is a multiple being: he is a musician, poet, actor, acrobat; he is a kind of pleasure provider in the courts of kings and princes; he is a vagabond wandering the streets and performing shows in towns; he is a watchman who sings the wonders to pilgrims; he is a charlatan who entertains fairgoers; his is the author and actor of enactments at the church door on holy days... he is the storyteller, the singer bringing cheer to nights and evenings; he is the rider pirouetting on a horse; the acrobat dancing on his hands, who throws knives,

who passes through moving hoops, who eats fire, who flips upside down and contorts his body; a wanderer who plays and mimes; a fool who jokes and provokes: the jocolator is all this and much more (Faral 1910: 1).

Telling stories thus seems to be included in the large variety of activities performed by jocolators. It's not hard to see however how insignificant its importance appears to be in the midst of so many talents. And, once again, the scope of the "storyteller" concept makes it difficult to grasp in which sense Faral includes this activity in such an extensive and diverse list.

Indeed, it is very hard to identify the activity and the social figure of the jocolator, this rogue of medieval history whose diversity of practices allows us either to see him as a multifaceted virtuoso, as Edmond Faral argues, or as a so-so professional, as Giuseppe Tavani suggests (1995). The musical, narrative or lyrical practices known of the Middle Ages, addressing palace, religious and folk subjects, have already been the focus of a great deal of attention in studies into literature and medieval poetry (Pidal 1924, Tavani 2002). The repertoire of jocolators could also include comic tales of the *falbiaux*, although it is hard to know how they would be recited or sung. In any case, I have been unable to find any mention of the practice of telling stories in prose, or what role storytelling played in the performances of these entertainers.

Continuing on our quest for a wandering performer who historically fulfils the "storyteller" paradigm, we also come across the more recent memory of *cordel* literature and *cantigas de cegos*, of street performers travelling from fair to fair selling story pamphlets, as they still do in Northeast Brazil (Matos 1986). Here too, however, the sung, lyrical performance distances the art of the "new" storytellers from this desired lineage, with rare exceptions, such as Thomas Bakk, a Brazilian *cordelista* operating within the storytelling networks in Portugal.

There is no questioning the fact, though, that the “storyteller” is valued and ingrained in popular culture. The fame of the concept makes it seem impossible that it did not exist historically, as in the examples of the *seanchaí* reinvented by the Celtic Revival or of the *imayazen* of Arab squares. They are figures, which, despite being different, incontrovertibly match the image of the “storyteller” in Walter Benjamin’s fine article (1992). Nevertheless, actual information on the practice of these figures is scarce and often idealised. I have been unable to find sound ethnographic data on either of the two cases. As such, unfortunately any in-depth research has to be postponed for now. In any event, in my view these exceptional examples do not undermine the rationale this reflection proposes.

Hence, giving the referred examples and other possible ones the benefit of the doubt, it appears to be impossible to find a historical figure professionally and exclusively performing the trade of telling stories orally and in prose, as “new” storytellers do today. Even the so-called “traditional storytellers”, who provided information for ethnographic compilations, didn’t perform the activity of telling stories in a systematic manner. As far as we can gauge, they told stories because they were confronted by the interest of compilers and folklorists. This is the case of Dorothea Viehman, who advised the Brothers Grimm in Germany, of Marguerite Philippe, favourite advisor of François-Marie Luzel in France, of Agatuzze de Messina, who briefed Giuseppe Pitre in Italy (Sanfilippo 2007: 164). None of these were actually “storytellers” in the sense of an artist socially acknowledged and paid as such.

This is also the case of Ray Hicks, in the USA, belonging to a family of craftspeople who provided information for ethnographic compilations and who was welcomed into the revivalist movement, becoming a recurrent “star” at the Jonesborough *National*

Storytelling Festival (Sobol 1999: 104-117). Also in the United States, Ed Bell was the owner of a fishing camp in Indianola, Texas, when he was contacted by the ethnographic collector Patrick Mullen. Despite storytelling being, according to Bell himself, an important resource with regard to his customers (he was well-known in his local area), it is not possible to find information that hasn't been romanticised to some extent, on the "how", the "where", and "to whom" Ed Bell told stories prior to being discovered (Bauman 1986: 79-80). Joe Neil, from Cape Breton, impressed Key Stone and the audience at the *Storytelling Festival of Toronto*, in 1986. However, there is no information as to role of storytelling in his life before being contacted by John Shaw, who acknowledges: "Joe Neil, as far as I know, was not an active storyteller before I met him, although he clearly had capability to be so" (Stone 1996: 162). Similarly, Duncan Williamson, who became cherished by the UK revivalist movement, belonged to a family who provided information to ethnographic compilations. Prior to being contacted by Helen Fullerton and, later on, by Geordie MacIntyre, he worked as a seasonal farm labourer. It is difficult to ascertain if he performed the function of telling stories within his community, and what status he would have had in this context (Hunt 2007).

All these examples were known as "traditional storytellers", participated in storytelling events and festivals, were admired as models and prized by "new" storytellers. Nevertheless, it is hard to identify the role of storytelling in their lives prior to being "discovered", even if they were already acknowledged within their own communities as fine storytellers. As Francisco Assis de Sousa Lima proposes, when referring to the tradition of Northeast Brazil, which serves perfectly as a reference:

In Cariri and in the Northeast, telling stories is not a paid profession. Storytellers do not represent a separate professional category, although their trade entails the requirements of an artisan task: commitment, technique, style, singularity and talent in repeating. But the storyteller doesn't collect coins in his hat, as, say, the shoeshine, the market poet, the

improvisational singers or, for that matter, the northeast revellers. The “história do Trancoso” is leisure and it is art, but above all else it is a deed within life itself. It occurs and moves around like a priceless object, a common asset, prized (Lima 2005: 60).

In so-called western cultures, the act of telling stories with no other resource than the prose discourse of a storyteller seems to have always been part of everyday life. Without dramatic performance, acrobatics, costumes and props, without dance, music or rhyming verse, the art of narrating is a universal skill, the expression of a *homo narrans*, of immeasurable importance within a community, but devoid of an artistic quality that would allow it to have commercial value outside of that community. Therefore, we need to acknowledge that, as Lima points out, the “storyteller paradigm” is more an anthropological given, or an archetype, than a historical figure. This allows us to think that these “new” and “urban” storytellers represent a contemporary phenomenon, a change of paradigm that allowed narrative in prose, formerly an asset that circulated freely, as in the quote from Lima, to become a consumer product traded in the cultural activities market, while also authorising the emergence of a profession.

There is no way to outline a history of the storytelling revival in every geographical context where this has been experienced, but there might be a way to acknowledge some of the socio-cultural factors behind this paradigm shift. These factors unequivocally influence the attitudes and discourses of these movements and accordingly explicitly determine their practices and artistic proposals.

The conferral of importance to orality

The most influential socio-cultural factor in the storytelling revival is probably, as Marina Sanfilippo mentions (2007: 18), the growing appreciation of orality, of the cultural heritage conveyed by it, in addition to the models of community relationship

normally associated to traditional contexts. In this view, orality, seen as a non written culture, the expression of which gives voice to the thoughts and feelings of groups outside the processes of industrialisation and urbanity, corresponds to the past or to the “other” that lives according to models of that past.

Simon Heywood (2001) and Marina Sanfilippo (2007) see Romanticism as the origin of these dynamics comprising a revivalist perspective towards tales, legends, fables, proverbs, songs, prayers, in brief, the whole range of expressions of orality. In any event, by the end of the 17th century we can decipher a sense of nostalgia in the title *Stories or Fairy Tales from Past Times*, by Charles Perrault, which allows us to acknowledge, even then, an apparent revivalism. Nevertheless, it seems to be in the context of Romanticism that looking back to the past and the interest for oral heritage found a political and philosophical legitimacy marking the 19th and 20th centuries, paving the way to studies on “traditional” and “folk” expressions in academies and establishing ideas on these concepts in the broader sense.

If the collections of Italian baroque tales, initially, and then French fairy tales paved the way for the cultivation of the literary tale, the influence of the work of the Brothers Grimm in Europe from the 19th century and beginning of the 20th century fostered the large scale compilation of folkloric tales. The reasons causing a large number of people to collect tales and legends of the folk tradition were a blend of investigative frenzy and nationalism; on the one hand it was believed that these tales contained precious information on the beliefs and ancestral rites and that through them an old mythology could be reconstructed; on the other hand, a fount of knowledge was found in the tales on local traditional rural life and language, which could be used to strengthen national identity (Ferrer 2014: 331).

This is how, under nationalist precepts and evolutionist theories that the first steps were taken in the study of narrative forms of oral tradition, such as myths, tales and legends. In this context, tales were seen as degradations of Indo-European solar myths, in the theory of Max Müller, or as cultural manifestations of animist and totemistic societies, from the ethnographic perspective of Andrew Lang (Finnegan 1992: 29-30). For its part, the Finnish school of Antti Aarne established a work of comparative nature,

with its system of classifying tales, published for the first time in 1910, continued by Stith Thompson throughout the 20th century (Aarne and Thompson 1961) and, more recently, by Hans-Jörg Uther (Uther 2004). In a different way, the structuralism of Vladimir Propp, proposed in his *Morphology of the Folk Tale* (Propp 2003), published in 1928, was highly influential from the 1960s. Indeed, his work influenced authors from many different fields: from anthropology, such as in the work of Claude Lévi-Strauss (1958), to American folklore studies, with Alan Dundes (1964), or linguistics and narratology, in the case of Algirdas-Julien Greimas (1966), among others. On the other hand, the theories of Sigmund Freud, Otto Rank and Carl Jung initiated a psychoanalytic approach of tales and of myths which bore fruit in works such as those of Bruno Bettelheim (2010) or Marie-Louise Von Franz (1995), or in comparative studies, such as that of Joseph Campbell (1968), in a trend that contributed significantly to the development of studies into traditional narrative.

Accordingly, the study of oral tradition went through a process of academic legitimisation, in approaches originating one moment from the fields of literature and of linguistics, the next from anthropology or from psychoanalysis, which enables the emergence of new subjects, such as Folklore Studies. If all these approaches allow a progressive legitimisation of these “texts” as object of study, the growing conferral of importance to orality throughout the 20th century is also closely associated with the perspective Bengt Holbek refers to as *craftsmanship viewpoint* (Holbek 1987: 39-45). This viewpoint, which guides various approaches and which is not limited solely to the study of narrative forms, places performance, event, context and participants under the spotlight. This is a trend prevalent from the 1960s onwards, into which fit theoreticians such as Richard Bauman (1984, 1986) and Ruth Finnegan (1977, 1988, 1992), significant

in American folklore studies and invariably associated with the influence of Dell Hymes (1974, 1975, 1996). The influential work of Milman Perry on Homeric epics opened up this shift of attention to performance aspects, whose theory provided a framework for an analysis of the traditional Serbo-Croat epic, which resulted in the work by Albert Bates Lord, *The Singer of Tales* (Lord 1960), already mentioned. His major contribution was to propose that every aspect of Homeric poetry results from an oral composition, which can be analysed in terms of structure of the texts themselves. This theoretical confirmation of the existence of mechanisms of oral communication, of formulae of poetic composition, paved the way for the growing appreciation of orality, naturally exacerbating, in some approaches, an oral/written dichotomy, as is the case of Walter Ong (2002).

Finally, this process of assigning importance to orality transcends the academic world. From Romanticism, ideas on “tradition” and “folk” have come to be adopted in conventional wisdom, associated with political and social contexts, which make the affirmation of cultural identities and their intangible heritage pertinent. The concept of “intangible cultural heritage” established by UNESCO, and its respective protection programmes are the result of these dynamics. This is how, in fact, in an environment conducive to phenomena of orality, that the storytelling movements, in conveying ideas and values confluent with these dynamics, find a space of legitimisation for the “renaissance” of the practices of telling and listening to traditional stories.

A literary tradition of tales

Another decisive factor in the storytelling revival, related to the key role of repertoires in the practice of these artists, takes the form of literary traditions closely

linked to oral tradition. This is the *corpus* available to new storytellers when, inspired by this imagery, they go looking for repertoires they want to be “oral” and “traditional” (Patrini 2002: 180- 186, Ryan 2003: 70-72, Sanfilippo 2007: 175-182, Palleiro and Fischman 2009: 49-50). Immersed in an urban and written culture, a large proportion of the references these artists have of tales are within this literary tradition that over time has striven to represent the act of telling and listening to stories:

This is the essential point: fairy tales on the page invoke live voices, telling stories aloud. A memory of a living narrator reverberates in the genre, even when the story is manifestly a highly wrought literary text. Authors like Straparola and Basile and D’ Aulnoy are playacting, stepping into the roles of Sharazad or Mother Goose, because one of the things that fairy tale promises is an unbroken link with the past (Warner 2014: 53).

The diversity and long history of this literary tradition makes it hard to follow a path that isn’t littered with inaccuracies. Juan José Prat Ferrer, with his comprehensive work, *Historia del Cuento Tradicional* (Ferrer 2013), serves as a guide. I cannot be thorough in a brief reflection such as this, and hence I focus particularly on references that most expressively influence the repertoires of “new” storytellers.

Once again, I thus start by making mention to the tales appearing in the *Golenischeff* and *Westcar* papyruses, examples of a pre-classic tradition of short frame narratives. Then, it is impossible not to mention the *Metamorphoses* by Ovid or *The Golden Ass* by Apuleius, which includes the tale of Eros and Psyche, a narrative that has echoes in “The Search for the Lost Husband” (ATU425) and in its most famous variant, “Beauty and the Beast” (ATU 425C). Sticking to classic tradition, the fables immortalised by Aesop and Phaedrus provide another example of a literary tradition later recovered by La Fontaine.

Throughout the Middle Ages, the *exempla*, short moral anecdotes aimed at illustrating a point, compiled into many collections for preachers to use, such as the

Gesta Romanorum, the oldest manuscript of which dates from 1342, constitute a large source of narratives, with obvious parallels with oral tradition.

Other works that speak of a tradition of pre-Christian narratives, of Celtic and Germanic origin, were laid down by members of the clergy and today still fuel the imagination of artists of the storytelling movements. One of the oldest examples is the *Voyage of Bran*, which may have influenced the voyages of Saint Brendan the Navigator and was written approximately in the 8th century. Alongside the tradition of “voyages”, an Irish epic, with strong Christian influence, is gathered, for the most part, in the manuscripts *The Book of the Dun Cow* and *The Book of Leinster*, compiled, approximately in the 12th century. Also representative of a Celtic tradition, a series of Welsh tales from the *White Book of Rhydderch* and from the *Red Book of Hergest*, written between the 14th and 15th centuries, were compiled and translated into English by Lady Charlotte Guest, in the 19th century, and gave rise to *The Mabinogion*. Other examples include: the *Historia Brittonum*, written somewhere between the 9th and 11th centuries, which contains the famous story of “Tristan and Isolde”; and the *Historia Regum Britanniae*, written by Geoffrey of Monmouth, in the first half of the 12th century, which includes Arthurian legends and a version of the “Love like salt” tale (ATU 923).

Representatives of a Germanic tradition, laid down from the 13th century onwards, include works such as the *Gesta Danorum*, from the Dane Saxo Grammaticus, which contains narratives with clear parallels with oral tradition, and where we find an interesting version of the story of Hamlet immortalised by Shakespeare. It is in Iceland, however, that much of this tradition was laid down in *Eddas* and *Sagas*, representing the largest source on history, mythology and Scandinavian folklore now featuring significantly in the repertoires of storytellers.

Further south, the heroic epic finds its place in the chivalry ideal with the *chansons de geste* of French origin, the most famous and widely disseminated example of this model being the *Song of Roland*, apparently composed in the 11th century. Similarly, the “chivalry romances” were widely disseminated, as in the work of Chrétien de Troyes, produced in the second half of the 12th century, which favoured the so-called “Matter of Britain”. Here we find King Arthur, the knights of Round Table and the quest for the Holy Grail, subject matter later also made famous in the work of Sir Thomas Malory, *Le Morte d’Arthur*, published for the first time in 1485.

In parallel, the tradition of comic tales found its space, among others, in the *fabliaux* genre, which I have already spoken on with reference to jocalors, originating in Northeast France, between the 12th and 13th centuries and later disseminated in other languages. They later lose ground to Italian *novellas*, but they were published again in France in the 18th century. On the other hand, animal tales also enjoyed widespread coverage throughout the Middle Ages, as in the *Roman de Renart*, presenting the cunning character of the fox, about which many poems would be written, in several languages.

In the 13th century, the famed Italian tradition of the *novella* comes into existence, one of its best known examples being *The Decameron* by Boccaccio, written in the mid 14th century, which follows the tradition of frame narratives. It is in this work in particular that Geoffrey Chaucer seems to have taken his inspiration to write his *Canterbury Tales* at the end of the same century.

In Venice, between 1550 and 1553, *Piacevoli notti* by Straparola was published, compiling, besides versions of previous *novellas*, a large number of traditional folktales and tales of wonder. Some of the tales present in this collection find parallels with the

tales from *One Thousand and One Nights*, long before their adaptation and translation was known in Europe, and seem, according to Juan José Prat Ferrer, to have inspired some versions by Perrault and by the Brothers Grimm (Ferrer 217-221). A tradition is thus begun of collections of clearly traditional tales, the first famous example of which was *Il Pantamerone*, by Basile, published in Naples between 1634 and 1636.

As identified by many authors (Ferrer 2013: 228-238, Zipes 1979: 32-33, Warner 2014: 45-47), fairy tales become fashionable at the end of the 17th century in France. In 1697 Charles Perrault published the famous *Stories or Fairy Tales from Past Times with Morals – Mother Goose Tales*, already mentioned here too. At the same time, and dedicated to another type of public and not children, a group of lady writers galvanised a bourgeois and courtesan, primarily feminine practice. The group includes: Madame d'Aulnoy (who coined the term "fairy tales"), Madame d'Auneuil, Mademoiselle Bernard, Madame Durand, Mademoiselle de La Force, Mademoiselle L'Héritier and Madame Murat. The fashion continued throughout the following century, culminating in the publication, as of 1785, of *Le Cabinet des Fées ou Collection choisie des Contes des Fées, et autres Contes Merveilleux* by Charles-Joseph de Mayer. Also in the 18th century, the translation into French of *One Thousand and One Nights*, by Antoine Galland, disseminated a literary orientalism that would last until the end of the century.

The fairy tale fashion also made it to Germany, and, also in the 18th century, collections were published, many of them specifically aimed at children. Then, and as already mentioned, Romanticism provided a framework for the interest in collecting and rewriting folk tales, the most famous example of which is the collection of the Brothers Grimm. As mentioned in the previous point, throughout the 19th and 20th centuries there is a profusion of works collecting narratives of oral tradition, in addition to a literature

inspired in its storylines and motifs, such as the model case of Denmark's Hans Christian Andersen.

Throughout the 20th century, many factors have combined to foster editorial interest in adaptations and collections of traditional tales, in untold numbers. First of all, as mentioned, a process of allocating importance to orality leads anthropologists, sociologists and linguistics to look in two directions: outwards, to observe cultures subjected to the colonisation of European empires; and inwards, to observe the peasant cultures of their own countries of origin. The result of these studies revealed a huge quantity of narratives, which became the target of adaptations and publications. In yet a different way, a growing interest in oriental cultures led to a literature inspired in the motifs and narrative structures of cultures seen as "exotic". Secondly, a tradition of works dedicated to children culminated, throughout the 20th century, in a significant and economically dynamic children's literature openly inspired by fairy and folk tales. The development of this literature, in a profusion of authors, illustrators and publishers is closely related to a legitimisation of this traditional imagery as product of child enjoyment, as we shall see next, with the process of literacy and democratisation of teaching in western societies, in addition to the flourishing of an entertainment market devoted specifically to children.

The profusion of 'magical imagery'

The profusion of fairy-tale imagery in contemporary popular culture is another key factor in stimulating practices of oral storytelling in the contemporary world. This profusion not only takes form in the transposition of narratives of the fairy-tale genre into other artistic languages, but also in the dissemination of motifs particular to the

magical universe characterising the genre, present also in other genres. Accordingly, I include in this phenomenon the magical narratives present in the Arthurian series, made famous in contemporary literature, in books such as *The Mists of Avalon*, by Marion Zimmer Bradley, or in films, such as *Excalibur*, by John Boorman, among many other more recent adaptations. Similarly, I consider the fantasy literature of J. R. R. Tolkien, C. S. Lewis, J. K. Rowling, or more recently, G. R. R. Martin, authors whose works have been adapted intensively for cinema and television. As such, the profusion of the magical imagery named here does not only relate to the specific “fairy-tale” genre, but also to narrative structures centred around the quest of the hero or heroine, around wizards and witches, around fantastic beasts and speaking animals, around magical objects and metamorphoses.

As Marina Warner notes, this profusion of the imagery of magical tales, or of fairy tales, beyond the specific universe of literary and oral traditions is no recent phenomenon:

Fairy tales have never been exclusively verbal, and the slippery interactions of oral and written transmission over the course of the genre’s history result as much from stories’ constant reincarnations on stage and on screen, from pantomime to puppet shows, again showing its affinity with migrating tunes, cross-pollinating plants (Warner 2014: 159).

As Marina Warner notes, via Enlightenment, magical imagery burst onto the stage, inspiring operas and ballets. *The Magic Flute* by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, or the ballet pieces of Pyotr Ilich Tchaikovsky, such as *Swan Lake* and *Sleeping Beauty*, in the following century, are famous examples of this. In the theatre, the influence of the *commedia dell’arte* of Carlo Gozzi, who, in the second half of the 18th century, adapted fairy-tale themes, is clear to see. He was admired by writers such as Friedrich Schiller, Johann Wolfgang Goethe, or the brothers Friedrich and August Wilhelm Schlegel. His influence makes it to the 20th century through famous adaptations for opera: his first

play, *L'amore dele Tre Melarance*, version of the "The Three Citrons of Love" tale (ATU 408), inspired the arrangement by Sergei Prokofiev, *The Love for Three Oranges*, in 1921; *Turandot*, which provided the name to a type of tale in Aarne and Thompson's classification (AT 851A), a sign of its popularity, was the basis for the opera of the same name by Giacomo Puccini, in 1926.

On the big screen, ever since its arrival, the fairy-tale universe has become a recurring theme in the seventh art, calling for the infinite possibility of illusion and enchantment of constantly evolving cinematographic techniques. This fruitful relationship began, at the outset, with the pioneer Georges Méliès, who from his experiments based on photo montage and special effects adapted tales such as "Cinderella" (ATU 510A), in *Cendrillon*, from 1899, or also "Maiden-Killer (Bluebeard)" (ATU 312), in *Barbe-bleue*, from 1901. From the mid 20th century onwards, adaptations of more exacting fairy tales in terms of special effects started to proliferate, such as "Beauty and the Beast" (ATU 425C). This is the case of *La Belle et la Bête*, by Jean Cocteau, in 1946, and *Panna a netvor*, by Juraj Herz, in 1978 (Haase 2007a: 345).

However, the tale most adapted for the big screen is probably "Cinderella" (ATU 510A). The popularity of these films appears to be associated with their narrative structures focused on wealth and on beauty, which fit into the capitalist tendencies and the advertising discourses focused "on white, middle-class, male-dominated ideal" (Haase 2007a: 344). In any event, as film adaptations move away from their sources, normally Perrault and the Brothers Grimm, central values on class and genre tend to be subverted, in addition to the "happy ending" paradigm. Examples of this subversive trend included films such as *The Company of Wolves*, by Neil Jordan, in 1984, and *Hard*

Candy, by David Slade, in 2005, which revisits the “Little Red Riding Hood” tale (ATU 333) in surprising and original ways.

In the meantime, other directors have freely adopted the structures and motifs of fairy tales, as is the case of George Lucas in *Star Wars*, the narrative of which is a revisiting of the fairy-tale model. Tim Burton is also a good example of this, closer to fantasy literature than to fairy tales as such, with films such as *The Nightmare Before Christmas*, from 1993, or *Corpse Bride*, from 2005. He was also the filmmaker behind the latest adaptations of Lewis Carroll’s work, with his film *Alice in Wonderland*, in 2010 and more recently, *Alice Through the Looking Glass*, in 2016. Other examples, among many others, may include Terry Gilliam’s *The Brothers Grimm*, in 2005 or Guillermo del Toro’s *Pan’s Labyrinth*, in 2006.

The most visible proliferation of adaptations of fairy tales or stories inspired by the genre is probably to be found in animation films. The first steps in this direction were made by Lotte Reiniger, who, through a characteristic work on the shadow puppetry technique adapted the *One Thousand and One Nights*, in *The Adventures of Prince Achmed*, in 1926, and tales such as “The Frog King” (ATU 440), in *The Frog Prince*, from 1954, or “Cinderella” (ATU 510A), in *Cinderella*, from 1955.

Fairy tales truly reached mass audiences with Walt Disney and the film industry he founded in which these narratives suffered a process of “disneyfication” often criticised for conveying conservative values about the genre and the classes. In any event, from *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, in 1937, or *Sleeping Beauty*, in 1956, to *The Little Mermaid*, in 1989, or *Beauty and the Beast*, in 1991, the animated characters created by the Disney studios have undeniably permeated contemporary popular imagination.

But in animated films too, adaptations have gradually striven to overturn values on classes and, principally on genders, normally associated with this kind of narrative: in *Shrek*, from 2001, Princess Fiona shirks established concepts of beauty; in *Tangled*, from 2010, Rapunzel is an active and adventurous heroine; in *Frozen*, from 2013, the younger sister fights off storms and ordeals to save her elder sister, a task normally left to male siblings in tales (Warner 2014: 166).

The analysis of adaptations made by the greatest literary dispersers of fairy tales, such as Perrault and the Brothers Grimm, or Disney, in the film era, and the way in which it has served the interests of given periods, of an elite and of a male, conservative power, has become a touchstone in the study on this genre of narratives. Among the questions raised, one that has deserved greater attention concerns how women are represented. In contemporary artistic practices too, the undermining of subjects and motifs associated with the more “conservative” of fairy tales, their free appropriation and adaptation, has proved a recurring space of artistic experimentation: from the painting of Paula Rego, or the celebrated writing of Angela Carter to the photography of Cindy Sherman, a place of questioning how women are represented in the fairy-tale universe finds a clear pertinence in thought and contemporary art.

For its part, TV production or online platforms of fictional work, such as NETFLIX broadcast fairies, dragons, giants and a whole host of magical beings into homes around the world, with epic narratives that follow the trials and tribulations of heroes and heroines and of their magical helpers, in fiction series for adults and young viewers, or in cartoons dedicated to children. Examples of this include *Once Upon a Time*, from ABC, or the famous TV adaptation of George R. R. Martin’s work, *Game of Thrones*, from HBO. In the case of cartoons, there are so many of them that there is no need to give

examples. Nevertheless, and as no mention was made to it when referring to film examples, we should not forget the cartoons inspired by the famous Tinker Bell, Peter Pan's companion ever since J. M. Barrie's play debuted in 1904, which has adapted for the stage and screen on many occasions.

This profusion of magical imagery effectively embraces all media forms in contemporary societies. In this context, advertising appears to play a vital role in the intensive diffusion of clichés and preconceptions associated with fairy tales, almost always conveying a "white, middle-class, male-dominated ideal". The obvious sexual connotations of Little Red Riding Hood have made the character a constant in advertising, accompanied by the bad wolf: in an advert for Chanel N° 5, the wolf obeys the perfumed girl; in an advertising shot for the drink Campari, a Little Red Riding Hood with one of her legs sensually uncovered has the wolf on a leash; and in the case of Vito tools, a sensual Little Red Riding Hood is working with a chainsaw. Indeed, they are all Little Red Riding Hoods with no fear of the bad wolf: but what do the representations conveyed by these images say, if not an immediate sexual appeal and an objectification of women so common in advertising language? On the other hand, there are also many washing detergent and cleaning product adverts that resort to this imagery, in an association between the housewife and "household fairy", as in the prime example of *Fairy* washing up liquid, once again disseminating conservative ideals.

The questions raised by the presence of fairy-tale imagery in popular culture and in the media is nicely summarised by Patricia A. Odber de Baubeta, when she notes that:

Feminist critics bemoan the perpetuation of certain stereotypical types of female behaviour, pointing to the passivity, submissiveness and helplessness of fairy tale heroines. Psychoanalytical commentators use the ideas of Freud and Jung as their point of departure, and there is more than one doctoral thesis waiting to be written on advertisements as a locus for (Lacanian) desire. Marxist analysts comment in deeply pessimistic terms on mass-

mediated culture, and those dedicated to Cultural and Media studies frequently express dismay about the “disneyfication” of fairy tales and folklore in general (Baubeta 1997: 38).

Finally, we cannot overlook video and computer games, which, either inspired by big screen productions or the other way around, are another example of how magical and fantasy imagery is omnipresent in contemporary popular culture. Games such as *Dungeons & Dragons*, *Dragon Age*, *Final Fantasy*, *World of Warcraft*, among many others, feature fantasy creatures, magical places and objects, heroes and heroines helped by talking animals. Without a doubt, mention still needs to be made of the world phenomenon card game known as *Magic: The Gathering*, with its dedicated international community, professional players, competitions and conferences around the globe.

In an inspired moment, Jack Zipes succinctly summarised this situation three decades ago:

Everywhere one turns today fairy tales and fairy-tale motifs pop up like magic. Bookshops are flooded with fairy tales by Tolkien, Hesse, the Grimm Brothers, Andersen, C. S. Lewis, and scores of sumptuously illustrated fantasy works. Schools and theatres perform a wide range of spectacular fairy-tale plays for the benefit of children. Operas and musical works are based on fairy-tales themes. Famous actors make fairy-tales recordings for the radio and other mass-media outlets. Aside from the Disney vintage productions, numerous films incorporate fairy-tale motifs and plots. Even porno films make lascivious use of Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs and Sleeping Beauty. Fairy-tale scenes and figures are employed in advertisements, window decorations, TV commercials, restaurant signs, and club insignias. One can buy banners, posters, t-shirts, towels, bathing suits, stickers, ashtrays, and other household goods plastered with fairy-tale designs. Indeed, the fantastic projections of the fairy-tale world appear to have become “in”, consuming the reality of our everyday life and invading the inner sanctum of our subjective world (Zipes 1979: 2).

The narrative shift in social and human sciences

Another factor integral to the process of stimulating and legitimising oral storytelling practices in recent decades has been referred to as “the narrative shift” in social and human sciences. If the process of allocating importance to orality came to legitimise traditional narratives and non-mediated relationship models in contemporary

society, the narrative shift in social and human sciences came to place the concept of “narrative” under the spotlight within any thought on the individual, culture and society, introducing it into the vocabulary of the sciences and, finally, into vernacular discourse. It consisted of a change, in epistemological terms, of perspectives that value abstraction and generality to those that favour experience and subjectivity, as Sarah Raine points out (2013: 64).

As Barbara Czarniawska notes, interest in narrative has been present since the hermeneutical approaches on the Bible, the Talmud and the Koran (Czarniawska 2004: 1). Nevertheless, as to the origin of contemporary processes that gave rise to this “shift”, reference is often made to the seminal work of Vladimir Propp, mentioned here.

According to Czarniawska’s proposal, the study of narrative has developed in four branches, associated with nationalities: firstly, in Russian formalism; then in French structuralism; in German hermeneutics; and in the American ‘new criticism’. From the formalism of Ramon Jakobson to the structuralism of Gérard Genette, from Roland Barthes to Tzvetan Todorov, under the influence of the anthropology of Claude Lévi-Strauss, from the hermeneutics of Wolfgang Iser and Hans Robert Jauss to American ‘new criticism’, the “text” takes on an autonomy with relation to its author and to its context, which questions the fundamentals of previous hermeneutical traditions. It is appropriate to add to this list the hermeneutical perspective of Paul Ricoeur and the unique and influential theories of Mikhail Bakhtin (Czarniawska 2004: 2).

From literary theory, in which the role of the concept is primarily due to the nature of the subjects studied, interest in “narrative” overflowed into all the social and human sciences. From the 1970s onwards, the phenomenon spread in a multidisciplinary

dynamic, which includes political sciences, psychology, sociology, anthropology, history, cultural studies, pedagogy, among others, in a vast array of different approaches:

As anyone aware of the current intellectual scene has probably noticed, there has been a virtual explosion of interest in narrative and in theorizing about narrative; and it has been detonated from a remarkable diversity of sites, both within and without the walls of academia (Kreiwirth 1992: 629).

From this variety of perspectives, there are two that are of particular interest, because their influence in the storytelling revival is easily spotted. Firstly, we have the perspective that sees narratives as a structure of knowledge, as in the work of Jerome Bruner, which includes *Actual Minds, Possible Worlds* (Bruner 1986). The author makes a distinction between narrative and paradigmatic thought, a central idea of these perspectives that contribute to the enhancement of the role of narrative in the sciences and beyond. Bruner proposes that there are two distinctive ways of thinking and of understanding experience. On the one hand there is paradigmatic thought, which corresponds to logic, which is recognised as part of scientific procedure and which follows the ideal of a formal system of description and explanation. It works by conceptualisation and categorisation, establishing a system of operations between these categories. On the other hand, we have narrative thought, focused on the subjective sense of experiences processed in the form of narratives. This mode of knowledge is focused on human intentions and actions in a given context, on the vicissitudes and consequences of these in the course of experiences. Thus, if the first mode of thought, the paradigmatic, strives for generalisation through logical and scientific methods, a truth verified through empirical procedures, the narrative mode strives for the inherent subjectivity of the individual experience, an explanation contextualised in the sensitive and the personal.

Secondly, the understanding of narrative as a form of communication is also central, establishing the paradigm of *homo narrans*, often referred to throughout this report. It is in the seminal work of Walter Fisher, *Human Communication as Narration: Toward a Philosophy of Reason* (Fisher 1987), that this view places narrative under the glare of social and human sciences. The narrative paradigm in communication, as Fisher proposes, is based on the idea of “narrative rationality” and on the principles of “narrative probability” and of “narrative fidelity”. The principle of probability concerns the coherence and integrity of narrative, while the principle of fidelity is related to the credibility of the story through recognition of its processes of cause and effect. Nevertheless, as Czarniawska notes, Fisher acknowledges that not all communication is necessarily narrative: other forms of communication may include technical argument, poetic discourse and description, among others (Czarniawska 2004: 11). In this regard, Fisher does not wish, when exploring the narrative mode of understanding, to completely reject the paradigmatic, which clearly results in the expression “narrative paradigm”.

These two perspectives allow us to understand what this “narrative shift” means for the development and legitimisation of the practices of oral storytelling. Transposed outside the scientific and intellectual universe, the role of narrative very clearly takes root in thought and in contemporary discourse. This is how telling stories, or recognising a history in experience, becomes a way of thinking, of understanding and, finally, of communicating.

As Raine notes, drawing from Polkinghorne (1987), the narrative mode does not represent a new epistemology: it is present in the human experience and perhaps even precedes the logical and scientific mode as a way of giving meaning to the world. This is

perhaps why, the author continues, given its ubiquity, that narrative thought has been neglected by the intellectual and scientific community:

Narrative sense-making seems natural to those who have achieved this competence and therefore may have attracted less academic attention and prestige. However, as schools become more culturally diverse due to greater transnational mobility and globalization, educators are also recognizing the cultural specificity of narrative forms and giving greater attention to the development of narrative competency (Raine 2013: 68).

The author notes a tendency in scientific thought to value discourse deemed academic, scientific or technical, at the expense of knowledge in the form of stories and, in particular, in personal narratives. Nevertheless, despite the resistance of an epistemological tradition focused on the paradigmatic mode, it seems to have growing academic interest in the acquisition of narrative skills, a probable consequence of a cultural diversity that results from greater mobility and of the phenomenon of globalisation, as the author notes in the above quotation. In this regard, this epistemological shift may be understood in the context of a postmodern reaction to positivist approaches, to modernist globalisation, to the Enlightenment, and to European colonial rule.

There's no room here for a more detailed reflection on the different perspectives placing narrative at the heart of discourse of social and human sciences. It will be important to acknowledge that such perspectives, once disseminated in the scientific and intellectual circles, transferred into vocabulary and thought of almost every sphere of society:

Narrative is all around us, not just in the novel or in historical writing. Narrative is associated above all with the act of narration and is to be found wherever someone tells us about something: a newsreader on the radio, a teacher at school, a school friend in the playground, a fellow passenger on a train, a newsagent, one's partner over the evening meal, a television reporter, a newspaper columnist or the narrator in the novel that we enjoy reading before going to bed. We are all narrators in our daily lives, in our conversations with others, and sometimes we are even professional narrators (should we happen to be, say, teachers, press officers or comedians) (Fludernik 2009: 1).

It is in this regard that the “narrative shift” came to disseminate the *homo narrans* paradigm. On the one hand, thus, as I have mentioned, this paradigm has shown itself to be one of the major obstacles in identifying the limits of oral storytelling practices. As can be seen, the Fludernik quote clearly expresses this question: she calls anyone who tells something a storyteller and even recognised professional narrators (teachers, press officers or comedians in the quote), but she is unaware of or does not mention these unknown “new” storytellers who are part of the storytelling revival.

All the same, the role of narrative has contributed greatly to the storytelling revival, as is obvious. The professional storyteller has become a specialist in a way of thinking and of communicating that has become favoured. Their practice has taken on unquestionable pertinence in the context of education and social work; their presence, felt at congresses and conferences; their knowhow, requested in workshops for companies and group dynamic management, in an endless variety of fields. The “narrative shift” significantly contributes to the current appreciation that storytellers enjoy in contemporary societies. And, on the other hand, it is easy to understand the sympathy “new” storytellers feel for a dichotomy between paradigmatic thought (inevitably associated with the elite and with the language of power and of economic statistics) and narrative thought (seen as the mode of proximity and appreciation of the personal experience). In fact, in a historical and social context in which information, mass-media and reason prevail, a way of understanding the world that celebrates the sharing of experiences, the cultural singularities and the emotional and subjective engagement fits perfectly into the motivations and artistic proposals of these movements.

The democratisation and institutionalisation of children's spaces

Other essential factors in the stimulation of oral storytelling practices have to do with the process of democratisation of education and with the development of literacy. It is in the context of schools and libraries that storytelling movements found their principle space to germinate, enabling a specialisation and, finally, their professionalization.

As Anne Pellowski (1990: 99-100) and Simon Heywood (2001: 229) state, from the end of the 18th century and throughout the 19th century a preschool environment was institutionalised, which would be given the name *kindergarten* by Friedrich Froebel, conveying ideas in which playful and creative activity from the outset held a central place with the educational process. Telling stories, in this context, became one of the activities carried out by the educators of these environments, with the role of these preschool institutions becoming fundamental in the recognition of the practice of storytelling in the work for children.

The Germanic *kindergarten* model became widespread and also arrived in the United States, via German emigrants, as Ellin Green mentions (Green 1996: 5-6). The storytelling practices used in kindergartens were quickly introduced into Sunday schools too, and it was in this educational context that, right from the start of the 20th century, the practice of telling stories became very popular:

Its present popularity seems in a way to be outgrowth of the recognition of its educational value which was given impetus by the German pedagogues of Froebel's school. That recognition has, at all events, been a noticeable factor in educational conferences of late. The function of the story is no longer considered solely in the light of its place in the kindergarten; it is being sought in the first, the second, and indeed in every grade where children are still children. Sometimes the demand for stories is made solely in the interest of literary culture, sometimes in far ampler and vaguer relations, ranging from inculcation of scientific fact to admonition of moral theory; but whatever the reason given, the conclusion is the same: tell the children stories (Bryant 1905: xix).

A teaching aid in the most varied subjects or in passing on values, from the outset telling stories has been related to the acquisition of linguistic skills, becoming an omnipresent instrument in the mediation of reading. This is how the practice of telling stories moved from the schoolroom into public libraries, where it became more visible through “story telling hours” and thus became one of the contexts of greatest influence in the development of storytelling throughout the 20th century. As Simon Heywood notes: “Later, in the 1880s, the first children’s libraries were established, and, again, storytelling was one of the services provided. Education is the tap-root of storytelling revivalism” (Heywood 2001: 229).

Anne Pellowski refers to the central role of the Carnegie Library in Pittsburgh and of the Pratt Institute Free Library in Brooklyn in boosting “story telling hours”, influencing other US libraries, as in the case of the New York Public Library. The author says that in 1900 at least five libraries held regular story sessions (Pellowski 1990: 98).

Therefore, it is within the educational milieu that a space of necessity is developed, which was then satisfied by educators, who, for vocational reasons, went on to specialise in storytelling. This is true of Sara Cone Bryant (1905), quoted above, Marie Shedlock (1915) and Katherine Dunlap Cather (1918), educators and writers who first began to develop the activity professionally.

Decades later, in France, for example, the role played by libraries was equally fundamental, as shown by the testimony of Geneviève Patte at the *Le Renouveau du Conte* symposium, where she tells of the proliferation of “story telling hours” in French libraries throughout the 1960s and 1970s (Calame-Griaule 2001: 90- 93). Maria Patrini also acknowledges its importance in the development of the *renouveau du conte* in France, calling libraries *le vivier du conte* in the chapter she dedicated to discussing the

first developments in the area (Patrini 2002: 73-75). The author highlights the work of libraries in Clamart and in Grenoble, in addition to their collaboration with storytellers making their first steps in the process of professionalization of the activity in France, in which the figure of Bruno de La Salle stands out. And, as in the United States, the practice is also assimilated by schools: “just as important as storytelling in libraries is the practice in schools, as it existed before the beginning of the storytelling revival in France” (Patrini 2002: 77).

In England, according to Simon Heywood, oral storytelling became a practice in libraries at the start of the 20th century, with the establishment of an undergraduate degree for librarians at University College in London and the opening of children’s libraries. One of the key figures in the development of oral storytelling in these contexts was, according to the author, Eileen Colwell, who, from 1926 onwards, was ‘Children’s Librarian’ at Hendon District Library, which was a pioneer in “story telling hours” in the United Kingdom (Heywood 2001: 238). Despite being carefully represented by Simon Heywood, the influence of libraries on the development of the storytelling movement in the United Kingdom is less clear. It appears, in fact, to be less significant, when compared with what happened in other countries. Patrick Ryan seems not to give it great importance (Ryan 2003) and Michael Wilson, despite addressing the idea of “applied storytelling” in his book, does not mention libraries at all (Wilson 2006: 95-119). In any event, the importance of this factor is clear and the practice of storytelling in schools, a reality, largely responsible for the professionalization of the activity. As Wilson acknowledges:

The storytelling movement has been remarkably successful in establishing storytelling as a mainstream activity within schools. Regardless of a particular storyteller’s preference for a particular way of working, there are very few storytellers for whom work in schools does

not fill a significant part of their diary. It is the kind of work for which storytellers are in most demand (Wilson 2006: 97).

In Spain, Marina Sanfilippo identifies the same phenomenon and pays special attention to the role of libraries (Sanfilippo 2007: 87-94). According to the author, “story telling hours” started being held in the 1930s, following the American examples. One of the leading figures in this movement was, according to the author, Elena Fortún, who, during the war, was obliged to go into exile in Argentina, where she published her manual *Pues señor... Cómo Debe Contarse el Cuento y Cuentos para Ser Contados* (Fortún 1991). Despite the instability caused by the civil war, the custom of “story telling hours” seems to have survived. In Barcelona, Concepción Carreras kept up the practice of telling stories to children in the library of Santa Creu and, years later, Monserrat del Amo wrote a manual entitled *La Hora del Cuento*, commissioned by the *Servicio Nacional de Lectura* (Sanfillippo 2007: 88). This is how, in the 1990s, a library would be at the heart of the storytelling movement in Spain: the Public Library of Guadalajara, responsible for the “Maratón de Cuentos”, an event which since then has served as the epicentre for the Spanish storytelling revival. As such, just as happened in the United States and in France years beforehand, oral storytelling in Spain has strengthened its ground in libraries and schools, while remaining constantly associated with children’s literature and reading promotion. This reciprocal relationship between publishing investment in children’s literature and mediation programmes for reading in libraries created the need for a mediator, for a specialised performer, and this role has been taken by those who were interested in telling stories, traditional or otherwise, with or without books.

In Portugal, the phenomenon was similar, despite its later arrival. The order issued by the Portuguese Secretary of State for Culture in 1986 for the creation of the network of municipal libraries, would come to bear fruit throughout the 1990s. In this context,

the role of libraries proved vital in the promotion of oral storytelling in Portugal, giving rise, even if timidly, when compared to the French and Spanish situations, to a process of professionalization of the activity. As had happened in Spain, in the context of this phenomenon, a library became the centre for national activity to do with oral storytelling: the Municipal Library of Beja. Ever since 1995, the library has been holding story telling sessions as part of its ongoing activities, while developing a range of projects in schools and in the rural context. In 1997 it would launch one of the initiatives that would prove decisive in the development of oral storytelling in Portugal: the event “Palavras Andarilhas”. In the meantime, another library also became an important centre of activity: the Municipal Library of Oeiras, which in 2004 launched the project “Histórias de Ida e Volta”, involving training activities and an ongoing schedule of oral storytelling events. Like these, other libraries throughout the country developed projects and festivals, as in the case of the libraries of Pombal and Lagos, to name just two. More recently, the library of Montemor-o-Novo has organised an ongoing story telling programme, “Contos Doutra Hora”, as well as an annual festival, “A Festa dos Contos”, produced by Algures – Coletivo de Criação Teatral, which features the participation of national and international storytellers.

These dynamics, witnessed initially in the United States, in a more visible and documented manner, and then later, in an almost generalised fashion throughout the so-called western world, represent, from my point of view, the factor contributing most to the storytelling revival in the European and American context. Indeed, it was this that led to the demand for a specialist, who, on one hand, was able to mediate between readers and the growing amount of children’s literature, and on the other, provided a

kind of activity with progressively legitimised pedagogic and entertainment effectiveness.

This phenomenon has parallels in other European and American countries, naturally, although the time available and the size of this report prevent me from exploring them. As such, the US, French, Spanish and Portuguese examples serve here solely to portray the fundamental role played by schools and libraries in the professionalization of storytelling, in a dynamic that enabled, on the one hand, the creation of a work market and, on the other, its legitimisation as an entertainment and pedagogic activity.

The legitimisation of the aniles fabulae

As shown in the previous point, the context for the greatest development of storytelling practices appears to have been that of education and of entertainment of younger audiences. Their entertainment and pedagogical applicability led the way to a specialisation and, in turn, the professionalization of an activity that seems to have always belonged to this environment: childhood. Nevertheless, the background to the practice of telling stories within the context of kindergartens, schools and libraries, as I outlined in the previous point, is closely associated with a process of legitimisation of the models and themes of so-called folk tales and fairy tales.

Classical Greek literature makes, as Anna Pellowski (1990: 5-8) says, many references to the act of telling stories in the context of education and entertainment of young audiences, showing itself to be seriously concerned with the content and genre of stories told to children. In these references, telling stories is represented as an activity of a specific age and social group entrusted with educating and entertaining children:

nannies (old wives), servants, elderly relatives, etc. The repertoire of these old carers and educators was known in Latin tradition as *aniles fabulae*, the prime example of which is *The Golden Ass* by Apuleius: an old woman entertains a kidnapped girl by telling her the story of Eros and Psyche.

As many authors note, this *corpus* of narratives has faced great resistance among the cultural elite throughout time (Warner 1995, Heywood 2001, Graverini 2006). We hear the first expression of prejudice from Plato, who refers to this kind of stories in the following terms: “a false myth, a story that has no rational ground and that should have no place in the philosopher’s utopia” (Garvernini 2006: 90). According to Marina Warner, it is in the Athenian philosopher’s work, and more precisely *Gorgias*, that we find probably the oldest reference to this kind of practice and of narrative (Warner 1995: 14). However, Plato also muses on the matter in *The Republic*: through Socratic argumentation, the philosopher deems that all stories that mothers and nannies tell children should be carefully chosen, so as to exclude any that have harmful effects on the education of young citizens (Gavernini 2006: 90-93). In this regard, if the applicability of the practice of telling stories is acknowledged, in addition to the benefits of certain stories (chosen and moulded by the Athenian elite), the kind of narratives present in the repertoire of old nannies would be, if the philosopher were to have his way, condemned to censure. After Plato, Roman intellectuals were no less hostile with regards to this narrative genre. It was Quintilian’s understanding that trivial and morally repugnant stories of the *aniles fabulae* kind should give way to myths penned by authors of renown, while for Seneca, any fantasy story consisted of a useless literature, devoid of morals and philosophy (ibidem).

As such, throughout the history of European thought, the term *aniles fabulae* has gained a derogatory meaning, associated with a kind of fanciful story, bereft of truth and of useful teachings.

It is still, in English, an ambiguous phrase: an old wives' tales means a piece of nonsense, a tissue of terror, an ancient act of deception, of self and others, idle talk. As Marlow writes in *Dr Faustus*, "Tush, these are trifles and mere old wives' tales". On a par with trifles, "mere old wives' tales" carry connotations of error, of false counsel, ignorance, prejudice and fallacious nostrums – against heartbreak as well as headache; similarly "fairy tale", as a derogatory term, implies fantasy, escapism, invention, the unreliable consolations of romance (Warner 1995: 19).

The main issue of the controversy naturally lies in the suitability of a traditional repertoire in educating children. John Locke, whose theories in the field of education proved highly influential from the 18th century onwards, despite acknowledging the importance of stories such as Aesop's Fables in learning to read and write, in addition to morals and good behaviour, deemed fairy tales to be pollution of the mind that could ward children off of religion (Dunning 1999: 63). Jean Jacques Rousseau, one of the modern founders of thought on childhood and education, disapproved of fairy tales, preferring a more everyday and real imagery (Haase 2007a: 186). In fact, the Enlightenment harnessed a powerful antagonism towards such repertoires, resulting from a process that Jack Zipes describes as:

The rise of the fairy tale in the Western world as the mass-mediated cultural form of the folk tale coincided with the decline of feudalism and the formation of the bourgeois public sphere. Therefore, it quickly lost its function of affirming absolutist ideology and experienced a curious development at the end of the eighteenth century and throughout the nineteenth century. On the one hand, the dominant, conservative bourgeois groups began to consider the folk and fairy tales amoral because they did not rejoice in the virtues of order, discipline, industry, modesty, cleanliness, etc. In particular, they were regarded as harmful for children since their imaginative components might give young ones "crazy ideas", i.e., suggest ways to rebel against authority and patriarchal rule in family (Zipes 1979:12).

A change of perspective was needed with regard this *corpus* of narratives so that, from the end of the 19th century, their use was deemed appropriate in the context of educational practices, as much in kindergartens as in schools and libraries. This process

of legitimisation of fairy tales seems to have its origin in Romanticism, as mentioned, enabling this repertoire, whether in its literary sense, or in the practices of oral storytelling, to move from a family and community context into an institutionalised space. In combining an interest in folk expressions with adulation of purity and of the innocence of childhood, the romantic ideals produced a vast work of adaptations of traditional tales dedicated to a child audience, as already mentioned. Published for the first time in 1812, the famous collection by the Brothers Grimm, although not isolated, is the best example of this trend. Nevertheless, resistance to magical imagery of folk and fairy tales persisted, leading to versions for child audiences being adapted to the moral tastes of the literate elite and of the aspiring classes.

It is in this context that fairy tales find a fundamental ally in psychoanalysis, an emerging subject that would contribute to a change in attitude towards the magical material of tales and, finally, to their legitimisation as a pedagogical and therapeutic instrument. The theories of Sigmund Freud and, in particular, of Carl Jung lie at the heart of the process of legitimisation of the *aniles fabulae*, which took place throughout the 20th century. The most prominent expression of this movement can be found, without doubt in the work of Bruno Bettelheim, *The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales* (Bettelheim 2010), which represents a benchmark work with regard to the pedagogical and therapeutic uses of fairy tales. As Veronika Görög-Karady notes, these theories created the basis for a reassessment of this repertoire in work for children:

Psychoanalysis and other psychological therapies have contributed for their part to the cultural legitimisation of the fantastic and the supernatural. Not only have the terrifying aspects of magic tales been reinterpreted as the acting out of suppressed desires, but even the idea that they are harmful to children's socialization has been revised (Görög-Karady 1990: 177).

Accordingly, parallel to the process of institutionalisation of the spaces dedicated to educating children, in which reading and storytelling were adopted from the outset as a work tool by educators, the legitimisation of series of narratives, here generically referred to as *aniles fabulae*, represented one of the key factors in the development of oral storytelling. The first storytellers set down a path towards specialisation and professionalization in the school and library environments, while their discourses, practices and repertoires were finally legitimised by a receptive attitude towards folk and fairy tales. It was this process that enabled, in the first place, the professionalization of the practices of oral storytelling throughout the 20th century and, as far as can be gauged, more consistently in its latter decades.

The affirmation of the short narrative in contemporary literature

In the theory on short narrative there is a fundamental distinction between the products of the tradition noted before and modern literary tales, expressed perfectly clearly in English through the term “tale”, when referring to the former, and “short story”, when referring to the latter (Marler 1994). The tradition of tales, which generically include the frame narratives of Boccaccio or of Chaucer, the *exempla*, the *fabliaux*, the *novellas*, fables, fairy tales and folk tales, are presented as a predecessor to the short story, the literary tale, the development and profusion of which is now of interest to look at. Because, as Marina Sanfilippo says, one of the factors enabling the development of oral storytelling as a professionalized artistic practice concerns the prestige the short story has achieved throughout the 20th century (Sanfilippo 2007: 18).

In most oral storytelling movement contexts, the folk and fairy tale in the broader sense, represents a prime source for the repertoires of the “new” storytellers.

Nevertheless, although in lesser numbers, short stories are also present. From what can be ascertained, the presence of author tales, that is to say, of an unmistakably literary nature, seems to be more significant in the repertoires of Spanish artists (Sanfilippo 2007: 194-196) and South American ones (Palleiro e Fischman 2009: 49). By contrast, in the works of Joseph Sobol (1999), Simon Heywood (2001) and Patrick Ryan (2003) on the English-language situation, or in the studies of Veronika Görög-Karady (1990) and Maria Patrini (2002) into the *renouveau du conte* in France, the presence of short stories goes unnoticed in artists' repertoires.

In any event, the phenomenon of the short story, of the "literary" tale, as it were, is not solely associated with oral storytelling movements as work material, that is to say, as a repertoire source. Its influence in the storytelling revival has to do with the appreciation of the practice of telling short stories in prose as an artistic activity, which first and foremost is closely associated with the affirmation of the short story as a literary genre, that is to say, as a form endowed with aesthetic validity. In the same way as the growing appreciation of orality and the profusion of magical imagery contributed to the taste for the "traditional" and as the institutionalisation of oral storytelling in school and library contexts created a space favourable to action, the affirmation of the short story as a literary genre developed, in turn, a taste for this kind of narratives which made its performance welcome in the artistic and established scene.

According to the agreed discourse of a vast theory, the short story genre is an invention of the 20th century, which coincides with the dissemination of periodicals, newspapers and magazines (May 1994). In the United States, one of the celebrated authors of the genre was Washington Irving, with the work *Sketch Book of Geoffrey Crayon, Gent.*, published in instalments between 1919 and 1920, and containing the

famous short story “The Legend of Sleepy Hollow”. Beyond Irving, other prominent figures include Nathaniel Hawthorne, especially with the works such as *Twice-Told Tales*, published in 1837, and Edgar Allan Poe, known for his gothic style and for his murder mysteries, such as, for example, “The Murders in the Rue Morgue”, published for the first time in 1841. Poe also stands out for his contribution to the development of a theory on the genre (Marler 1994). A shift towards Realism, in a trend felt right across literary production of the time, took place a little later in the work of Herman Melville, collected, for example, in *Piazza Tales*, in 1856.

For its part, in United Kingdom the genre faced greater resistance. Despite inroads made by some romanticists, such as Charles Dickens, George Eliot or Sir Walter Scott, in addition to some production in magazines by other authors, the phenomenon seems to have only reached maturity at the end of the century, within a realist trend, with Robert Louis Stevenson and Rudyard Kipling. And, while in Germany the forerunners of the genre included Ernst Theodor Amadeus Hoffmann and Heinrich von Kleist, in France, still as part of the Romantic Movement, Charles Nodier produced a work marked by the fantastic and Prosper Mérimée redefined the genre with the key work “Mateo Falcone”, published in 1829. Honoré de Balzac and Gustave Flaubert also made some forays into the genre, but it was Guy de Maupassant, who, in the final decades of the century implemented a shift towards realism with texts such as “Boule de Suif”, to name but one. Other important authors of the genre were Alfred de Musset and Alphonse Daudet.

In Russia the phenomenon took on a similar guise, with authors such as Nikolai Gogol and Aleksander Pushkin standing out, in a realist trend that would culminate in the work of Anton Chekhov, considered one of the most significant names of the genre. And, accompanying this same movement from realism to naturalism, the short story

developed everywhere, advancing to the 21st century in a progressive affirmation as a fully fledged literary genre, culminating with Alice Munro being awarded the Nobel Prize in 2013.

In a far-reaching universe, which allows examples only, names such as Machado de Assis, Franz Kafka, William Somerset Maugham, Italo Calvino or Jorge Luis Borges were, although not devoted exclusively to the genre, authors who were instrumental in this process of affirmation of short narrative. It is also interesting to note, for its influence in oral storytelling movements, that South American literature was rich in the production of short stories throughout the 20th century, thanks to authors such as J lio Cort zar, Gabriel Garcia Marques or Eduardo Galeano. Indeed, and as we can also see in the study by Marina Sanfilippo, these authors have a significant presence in the repertoires of the Spanish-language storytellers (Sanfilippo 2007: 200-204).

Thus, the affirmation of this literary genre proved a decisive factor in the development of oral storytelling movements. Firstly, the proliferation of authors and works and their publishing created a taste for short narrative: on the one hand, stimulating storytellers by serving as work material and inspiration, and on the other, creating an audience, which, already appreciative of this literary genre, is easily attracted to the performance of these texts. Secondly, the legitimisation of the short story as a literary genre gave the act of oral storytelling in prose, that is to say the performance focused in the discourse of a narrator, an aesthetic validity previously achieved in the literary field. This practice of telling stories based on the artistic legitimacy of the short story differs from the paradigm of the *homo narrans*, of the everyday act of storytelling, which has no other value than its social function, of memory and community sharing. The literary quality of storytelling has ultimately become an

element of appreciation, which contributes to the legitimisation of oral storytelling as an artistic practice.

The crisis of drama in theatre practices

Some of the factors responsible for the stimulation of oral storytelling and, in particular, for its professionalization in the final decades of the 20th century, are closely linked to a change of paradigm in theatre practices. On the one hand, these factors have enabled a progressive affirmation of oral storytelling in the context of the performing arts, possible due to a tendency towards the narrativity of some theatre proposals. On the other hand, many oral storytellers come from this universe, equipped with the techniques and experience of the theatre, and revealing a vocation that fits into the lifestyles of a freelance artistic and professional activity.

This change of paradigm in theatre practices seems to be the consequence of what Peter Szondi called the “crisis of drama” (Szondi 2001). In a variety of proposals, theatre strove to move away from models of dramatic performance, allowing Hans-Thies Lehmann to give this series of trends the name “postdramatic theatre” (Lehman 2006). Among these proposals was the clear introduction of the narrative element, in a process that Szondi called “epicization” and Jean-Pierre Sarrazac called “rapsodization”, and which represented a “way of moving past or reinventing the dramatic model”, as Rui Pina Coelho says (2008: 19).

The epic theatre of Bertolt Brecht is a prime example of this trend in which the surpassing of drama does not necessarily imply the disappearance of the “fable”, of the function of telling a story and of creating a fictional world (Brecht 1978). In his quest for an emancipation of the mechanisms of projection and identification, Brecht, in addition

to other scenic resources, such as revealing sets, scenery and behind the scenes action, introduces the narrative element, central to achieving the famous *verfremdungseffekt*. In this regard, the responsibility of telling a story is not necessarily transferred from the dramatic performance to narration. The latter is first and foremost a mechanism that aims to promote a critical distance on the part of the spectator.

Indeed, it is impossible to think about 20th-century theatre without the questioning made by Brecht. As Lehmann proposes, “postdramatic theatre” is also a “post-Brechtian theatre” (Lehmann 2006: 33). And the role of narration in theatrical proposals, in addition to a visible assimilation of folk and traditional expressions, marked a trend in the performing arts that led the way, directly and indirectly, to the practices of oral storytelling. This is the case of Dario Fo, as Marina Sanfilippo (2007: 105-111) and Michael Wilson (2006: 123-125) note, whose work has influenced an entire theatre movement in Italy known as *teatro di narrazione*, including artists such as Ascanio Celestini and Marco Paolini, among others. In another way, the work of Peter Brook, an inescapable example of which is his staging of *Mahabharata*, has placed the figure of the “storyteller” under the spotlight in a range of productions in recent decades.

Pépito Matéo, when talking at the *Le Renouveau du Conte* symposium held in Paris in 1989, acknowledges the ongoing relationship between certain theatre practices and the development of oral storytelling:

I would like to talk to you about the evolution of a certain type of theatre, which leads me to believe that my career isn't entirely original, but also corresponds, it seems to me, to what many theatre folk do, who bit by bit reach what we call orality, the tale (Calame-Griaule 2001: 287).

Through a reflection on his own personal journey, in which the development of oral storytelling is a natural consequence of a theatre experience, Pépito Matéo sets a pattern common to many artists. Indeed, Michael Wilson deems the importance of

alternative theatre of the 1960s and 1970s to be fundamental in the origin of oral storytelling movements in UK:

Moreover, many of those who are now leading practitioners within storytelling have backgrounds within the alternative theatre movement of this time and their work is informed by those experiences (and is arguably an extension of that same work) (Wilson 2006: 15).

In fact, a large number of storytellers have had a similar career path. However, the influence of theatre practices on oral storytelling movements, although significant, does not appear to be as fundamental as Michael Wilson proposes, or as career paths similar to that of Pépito Matéo seem to imply. Instead, it is important to bear in mind, as I have tried to portray, the diversity of factors providing a background to the storytelling revival. As such, it might be better to consider that the growing appreciation of orality and of folk and traditional manifestations, in a reaction against industrialisation and the mediatization of societies, along with some other factors observed, led to a reformulation of theatre practices at the same time as, in another context, bringing about a renewal of a different performance practice: oral storytelling. Because, actually, the worlds of oral storytelling and of theatre, despite all the possible interplay, seem to carry out very independent itineraries. Hans-Thies Lehmann, when talking about the growing role of narration in the theatre productions of his postdramatic theatre says:

Lost in the world of media, narration finds a new site in theatre. It is no coincidence that performers rediscover the telling of fairy tales in the process. Bernhard Minetti realized a memorable evening (directed by Alfred Kirchner) in which he performed all alone as a storyteller of Grimm's fairy tales on the stage of the Schillertheater. In a performance by the Danish company Von Heiduck – famed for works exploring eros, its uncanniness and potential for anxiety by means of dance, gesture and scenic design – the dancing suddenly stops and for about half an hour a man retells Hans Christian Andersen's *The Metal Pig* in a monotonous, calm and undramatic voice... The moment of narration returns to the stage and asserts itself against the fascination of bodies *and* of media" (Lehmann 2006: 109, italic in the original).

What is important in this quote, which expresses some wonderment as to these narrative performances, is the absence of any mention to the many artists within oral

storytelling movements. We can say that Lehmann is totally unaware of the storytelling revival and its artists. Similarly, in *Worlds in Words: Storytelling in Contemporary Theatre and Playwriting*, edited by Mateusz Borowski and Malgorzata Sugiera (2010), every contribution seems to ignore this phenomenon. The exception that proves the rule is Michael Wilson's chapter dedicated to analysing the work of Welsh storyteller Daniel Morden. Also in the same way, there are very few cases of storytellers or storyteller shows appearing in theatre schedules or festivals. Some French exceptions, such as Bruno de La Salle, Pépito Matéo or Abbi Patrix represent artistic proposals more easily accommodated within the theatre scene.

On the other hand, as observed, oral storytelling has developed in different contexts to theatre practices, building and stimulating its own scheduling networks, which rarely intersect with those established as "theatre", in the broad sense in which the term appears in cultural agendas. Indeed, the regularity of storytelling performances in schools and libraries, the production of "soirées" for adults in cafés, bars and cultural associations and the profusion of international storytelling festivals allows us to think that, in spite of the positive and interesting interplay between theatre and oral storytelling, the activity of telling stories orally has found, over recent decades, its own territory, an independent network.

Nevertheless, it is important to note the distance between the two universes is reciprocal. It's not just theatre professionals unaware of the world of oral storytelling. Despite the theatre backgrounds of some storytellers, the discourse of many of these artists reveals little familiarity with theatre history, theory and practices. As Michael Wilson notes, the idea of "theatre" shared by a large number of storytelling enthusiasts has no concept of the proposals making up the vanguard of 20th-century theatre (Wilson

2006: 43-48). The arguments these put forward to differentiate their practice with that of an actor are based on ideas related to memorising a text, the “fourth wall”, the incarnation of a character, the costumes, scenery, sets and props, in addition to aspects of authorship and staging. This reveals an unawareness of the diversity of contemporary theatre in which all of these elements were questioned and revised. So we are led to believe that the influence of postdramatic proposals are not as fundamental in the discourses and practices of professional storytellers as Michael Wilson assumes, or from what could be supposed from when observing cases such as that of Pépito Matéo.

In fact, the discourses of some storytellers reveal major resistance to considering oral storytelling as a form of theatre. This antagonism is actually one of the most controversial points in discourse produced by storytelling revival movements. In an aside, I do understand and identify myself with the need for affirmation and legitimisation of a new discipline within the performing arts. Confronted with the unfamiliarity revealed by cities’ cultural agenda planners, of state subsidies or of the media with regard to their art, naturally artists feel the urgent need to differentiate their practice from others occupying privileged and established positions in cultural networks. The specific characteristics of the storytellers’ activity are tangible, of this there is no question, and there is a way to go for their acknowledgement and legitimisation. Nevertheless, exacerbating the differences, in my very personal opinion, seems hardly pertinent in today’s artistic scene, where the greatest wealth lies precisely in the intersection of disciplines, in the blurring of limits between artistic languages, in questioning labels and traditional forms of expression.

Moving on, in spite of the apparent lack of relations between the theatre and oral storytelling worlds, we cannot reject the idea that theatre practices had an influence,

direct or indirect, on the development of the storytelling revival. If a certain reciprocal unfamiliarity seems, on the one hand, to hinder the inclusion of storytelling shows in theatre scheduling and, on the other, to motivate differentiating discourses from some storytellers, we can still acknowledge an effective contamination between these two domains. Generically speaking, many artists within storytelling movements come from theatre practice backgrounds. And these artists arrive equipped with expressive skills and cultural references from the world of the performing arts, which allow them to develop unique artist careers and with a professional profile, common within the arts, compatible with a self-employed and intermittent activity.

As such, we can confirm that the paradigm changes in theatre practices throughout the 20th century have represented, primarily through the migration of professions, but not exclusively, one of the cultural and historical factors enabling the development and, finally, the professionalization of oral storytelling. One factor among others.

Luís Correia Carmelo
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BELGIUM

[HTTP://WWW.FEST-NETWORK.EU](http://www.fest-network.eu)
FESTEUROPE@GMAIL.COM