

Memories and Breath –
Professional Storytelling in England and Wales

**An unofficial report conducted via e-mail survey
by Ben Haggarty
Autumn 2003**



Published 2004 by CRDTS
The Centre for the Research and Development of Traditional Storytelling

epicstory2@aol.com

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Preface

Crick?

Crack!

I'm going to tell you a story

Let's hear it!

It's full of lies...

Is it?

But there's truth in it.

Good!

This is the first statistical report on the state of frontline professional storytelling activity in England and Wales. It is an unofficial document. Its aim, expressed in the codes of contemporary terminology – and therefore with tongue held firmly in cheek as far as the language is concerned – could be formulated thus: to bring visibility to a highly accessible re-emergent *art* that is centred on genuinely sustainable popular literature that promotes global citizenship whilst actively developing individual imaginative faculties and oral communication skills. Its objective is to be the catalyst that will compel an official body to undertake a further audit bearing the authority of independence.

This is a fairly lengthy report based on hard information collated by means of an 'informal survey' that consisted of 31 pages of questions.

Being committed to the search for a greater understanding of everything, I believe that it's worth making the best effort possible to be thorough in order to set both precedents and standards alongside which further work can be compared and developed. Also, in keeping with the process of tradition and its intrinsic generosity of spirit, I value the active politic of putting this information in the public domain so that others can freely copy, adapt or develop these models and templates.

This is offered as a first step to laying some groundwork for the building of an infrastructure that will support and develop excellence in professional storytelling.

Introduction

The report is based on data returned by 38 out of (at least) 100 surveys circulated by e-mail. Professional statisticians advise me that a response of 38% is above average for such an exercise and can therefore be considered successful. It seems probable that the respondents do represent a true and fair cross section of storytelling artists working in England and Wales. Having examined the findings closely and measured them against my first hand knowledge of the subject, I believe the sample is diverse enough to paint a fair picture of what is happening in terms of *paid* storytelling activity: when, where, how and on what scale.

The data provided by the survey demonstrates that the collective achievement of professional storytellers based in England and Wales is remarkable in terms of productivity, versatility and ingenuity.

What is Storytelling?

All the narrative arts tell stories, and so playwrights, sculptors, filmmakers, cartoonists, novelists, librettists, etc all obviously count as storytellers. But the ‘storytelling’ this survey focuses upon is that which a world wide movement that began over 30 years ago would define as being: the telling of stories through the primal oral form of the spoken word – and most of the stories told are sourced in what UNESCO terms ‘intangible cultural heritage’.

This type of storytelling is a content driven art form that is warmly relished by those who encounter high calibre practitioners. Audiences find it meets a profound need for communal listening and attentive gathering. At the same time it directly nourishes individual imagination with a highly evolved form of metaphorical material that can rarely be found elsewhere.

Several years ago, one of the most highly respected figures in the English literary establishment attended a storytelling performance and afterwards asked the storytellers who did their writing for them. The person thus revealed a widely held misunderstanding about the contemporary oral storyteller’s art: there is no writing. The body of storytellers at the centre of this study are genuine spoken word artists. They are not actors reciting a text written by others (nor are they generally reciting a memorised text that they have written themselves). Their storytelling is work of pure orality put to the service of the transmission of material that is intended for further transmission by others; that is, they see themselves as a link in a chain that extends from the past to the future.

Oral storytellers are simultaneously the authors, performers and directors of their own adaptations of (on the whole) pre-existing ancestral narratives. If one learns how to listen, these stories carry the whole material and psychological history of humanity in their vast ocean of genres. The verbal and corporeal language of each story is re-composed for every new and specific audience through an immediate improvisation, based on deep research and knowledge of the narrative. Storytelling is an art that thrives on variables: the same story cannot be told the same way twice because the

audience, the context and the psychic state of the teller can never be the same. Its processes of *re-creation-in-performance* are perhaps akin to jazz. The re-composition of a tale requires an expert knowledge of how to deconstruct and reconstruct using invisible stitching. Sustaining a two-hour long public performance demands intensity, skill and adaptability, and that in turn comes from the mastery of many grammars such as iconography and dramaturgy and their translation into communicative language. Once mastered, storytelling is an art that permits as much self-expression as the artist wishes. As with any art form, the exponents of storytelling can of course range from the brilliantly inspired to the lacklustre.

Professional storytelling has developed as an underground art form in Britain during the last 20 years. It tends to operate at ‘grass roots’ level and is therefore seldom visible to the public and media. Given a history of low-prioritisation by the arts funding bodies and correspondingly meagre and, at best, arbitrary support, the tenacity of storytellers is impressive. It is now primed for a splendid emergence – but needs appropriate and significant affirmations of support to do this.

This survey provides data that can be used to begin raising the status of this primal form of live literature. It will make a case for financial assistance lead by the state funding bodies. My hope is that these statistical findings will be recognised as sufficiently exciting to warrant the commissioning of an official survey. In turn I hope that the literature department of the Arts Council will argue for a significant ring-fenced increase in their portion of the general arts budget based on that new, up to date, authoritative evidence. Commitment to supporting a *performing* art will necessitate additional costs but the arguments in terms of social benefit, educational outreach and access are numerous, clear and strong. Once they are really understood, they become easier to make. The cumulative and collective achievement of storytellers deserves respect worthy of greater honour than mere lip service. This document makes a call for leadership in the effort to understand this art. Once willingness is born, a way will follow.

The report is presented in eleven parts, plus a preface, introduction and appendices.

Part One introduces the compiler, the storytelling revival and the need for this report.

Part Two introduces the respondents.

Part Three gives general data.

Parts Four, Five and Six give detailed data.

Part Seven looks at training.

Part Eight looks at international and collaborative work.

Part Nine looks at funding and standards.

Parts Ten and Eleven give summaries, conclusions and recommendations.

Part One: the Compiler, Storytelling and the Genesis of the Report.

A Note about the Compiler

I'm obliged to introduce myself, as I'm clearly not a disinterested party.

I wear several caps. However, first and foremost, I am a professional teller of traditional tales and I have been working as such, full-time, since 1981; the organisational and advocacy activities detailed below are secondary to that.

I am the co-ordinator of the Crick Crack Club – which, since 1987, has been an umbrella organisation for:

- a) promoting performance storytelling events for adults.
- b) promoting experimentation with the art form.
- c) developing new repertoire.
- d) developing new talent.

In practice this means bringing stories, storytellers and audiences together in the same place so that 'storytelling' can happen, which means the Crick Crack Club is probably best described as a peripatetic *venue*. The long-term aim is to find a permanent home in the inner cosmopolis of London, the capital city. A longstanding core of internationally acclaimed artists work at the heart of the Crick Crack Club. They nurture each others' creativity through a collective process of searching dialogue and stringent peer review. This team is gradually expanding – however it cannot be rushed as it may take the distilled experience of ten years work for evidence of somebody's mastery of this art to make its presence felt.

From the outset the various artists associated with the Crick Crack Club have pursued a rich creative dialogue with peer storytellers in Western Europe and North America and together sought guidance from tradition bearers in the developing world.

I'm also the Artistic Co-Director of the Beyond the Border International Storytelling Festival, held annually at St Donat's Arts Centre in Wales since 1993. The selection of the palette of guest storytellers is largely my responsibility.

I'm a teacher of storytelling too and use critical and technical languages evolved with the help of 30 students during periods of intensive teaching over four-years in my rural studio (CRDTS). These languages have 'grammars' based on a systematic analysis of the technical skills necessary for composition, performance and improvised response.

I have a campaigning nature. Since 1981, I have made many calculated 'active interventions' in fields concerning storytelling. They range from performance, promotion and advocacy, to organisation, standard setting, etiquette and training – this survey is a typical example. These interventions have often established precedents for working practices many of which are now taken for granted; as a consequence I am

widely credited as being one of the principal architects of the British storytelling revival.

It is worth adding that I left school in 1976 at the age of 17 and trained first as a mime and then as a theatre director. I have never been an actor and to this day, though I can tell stories that last three hours, I cannot memorise a single line. My creative vision was fuelled by the writings and manifestos of Artaud, Brook and Grotowski and the strongest influence on my formal training came during a year spent with Welfare State Theatre, 'Engineers of the Imagination' as their first 'apprentice image maker' (1978). These influences established values of a deep commitment to internationalism and what could be called the 'alternative' and community-building arts. Everything I have done subsequently has been in the name of affirming life and its vivacious celebration.

Experience has shown me that almost everything about the revival of professional storytelling can be regarded as radically 'counter cultural'. At its best it poses challenging questions to those who hold any form of fixed political or philosophical views. The trickster is the storyteller's guide. When those who would denigrate the re-emergence of professional storytelling dismiss it as a 'romantic' movement, I smile because, if anything, it is a '*Mantic*' movement. The pre-historic (that is, *pre-literate*) Salmon of Knowledge swimming upstream towards the source would make a fitting emblem for it...

Storytelling as Contemporary Art

The most dismaying part of my work has been the extraordinary effort it has taken to convince the Arts Council's literature department that the oral telling of a traditional narrative has anything at all to do with literature. For the best part of a decade, the official signal, percolating from the most senior officer down to the frontline literature development workers, had been that storytelling was ACE's lowest priority. Thankfully not everyone toed that line, and, in the last year, I have received verbal assurances that storytelling is now fully accepted as being within the literature remit. This is a major development and it is incumbent upon the literature department to take clear steps that build upon it boldly and wisely. (The evidence of several Arts Council grants awarded this year, 2004, betrays the fact that a proper policy addressing the issue of standards of professional excellence in storytelling still has to be put in place, as does a coherent overall national strategy for growth. Growth needs to begin with a serious commitment to understanding the nuances of an art as rich and complex as any other. Hopefully this document will initiate a constructive debate – and perhaps prompt the calling of a professional development conference. In order to learn, one has to first accept that one doesn't know.)

Whatever the reasons for the historical ambivalence towards this fundamental human art, the undeniable fact remains that a traditional storyteller sits at the cradle of almost every literature in the world (cf the seminal three volume 'Growth of Literature' by Munro and Chadwick). Charged with dealing backward-looking archaism – irrelevant

to modern times – I send critics to the surrealist essays of Daumal and Mabille, to the ‘beat’ essays of Rothenberg and Snyder. Closer to home, I point to the fading glimmer of the Celtic Twilight in the essays of Yeats, Auden and Travers. If the Jungian ‘mythopoeism’ of Zimmer, Hillman, Raine and Bly is too much to swallow, I point to the hard edge of essays by Hughes and Garner. I recommend Darnton for offering earthy common sense and Doniger for the breathtaking fluidity of her academic rigour. I point to Tutuola, to Calvino, to Ramanujan, to Diop, to Okri, to Brody and to Bringhurst. Evoking this roll call of genius becomes too daunting to continue... I’ve appended an introductory reading list to this report that would give anyone seriously interested in this art a good grounding in the wealth and range of ideas that underpin it.

The most challenging task facing a storyteller today is to make the stories of the past have valid meaning – *now*. The majority of traditional oral narratives build upon structures that demand, from the outset, that the audience accompanies the storyteller on a journey. These stories propose the direct exploration of major existential themes such as justice and injustice; power, duty and responsibility; crime and punishment; fate, accident and destiny; consciousness and death, etc. If such stories have been told well, feelings are touched and discussion of the tale follows as surely as night follows day, no matter what age the audience. The fact that the stories might seem to take place in remote histories or geographies shouldn’t even arise as a question – a deeper, immediate communication should have occurred. However if a weak storyteller has been telling the tales – and failed to do the job well – then they will have had little more effect than a musak version of an original tune. Good artists aim to make their work seem effortless. Storytelling is an art that may appear to be simple – but in reality its professional public form is far, far from that.

Storytelling is laced together by three continua: the fathomless continuum of narratives – from personal and incidental stories to epic sagas and myths of creation; the vast continuum of contexts – from the kitchen table to the formal stage, by day, by night, for friends, for strangers etc; the continuum of diverse storytellers – from the parent and friend to the paid performer in a public arena. Making a three dimensional matrix from this triad of continua (stories, contexts and tellers) helps one to locate and carefully assess all the forces at play in any given storytelling event.

If the Arts Council are genuinely committed to supporting storytelling, it is incumbent upon them to appoint assessors drawn from the ranks of those who have no doubt as to the value of traditional tales and who appreciate this narrative genre without quarrel. Evidently, not everyone shares an imagination that responds to these types of stories – and that is their prerogative (just as not everyone responds to opera) – however, many do. No serious restaurateur would ever entrust a vegetarian to give valid assessments of the quality of meat dishes.

What contemporary issue has not *always* been a contemporary issue?

Storytelling and Performance Literature

Listening to a good storyteller brings something akin to a literary experience to a performing arts event. The story that is being told doesn't take place on the stage. It is not a spectacle in the physical world; rather the words and non-verbal communications aim to evoke vivid, polysensual awareness in the listener's mind. This means storytelling puts much less emphasis on 'show' than the theatre (however what there is carries all the more significance and requires subtle study as there's always a risk of triggering the switch that turns *audiences* into spectators). Everything is put to the service of creating a specific 'happening' inside the listener: the activation of *imagination*. A storyteller's intention is to lead people towards their own inner selves rather than divert them away.

Participation in a successful storytelling event involves a different sensory experience from reading or listening to the radio or even a live recitation. There is neither a remote author nor a text carved in stone; instead, a warm-blooded mediator of creative energy stands right there with the audience, plucking (more than) words from the air. To re-iterate, each telling of a story is uniquely re-created for each fresh audience, meaning that the audience becomes aware that their communal and individual listening has a direct effect on the way the cloth of dreams is unfurling. The active participation of their attentiveness is integral to the shaping of the performance and on the choice of clothes that the ghost of the tale clads itself with. In fact what anthropologists term 'physical co-presence' is paramount: the atmosphere of immediate creative relationship makes it possible for the Wu Li masters to dance¹. And this is why so much consideration needs to be put into creating the optimum spatial conditions for good storytelling – the possibility of silence and focus.

The nature of the triad – story/storyteller/audience – means that oral storytelling cannot produce a material product. To adapt a quote from Robert Bringhurst, *stories* are 'pure spirit, made of memories and breath'². Books and recordings can be no more than secondary offshoots of this sort of storytelling: playing invaluable *archiving* roles. The absence of a material outcome contributes to the 'invisibility' of storytelling that will be discussed later in this document. It also introduces one of the many enigmatic paradoxes that surround the art – each telling is ephemeral, yet the stories can continue a shape-shifting existence for tens of thousands of years (for example, motifs still abound in European fairytales that can reasonably be judged as having their roots in the Mesolithic – if not long, long, long before).

If storytelling is an immediate, fluid and responsive *re-creation* for specific audiences, it means that professional storytellers are more or less entirely dependent on live work

¹ A reference to the ancient Taoist mystics and priests known as the Wu Li masters – whose philosophies and perceptions have much in common with the paradoxes revealed by Quantum Physics, see: 'The Dancing Wu Li Masters' Gary Zukav,

² The actual quote is: "*Skaay... lived in a world without writing. That is to say, a world in which voices were pure spirit, made of memory and breath, never captured by the hand or by machines.*" R.Bringhurst, from the introduction to, *Masterworks of the Classical Haida Mythtellers*, Volume 3 Skaay of the Qquun Qiighawaay: Being in Being. Publ Douglas & McIntyre 2001

with audiences for their livelihood. It is the *primal* literary experience and can only be truly experienced in performance. Storytelling is the original ‘live literature. The conspicuous absence of storytellers’ voices from the platform at the Arts Council’s major ‘Live Literature’ conference in Manchester at the turn of the millennium, speaks volumes about the value the establishment puts upon storytelling. The tension between the status of the spoken word and the written word carries an intense political charge (cf the chapter headed, ‘Words’, in Hugh Brody’s extraordinary work, ‘The Other Side of Eden’).

My hope is that, having studied this report, arts professionals will wake up and take notice of what has been developing in the shadows and margins of their world – find pride in the phenomenon and begin to identify – and become acquainted with – the work of leading storytellers, just as they have identified and supported leading performance poets. Good storytellers need to be treated with the respect equally due to all creative artists. Furthermore, I hope it will galvanise them to pro-actively redress the longstanding imbalance in the levels of financial support available to storytelling compared with those offered without hesitation to other forms of live literature.

The Artist’s Call to Storytelling

Storytellers are involved in an act of sustaining culture by preserving and perpetuating intangible heritage. They help those who want to listen – and there are many, from all walks of life – to access not only the heritage of the ancestral oral literatures of the world’s existing, threatened and lost civilisations, but also the still living traditional oral literatures of migrant communities and of those in the industrially developing world.

Humanity is in a state of accelerating turbulence. Viewed from the perspective of space the planet is clearly a single entity and mass communication invites us to see and accept it as such. Events on one side of the world bring consequences to the other and all could be completely consumed by conflict or a dreadful error caused by some profit hungry industry.

We are in the midst of multi-directional population migrations on an historically unprecedented scale (numerically far greater than the voluntary and forced migrations of Europeans and Africans to the Americas). As people move, so do their accompanying customs and cultures. It is therefore of vital importance that efforts are made on the one hand to create opportunities for creative exchanges in order to foster openness and greater reciprocal understanding between ‘new’ and ‘old’ communities – because prejudice is born of ignorance – and, on the other hand, to make efforts to sustain cultural variation. The diversity of long-evolved cultures is almost helplessly threatened by the homogeneous ‘lifestyle’ marketing of multi-national and global corporations. Whose dream of progress is this? And if it is a dream, who is asleep?

As a creative response to this immediate historical reality, oral storytellers are everywhere being summoned to sound a steady call for continuity amidst change, fragmentation and atomisation. They are cultural resistance fighters who understand that the world-wide legacy of traditional narrative offers a most valuable path of access to the levels of essential human commonality that lie beneath glittering surfaces of external difference. Shakespeare might have called these inherited stories, things ‘of great constancy’. There is an archaeology to narrative that reveals not only the archaeology of the imagination but also the aspiration of the soul.

Those who have a farsighted understanding of the part oral storytelling can play in shaping contemporary British society, see that it not only has obvious implications for inter/intra-generational and inter/intra-communal communication, but also understand that this archaic means of directly exercising the imagination develops metaphorical thinking; this in turn could open doors to completely new ways of perceiving the world and questioning the function of humankind within it. It is not for nothing that very specific narratives accompany rites of passage and initiation in traditional societies.

As the evidence of the survey reveals over and over again, storytelling is an extraordinarily versatile art operating through process, form and content.

The Survey Genesis

In 2002, a literature officer suggested, that I should voluntarily undertake an informal ‘straw poll’ survey using e-mail to establish some concrete facts. He was sceptical that storytelling was taking place on any significant scale in his region and in particular on behalf of groups that the government was prioritising for ‘access’ funding. I had been arguing that such target audiences were already likely to be significant benefactors of the majority of day-to-day storytelling activity through work in the state education sector. My proposal was that, in the case of a new art form – (or, more precisely, a radically re-conceived, *re-emergent*, ancient art form) – a bold and imaginative disbursement of public tax revenue, through the Arts Council was needed to support organisations wanting to give the *general public* access to storytelling events.

I proposed that the funding priority for storytelling should be the funding of *artist-lead* infrastructure – as exists for theatre, dance and the other performing arts. I made special pleas that, as educational and community activity is the daily bread and butter work of most storytellers – done ‘off the storytellers’ own backs’ and generally without recourse to agencies – it remains invisible. (In fact this survey has also revealed the invisibility of the vast majority of the work that is currently being done for public audiences too – for reasons that will become clear later. It should perhaps be added here that this invisible work is for a general public that cannot be assumed to share the demographic profile of those who ‘usually’ attend arts events – if such persons exist.)

I suggested that few applications for funding this sort of social access work were arriving at the office because grass roots storytelling is now a proven and reasonably cost effective activity meaning that ‘frontline’ community and educational organisations can generally afford to hire artists directly without going through bureaucratic processes to secure subsidy. In other words, just because grant applications weren’t arriving on the desk, didn’t mean such work wasn’t being done... I was challenged to prove it.

My initial reaction was that a survey would be better received coming from an impartial organisation such as the Arts Council or the Society for Storytelling, but no one wanted to take it up.

Early the next year, a second funding administrator challenged me to prove that my assertions about the scale of storytelling activity in England were not ‘merely anecdotal,’ so I renewed my approaches to other organisations to make a survey – again with no success.

Then, in April 2003, the Arts Council suddenly revealed that it had abolished its expert advisory panels – leaving no forum for advocacy on behalf of any cause. Many of my colleagues in this and in other arts disciplines found this extremely disconcerting. It seemed individual ‘officers’ had been handed what amounted to *subjective discretionary powers* to distribute taxpayers funding far beyond the remits of the posts for which they had originally been appointed. Such an increase in their powers must raise doubts as to whether they have sufficiently diverse ‘field qualifications’ to allow them to exercise these powers authoritatively, with expertise and responsibly. There must be transparency in decision-making when tax payer’s funds are being distributed – because anyone receiving so much as a penny of such funding is obliged to view themselves as a public servant. It’s healthy to step back sometimes and ask, who is setting the cultural agenda – on whose behalf and for whose benefit? The Arts Council is entrusted to disburse the nation’s wealth so that the nation can gain access to the work of excellent artists. There is a triad here. Surely *artists* should have some way of letting their experience of the ‘sharp end’ inform the decision making of arts administrators?

As the year progressed my colleagues and I watched, with increasing alarm, signs that a lack of knowledge about storytelling was leading to questionable funding decisions. Not only was the lack of a consistent measure for the assessment of the relative merits of work being exposed, but also the lack of a consistent *national* strategy (all this despite there being a salaried Literature Officer at the Arts Council with a dedicated national responsibility for storytelling). Was Arts Council policy itself being guided by false assumption, prejudice and, dare I return the charge, anecdotal evidence?

At what level, by whom and on what knowledge base, were priorities being set?

In August 2003, I decided that it was necessary to pick up the gauntlet and begin amassing some hard facts and figures to furnish all involved with storytelling with evidence to use in their advocacy.

Reflections Emerging from the Process of Undertaking this Survey

The following figures will prove that a great deal of storytelling is already taking place without the benefit of state funding – in fact, very much more than I expected – but this doesn't mean there's no case for subsidising storytelling; far from it. The findings of this survey demonstrate that storytelling in England and Wales is now ripe for imaginative and generous injections of tax payer's and lottery player's funding to bring it to visibility. The questions are: where should subsidy be targeted and how? How can audiences be nurtured and developed? How can the already substantial productivity of storytellers be enhanced? How can their working conditions be improved? How can they receive better financial reward and greater acknowledgement for their labours? How can the standards of that work be refined towards ever-increasing quality? How can 'new blood' be attracted?

Almost *all* current storytelling activity can be viewed as typical *outreach work* – except that it is undertaken on behalf of phantom centres and virtual organisations: there are no permanent, accessible premises to send '*those-who-have-been-reached*' to for more. There are venue-shaped holes at the heart of the storytelling revival. It is almost impossible for adult and family members of the public to locate regular events of consistent quality anywhere and therefore opportunities for long-term audience development are constantly lost. There is no rhythm to the patterns of public access to performance. Rhythm can only be built on a solid foundation. Storytelling lacks even a modicum of stable and basic infrastructure.

Former culture secretary, Chris Smith's inspiring DCMS paper, 'Culture and Creativity: The Next Ten Years'³, proposed a revolution in Arts funding policy; most significantly it acknowledged that the relationship between government and artists should be based on '*trust and freedom ...*' Surely it then follows that decisions to target funds should be arrived at through direct dialogue with artists and should be lead by the developmental needs of the art form and its practitioners – that is, through genuine trusting partnerships with artists on the actual frontline, rather than by accountants and management consultants dreaming up models based on... well, what? If it's research, where is that research? If funding is to be developmental, what studies have been made to show where development is really needed?

In the course of collecting this data it has become apparent that no comparable surveys seem to have been undertaken in England and Wales – ever. For example storytellers' nearest 'live literature' cousins are performance poets. Despite having an extremely well developed national network of revenue funded organisations with

³ published by the DCMS in 2001

salaried workers (promoting agencies, literature development workers associations and the like – not to mention the benefits accruing from the full marketing and PR resources of publishing companies, plus a commercial presence in bookshops and a well advocated place in the circuit of funded literature festivals) no comprehensive audit has yet been made on their work and impact. How does the productivity of storytelling compare? How is this reflected in relative support?

Half a year after deciding to begin this voluntary research into the levels of professional storytelling activity in England and Wales, the results are being put in the public domain for use by anyone in whatever way they wish.

A Note on the Presentation of these Findings

These figures indicate the presence of many interesting stories but cannot necessarily speak for themselves. They need a voice to tease out the tales they can tell.

I am evidently not impartial, and would thank one of my critics for cautioning me that a research and development study in Ireland was declared invalid because of the over-involvement of someone too closely associated with the project being examined – however, in this case, there is no project behind this other than to set precedents for the establishment of the principal that factual evidence should be used as an aid to policy making. In any case one could argue that this survey benefits from a certain type of expert authority derived from following the time-honoured advice of setting ‘a thief to catch a thief...’

I have been directly involved with the telling of traditional tales every day for twenty-three years. During this time I have witnessed the number of storytellers on the Island *who receive financial reward for their work* rise from a dozen at most, to possibly more than 350. (Unfortunately no one has yet had the resources to compile a comprehensive list). Having been invited to participate in 42 festivals and numerous conferences in 17 countries overseas, I have witnessed many different ways of approaching matters. I’ve probably seen more professional storytellers at work than anyone else in Britain. This has given me the qualification of experience. There are anomalies to spot and salient questions to ask of this data that a more innocent observer might miss – these results are therefore offered with observations and, for good or ill, the gloss of my own commentary.

In order to give the findings context, the commentary has also had to tell something of the history of this revival. Again being aware that my subjectivity may trigger reservations, I’ve tried, wherever possible, to make it clear when a conclusion drawn from the evidence is clearly my own – and where perhaps the same evidence might lead others to extract different interpretations. It should not be too difficult to separate the facts from the commentary and draw whatever conclusions are necessary.

(If occasional fiery notes of criticism are detected, please note that such flares of anger are born from an artist's love of an art form, and from respect for the efforts of his peers and loyal audiences everywhere to bring it back into being.)

Clarifying the Subject of this Survey

It is essential to make one point about the subject of this survey very clear at the outset.

Broadly speaking, in all post-hunter-gatherer cultures, two distinct storytelling traditions have always existed side by side: parallel yet mutually supportive. The first has become known as the 'fireside' tradition and the second, the 'professional' tradition. The fireside tradition refers to the unpaid, informal social telling of tales in the home, in the pub, as a hobby and to shorten the road. This tradition is 'amateur' in the original, non-judgemental sense of the word – i.e. it is done with an enthusiasm born of love. It could also be called the folk tradition.

In Europe the professional tradition once had formal titles associated with it, such as Bard, Scop, Skald, Trouvere, Minnesinger, etc. To this day, beyond the borders of Europe (and outside of the Eurocentric 'box'), terms such as Ashik, Akyn and Griot come into play. This tradition refers to the telling of tales in formal contexts, by (trained) professional artists: entertainers and orators, who receive financial remuneration for their expertise, repertoire and the conscious skill of their craft.

Both traditions survive with uninterrupted lines of transmission in other parts of the world, but only the fireside tradition survives unbroken in Britain: most strongly in Scotland. Both traditions can seemingly share something of the same repertoire and both can certainly produce excellent and powerful storytellers – but just as there are similarities there are, equally importantly (and profoundly), different aims and ambitions involved. Much misunderstanding and energy-consuming muddle in discussions about contemporary storytelling in Britain can be avoided if real care is taken to make sure that 'like-with-like' comparisons are being made. When talking about the revival of storytelling in England and Wales one must be clear that there is a neo-fireside, folk or amateur tradition and there is a neo-professional tradition. In between lie a number of semi-professionals whose ambitions and aspirations need to be made very clear otherwise they can cause confusion – much as 'cowboys' do in the building trade: they may be able to do some things fairly competently... but may not have the experience to do others – and they might sometimes make things worse.

The storytelling revival that this survey refers to is clearly the revival, rediscovery and re-invention of the professional tradition – as an economically viable, *contemporary performing art*, undertaken by creative artists consciously evolving new forms that are able to thrive in contemporary contexts through the identification and creation of contemporary markets. These include one within the publicly subsidised arts sector.



Part Two – Findings

Introducing the Storytellers: their Geography, Repertoire and Economy, relating to a typical year's Professional Storytelling Work

Year Covered by Data

Respondents were asked to provide data taken from one 'typical' twelve-month period during the last three years. A little leeway in the year of choice was allowed to account for atypical disruptions caused by life events such as sickness, bereavement and divorce. 34 respondents gave figures for years starting at various months in 2002 (6 of these began before April 2002 – the rest would fall into the financial year 2002/2003); 1 gave figures for 9 months of 2003; 2 gave figures for 2001; 1 gave figures for 2000.

Number of Respondents

As of 31st October 2003, there were 38 forms returned from at least 100 surveys disseminated by e-mail. Recipients were invited to forward the e-mail to others who might have been missed from the initial lists which was compiled by asking colleagues for names of storytellers known to be 'online.' Details of how to obtain a survey form were announced on Cybermouth (the web discussion group of the storytellers' anarchist non-organisation 'The Mouth') and via the Society for Storytelling member's e-newsletter. These produced additional enquiries.

One team of two storytellers completed one shared survey, which accounts for occasional numerical anomalies – i.e. reference to 39 respondents.

Comment

I'm advised by professional statisticians that a response of 38% is above average for such an exercise and can therefore be considered successful: it seems probable that the respondents do represent a fair and true cross-section of storytelling artists working in England and Wales.

Exaggeration would serve nobody's purpose and the broad consistency of the figures suggests there has been none.

Apologies received for non-participation in the survey range from simply being 'too busy' and 'not having enough time' – autumn is usually the most hectic season of the storyteller's year – to being spoken word artists who are 'by nature phobic about pens, paper, form filling and maths'. Some storytellers began to complete forms but didn't finish. A number of storytellers are dyslexics. Unfortunately the resources were not available to provide the forms in a manner accessible to the visually impaired. (I know of at least 5 storytellers who are either blind or have severely restricted sight).

Two people directly voiced antipathy towards the undertaking and some of their concerns will be addressed in the body text and in the conclusions.

It should be added that others might have been disinclined to participate for personal reasons because I'm both a performing artist and a promoter. This means I'm not viewed dispassionately. The selection/endorsement processes involved in programming festivals and Crick Crack Club events obliges my colleagues and I to make critical evaluations of artistic standards – as a consequence there may be some who begrudge their being 'passed over'. It shouldn't be necessary to point out that talent spotting and auditioning are inherent and accepted aspects of the mature performing arts. Without doubt, it would have been preferable that this survey had originated within a neutral and objective organisation such as the Arts Council itself and indeed, as previously stated, the aim of the survey is to catalyse the commissioning of a formal survey.

Anonymity

Two respondents submitted forms anonymously. Thirty-seven gave their names.

To safeguard confidentiality, all identifying names were separated from the forms on receipt and each form was assigned a number. The forms were examined together once it became clear there would be no more arrivals. The completed forms have been lodged in the Society for Storytelling archive.

Comment

One person expressed anxiety that I would only be surveying 'cronies' – all that can be said in response, is that every effort was made to ensure that the survey was distributed as widely as possible given the limits of my resources. It's therefore important to disclose that having studied the list of the 37 people who did provide their names, 12 were submitted by people whose work I have never seen; 20 were from people whose work I have witnessed in the course of my professional life (7 of whom I have occasionally given work to); 4 were submitted by close colleagues from the Crick Crack Club – and I, too, completed a survey. To summarise, I have not had any financial involvement with 25 out of 37 of the respondents. The identities of the other two remain unknown.

Gender of Respondents

Of the 39 respondents, 21 were Male and 18 were female.

Comment

This seems to tally with a general impression that there are slightly more men than women in the profession.

It was beyond the brief of this survey to enquire about partner preferences – but as with most human activities, storytelling attracts a diversity of participants.

Age of Respondents

The survey did not ask respondents to provide this information, though perhaps a future survey should.

Comment

Like the playing of musical instruments, storytelling is an art offering the possibility of a lifelong opportunity to work: it can be practiced until coherency fails. This work can start young: the phenomenon of the 11-year-old storyteller is a well-attested fact in many traditional cultures. Dozens of educational projects on this island have demonstrated the capability of young people to develop a repertoire that can be delivered with attention-holding flair, witty insight and linguistic skill. It is also an art form that really does provide a special platform for elders, thriving on their due veneration.

Self-assessed Ethnicity of Respondents

The respondents were invited to describe their ethnicity in their own terms:

3 described themselves as White.

1 as Caucasian.

3 as White English

3 as English

10 as White British

10 as British

1 as Scottish

1 as European

1 as Caribbean/European

1 as British Armenian

1 as European Jewish British

2 as 'Total Mongrels'

1 as Mixed

1 as Human.

Comment

I know of at least 13 professional storytellers of African or Afro-Caribbean descent and 5 Asian storytellers working in England, there are certainly many more. I did not have functioning e-mail addresses for all of them and most of those that were contacted were too busy to reply – it was leading up to Black History Month. A well-resourced, independent survey ought to be able to gather a comprehensive list of known professional storytellers and simultaneously determine accurate information about cultural diversity within a profession that is profoundly multi-cultural in its outlook (yet which also has to engage with the paradoxes surrounding pluralism).

The findings of this survey demonstrate that the economic bedrock of storytelling lies with work in the state education sector. My experiences as a promoter suggest that storytellers working in multi-cultural education, who can claim any non-Caucasian or non-European ancestry, are able to command a premium.

Regional Distribution of Respondents

The respondents were asked to give the city or shire in which they were based.

There were 4 respondents based in Wales:

2 in Powys

1 in Monmouthshire

1 in Cardiff

The remaining 35 are based in England, and are here grouped according to the nine new Arts Council regional divisions:

AC North East

1 in Newcastle

1 in Tyne and Wear

1 in Northumberland

AC North West

1 in Manchester

AC West Midlands

2 in Shropshire

1 in Birmingham

AC East Midlands

2 in Derbyshire

AC South West

3 in Devon

1 in Gloucestershire

1 in Bristol

1 in Somerset

1 in Cornwall

AC South East

1 in Oxford

1 in Berkshire

1 in Southampton

2 in Brighton

1 in East Sussex

AC London

10 in London

AC East

2 in Norfolk
1 in Cambridgeshire

No one returned a form from the Yorkshire Arts region.

It was beyond the scope of this survey to make a detailed examination of travel patterns.

Comment

These figures are probably the best indicator that this survey is representative. That the highest concentration of professional storytellers is in London is undoubted – I could list 33 immediately; that the second highest concentration seems to be in the South West also accords with the history of the spread of this revival. It would be reasonable to multiply the figures by a cautious factor of 3 to get an estimate of the minimum number of professional storytellers working in each region. However the urgent need for an accurate and comprehensive list becomes apparent, as approximations on this question are clearly not good enough: I can list 6 storytellers based in the Arts Council's Yorkshire region!

Regional Literature Officers should, at the very least, make sure they are aware of who the professional and semi-professional storytellers in their region are – and if possible the level of their local, national and international standing. Otherwise how are they to know who they are giving grants to? (See the comments on standards in professional storytelling on page 75 below.)

A pertinent Swedish saying identifies two types of storytellers, 'farmers and sailors...' Professional storytelling is for the most part inherently peripatetic. Journeying and the gathering and conveying of new material from one place to another are a creative dynamo for the professionals of this art. Minstrels have always wandered. They still do.

The implications of inherent peripateticism are something that a region based funding system needs to find the flexibility to understand and accommodate. It needs to bring a fluid and creative collective mind to addressing the vexed question of regional based organisations whose objectives include nationwide service. Writers don't have to travel (their work can be appreciated in absentia) – but storytellers do.

A future survey might also collect data about the relative geographical spread of public and non-public work, i.e how often do contemporary storytellers travel, how far and for what sort of work? One of my rural based colleagues, with a national profile, averages 40,000 miles of driving per year. (It must be admitted that such touring mileages militate against the 'green' credentials of storytelling, though most storytellers make every effort to use public transport if it is available.) The general impression is that educational and community work is largely confined to a region

relatively 'close to home', public work is more likely to involve touring and overnight stops.

When considering the intense mobility of this art, interesting questions concerning age, ethnicity and gender emerge, viz: Are male storytellers more likely to welcome touring than females? Are the youthful more likely to welcome touring than those more advanced in years? Are storytellers with ethnic minority backgrounds at ease when working in rural areas? What is the divorce rate amongst storytellers? What are the 'whys' behind the responses to these questions? How can touring be made less stressful? The answers to these questions might carry funding implications.

Experience of Respondents

10 had between one and five years of professional experience.

11 had between six and ten years.

10 had between eleven and fifteen years.

5 had between sixteen and twenty years.

3 had over twenty-one years experience.

Comment

By surviving in the market place for more than 6 years, nearly three quarters of the respondents (29) have made what they must consider a viable career for themselves. This is a sign of the maturity of this revival.

Financial Relationship with Storytelling

Self-definition

Based on a simple financial definition of professionalism, as evidenced by their earnings, 32 respondents described themselves as being a professional storyteller (registered self-employed) with 70% - 100% of their earned income primarily derived from storytelling or work directly related to storytelling such as training, consultancy, collaboration or events organising

6 respondents described themselves as being semi-professional storytellers with 15% – 69% of their earned income derived from occasional storytelling or directly related work. In Scotland they would be termed 'part-time storytellers'.

Note: 1 respondent described his/herself as a non-professional storyteller with 0%-14% of income earned through honoraria... that same respondent used storytelling as an aid to a primary profession – such as being a teacher, librarian, countryside ranger etc. As this person only did 6 engagements in the year (reaching a total of 130 persons), I have not factored that work into the computations referring to the work of *professional* storytellers.

Comment

Conversations with the Scottish Storytelling Centre in Edinburgh, (which is currently undertaking £3.4m worth of refurbishment for its premises, subsidised mainly by the Scottish Arts Council), suggest that there may only be 3 or 4 storytellers who would fit into a similarly defined full time professional category, however a further 90 fall into their 'part-time' professional category. (They have never gathered specific information relating to earnings). In addition they estimate a further 700 – 900 storytellers fall into their 'community storyteller' category – people such as teachers, librarians, social workers, therapists and rangers who incorporate storytelling in their daily work. The Scottish centre offers them a forum for networking and information sharing. Were that ratio to apply to storytelling in England and Wales – which well it might – then, given the sample figures above, the 'cascading' flow of storytelling into the cultural life of diverse communities is not a trickle, it's an exponential flood and truly remarkable. 'Word of mouth' is still widely recognised as a most compelling means of communication.

It would be extremely interesting – but perhaps impossible – to ascertain how much of this type of community storytelling can be traced back to contact with professional or part-time storytellers. In my experience the majority of one off introductory workshops that are undertaken aim to enhance the skills of precisely these sorts of professional and voluntary groups.

Professional Earnings Derived from Storytelling

- 11 earned up to £5,000 per year.
- 8 earned between £5,000 and £10,000 per year.
- 9 earned between £10,000 and £15,000 per year.
- 7 earned between £15,000 and £20,000 per year.
- 1 earned between £20,000 and £25,000 per year.
- 2 earned between £25,000 and £30,000 per year.
- Nobody earned more than £30,000
- 2 people chose not to disclose their financial information.

Note: several people pointed out that their earnings only just fell into the next higher band – suggesting that divisions of £2,500 would have given a more accurate picture.

Comment

Totalling the mid ranges of these earnings together, we could cautiously calculate that the average income of a typical storyteller is £10,337 per annum (£382,500 divided by 37). This is a subsistence wage. Only 10 of those who disclosed their incomes are earning anything approaching a modest living wage (over £15,000 p/a). This makes the productivity reported below all the more impressive. However, given the scale of engagements revealed by this survey, this also implies that many storytellers must be undertaking work at reduced rates – therefore self-exploiting.

Several respondents commented that they would not be able to remain in this profession without either having a partner who also worked, or inherited property, or some form of savings, pension or private income to fall back on.

It is important to point out that the survey suggests that those who are doing the most work and earning the most money are not necessarily those with particularly high profiles within the storytelling world let alone the public arena. The highest incomes are the result of intensive educational work.

Overseas Earnings

7 storytellers reported income from work overseas:

1 said it amounted to approximately 2% of their annual income from storytelling and storytelling related activity.

4 said it amounted to 5%

1 said it amounted to 10%

1 said it amounted to 15%

1 said it amounted to 30%

Observations

A number of storytellers based in Britain are fairly frequently invited to work abroad, particularly in Northern Europe where there is a well-established circuit of festivals and training contexts. This is largely due to the fact that English has become Europe's *lingua franca* (!) and English-speaking storytellers therefore gain an advantage over their non-English-speaking peers. However it is fair to say that British storytellers give good value for money and have a reputation for delivering energetic, intelligent and lively performances.

Composition of the Respondents' Repertoire

The storytellers were asked to estimate rough percentages for the various categories of story that comprised their working repertoire.

They were asked to assign approximate percentages to seven categories:

*1. Their own adaptations of Traditional Tales
(I.e. any narratives drawn from the whole spectrum, from whispers and rumours of conspiracy to Jokes, Urban Legends, Fables, Folk Tales, Fairytales, Epics, Myths etc.*

2. Original Tales

3. Adaptations of Literary Tales (written by others)

4. *Autobiographical Reminiscences & Family Stories*

5. *Biographies*

6. *History*

7. *'Others (please specify)'*

The responses are as follows:

Traditional Tales (T Ts)

6 persons told 100% T Ts
 5 persons told 96 – 99% T Ts
 5 persons told 91 – 95% T Ts
 3 persons told 86 - 90% T Ts
 3 persons told 81 - 85% T Ts
 3 persons told 76 - 80% T Ts
 4 persons told 71 - 75% T Ts
 3 persons told 66 - 70 % T Ts
 1 person told 61 - 65% T Ts
 1 person told 56 - 60% T Ts
 *
 1 person told 46 - 50% T Ts
 1 person told 36 - 40% T Ts
 1 person told 16 - 20% T Ts
 1 person told no traditional tales

Original Tales (i.e. entirely self composed stories)

1 person told 71 – 75% OTs
 1 person told 46 – 50% OTs
 2 persons told 16-20% OTs
 1 person told 11-15% OTs
 4 persons told 6-10% OTs
 13 persons told 1- 5% OTs
 16 persons told no original tales

Adaptations of Literary Tales (i.e. those composed by known authors but given new language)

1 person told 16-20% LTs
 1 person told 11 – 15% LTs

4 persons told 6 – 10 % LTs
 12 persons told 1-5% LTs
 20 persons told no literary tales.

History (accounts of historical events)

2 persons told 21 – 25% Histories
 3 person told 16-20% Histories
 1 persons told 6 – 10 % Histories
 9 persons told 1-5% Histories
 23 persons told no Histories

Autobiographical Reminiscences & Family Stories

2 persons told 16-20% AR&F's
 2 person told 11 – 15% AR&F's
 2 persons told 6 – 10 % AR&F's
 9 persons told 1-5% AR&F's
 23 persons told no autobiographical tales or family reminiscences.

Biographies (Accounts of the lives of historical and living people)

1 persons told 6 – 10 % Bio's
 5 persons told 1-5% Bio's
 32 persons told no Biographies.

Other (please specify)

One person gave a percentage for 'true' ghost stories – after consideration this was added to their history percentage; another person mentioned animal, plant and tree lore – all of which were assigned to 'traditional tales'. One other was writing a play – this was assigned to 'original tales'.

Observations

It was beyond the remit of this survey to ascertain the size of repertoires – but it is important to emphasise that one of the clearest differences between actors and storytellers lies in the question of repertoire. Professional storytellers are walking libraries: they can carry in mind anything from half a dozen oral narratives to *500 tales and more* – a lifetime's work. Some storytellers' repertoires include epics that last at least 2hours.

The survey did not ask what percentage of the repertoire of traditional tales was received through direct oral transmission from other oral tellers and what percentage

was ‘liberated from the suspended animation of the printed page’ in the great works of such collectors and storytellers as Calvino, Abrahams, Somadeva, Homer, Hesiod, Curtin, Mallory, the brothers Grimm, etc. and above all the work of the countless thousands known simply as ‘Anon’ and ‘Trad’. (This would be a significant question for a future survey.)

Comment

Given that the major part of 90% of the respondents’ repertoire consists of traditional tales, it would be interesting for a future survey to try to break down the distribution of sub-categories within this preferred category, i.e. how many artists are working with how broad a spectrum of sub-genres of traditional narrative and what is the centre of gravity of their spectrum? For some it may be a balanced mix – for others preferences might emerge for non-magical tales of the folk, or wonder tales, or sacred mythology, or heroic epic, etc. It would also be interesting to know about the cultural specificity of these repertoires. This information might harbour important ‘content’ implications about what repertoire is being used in which contexts.

The fact that this island’s storytellers have cracked the secret of finding the possibility for so much contemporary creative (‘self’) expression through work with traditional narratives, gives the British storytelling renaissance a distinguishing strength and flavour. It is an acknowledged area of expertise that also puts storytellers from these islands in demand overseas.

Personal Beliefs of the Storytellers

It was beyond the brief of this survey to enquire about the moral, ethical, political and spiritual beliefs of the respondents.

Comment

All artists cannot but express or reveal their moral, ethical, political and spiritual beliefs through their work. Storytelling is such a content rich medium that this question must be of crucial importance for anyone wishing to understand the phenomenon of this revival and its appeal to audiences.

My impression, based on the joking and banter that surrounds performance, is that many of the storytellers working in England and Wales probably hold left of centre political views and many of them are overtly concerned with ‘Green’ issues. A belief in experience of the numinous is also implicit in many of these artists’ work. Few seem to adhere to any particular religious tradition, but many seem willing to tell stories reflecting diverse cosmologies and metaphysical concepts with great respect – bringing new ideas and concepts to audiences. This might provide a particularly rich field of exploration for a future academic survey, as there is a direct relationship between what the storytellers choose to tell and what the audiences come to hear. Different storytellers attract different audiences. Such preferences in turn clearly shape the distinctiveness of different events and festivals.

Part Three – General Survey Data

This survey arose from a need to ascertain how much ‘invisible’ – i.e. non publicly accessible storytelling work, and how much ‘visible’ - i.e. publicly accessible work is being carried out annually in England and Wales. It became clear that it should also find out information on the balance between urban and rural work.

The questionnaire was divided into three parts. The first sought information about work in education and work with young people in libraries; the second asked about community work with targeted groups and the third about work to which the general public have access.

The information was provided by 38 performing artists – of whom 6 also work regularly in Wales [the data for Wales is presented enclosed in square brackets].

The survey reveals the following general information about one year’s productivity:

Educational and Libraries Work

Data

In England, 37 artists undertook 1,713 days worth of engagements in schools and with the education departments of various museums and library services reaching 207,877 children and young people. [In addition 6 of those people undertook 320 events reaching a further 31,840 children and young people in Wales.]

Tallying the England and Wales figures, we have 37 artists reaching 239,717 children and young people in one year, through 2,033 engagements.

An average of 117 under 18’s are being reached per event/engagement. This means the average professional storyteller is doing 55 schools/library events per year. (It is worth noting that while the largest amount of such work reported was 272 engagements in a year, 4 storytellers did less than 10 events each.)

Observations

For the most part, an engagement or ‘event’ counts for a full day’s storytelling.

It seems reasonable to state that most storytellers working in education generally average 4 sessions a day in primary schools and 3 per day in secondary schools with ideally one class at a time (35 students) but, more often than not, two classes at a time (70 students). A future survey could verify this and provide more detailed information about the range of working practice.

This survey therefore assumes that each ‘day’ probably consisted of between 2 and 4, hour-long storytelling sessions with different groups – but it was beyond the remit of

this survey to break down the statistics into how many individual sessions and to what size groups this work represents. The above figures may therefore include performances to groups that range from one class at a time to half or whole school events. It also includes skills development workshops for very small groups of targeted children.

In order to get a rough sense of how many 50 minute -1hour storytelling sessions the above data represents, we could reasonably multiply the total by an average of 3 sessions per event. This gives 6,099 separate performances, which in turn is the equivalent of 253 days of 24-hour non-stop storytelling shared between 37 persons.

It is important to point out that each session may well have involved solo performance intensity equivalent to the delivery of an hour-long soliloquy. There are very few storytellers who can do more than three days a week of this kind of work without it seriously affecting their health.

It is also important to re-iterate that as storytelling is an immediate *live art* with no material product, it cannot be experienced without the extremely important initial ‘one off’ visit. A blanket change in literature funding policies in the early 1990’s diverted support away from ‘one off’ visits towards residencies and, failing to take this into account, penalised storytellers just as Local Management of Schools (LMS) was introduced. (See the comments on the threats to the Writers in Schools Scheme in Wales on page 37 below.)

Targeted Community Work

Data

34 storytellers worked in targeted community contexts such as: with the elderly in care centres; in youth clubs; in offenders institutions; in hospices; with adult special needs groups; with groups defined by ethnicity, etc.

These events/projects ranged from performances to skills development workshops and residencies. Residencies are counted as single engagements: a more detailed survey could look at the ratio between residencies and one off visits.

34 storytellers undertook 525 engagements that reached 14,496 persons in England. [3 of them also undertook a total of 17 engagements in Wales, reaching 609 persons.]

Tallying the England and Wales figures, we have 34 artists reaching 15,105 people in one year, through 542 engagements. This means that an average of 28 people are being reached per community event/engagement. This in turn suggests that most of this work is with precisely targeted groups and is developmental in nature – either skills sharing and workshopping or facilitating narrative exchanges.

Observations

The figures imply that the average professional storyteller is doing 16 community events per year. However it should be noted that, atypically, one person contracted by a charity to focus on this sort of work did 134 of these engagements in a year, (106 of which were with the elderly). Adjusting the figures accordingly, the average number of community events comes down to 12 per storyteller per year. 5 respondents did none of this type of work.

Publicly Accessible Work

Data

37 storytellers did 1,253 publicly accessible events in England reaching an estimated 76,305 adults and children, [in addition 6 of these storytellers did 102 public events in Wales reaching 7,856 people.] This work ranged from work in arts centres, museums, heritage and environmental centres, to literature festivals and general arts festivals, as well as appearances in dedicated storytelling festivals and clubs.

Tallying the England and Wales figures we have 36 artists reaching 84,161 people in one year, through 1,355 engagements. This means that an average of 62 people are being reached per public event – which is very much in line with audiences for other live literature events. It means that the average professional storyteller is doing 37 public events per year. However, it should be noted that the majority of these are for children or families and are often masked by being sub-events buried in a general arts programme, festival or ‘fun day’. At many such events the artist’s name is not announced in the publicity, and the status of storytelling is presented as being on a par with Tombola.

Invisible/Visible Storytelling

Data

Combining data on the educational and community work shows that 2,575 events occurred that were not publicly accessible – reaching 254,822 persons. 1,355 public events occurred reaching 84,161.

Observations

52% of all the storytelling is educational and 14% is in targeted community contexts. This suggests that 66% (2/3rds) of storytelling engagements in England and Wales are not publicly accessible, unpublicised and therefore invisible.

34% of the events are publicly accessible – *however the survey data reveals that only a small fraction of these events were marketed in a way that actually makes the storytellers visible to the general public in advance.*

Productivity Totals and Extrapolated Figures

Data

Combining the above figures gives the following hard facts about productivity.

In one year the work of 37 artists in England and Wales reached 338,983 people through 3,930 engagements.

Observations

One has to be careful when extrapolating figures, but the above could mean that the average storyteller undertakes an average of 106 engagements per year that reach an average audience of 9,161 people – that is 86 persons per event (larger schools audiences balance other smaller audiences) and earns an average £10,337 per annum.

If all 100 of the storytellers in England and Wales known to have been contacted by email for this survey had replied we could reasonably use the above averages to further calculate that, between the two countries, there are in the region of 10,600 storytelling events per year reaching 911,600 people from a very comprehensive diversity of community sectors... It could also be reasonably estimated that the minimum earnings economy suggested by this survey is over a million pounds (£1,033,700.)

These are very cautious estimates. An accurate, comprehensive and up to date list of professional and semi-professional storytellers working in England and Wales does not exist but conservative guesses put the figure at about 220 artists. The Scottish Storytelling Centre reckons there are about 95 more in Scotland. About 35 work in Northern Ireland. This puts the UK total at about 350 storytellers. If that *is* the case, then we could tentatively multiply the average figures above, by 3 again, to give an idea of the possible UK national scale of this art form:

i.e. 31,800 storytelling events per annum reaching 2,734,800 people representing an economy of £3,101,100.

Comment

Although these last figures have to be surrounded by large caveats – the big question being over the exact number of professional and semi-professional storytellers – they are phenomenal enough to warrant investigation by a proper study and the formulation of an informed and funded Arts Council policy towards storytelling in all its aspects. If, say, poetry were a newly emerging art form and as many poems were being read as stories are being listened to, surely investigative steps would already be well under way? For an ‘invisible art’ form, the productivity of storytelling is highly impressive. The stories are quite literally in the air that we breathe.

At this point it should also be stated that these figures indicate an enormous achievement that needs to be acknowledged and celebrated by those genuinely concerned with the arts in Britain.

23 years ago (1981) there were, at most, only a dozen storytellers known to be working professionally on the whole island of Britain – and they were certainly not working in anything like the range of contexts revealed by this survey. It is to the credit of those early trailblazers that their combined efforts have established viable contemporary contexts and markets for the rebirth of a popular art as ancient as music and dance. They should be lauded for having recreated a profession and for having inspired so many others to follow them into it. They should also be lauded, by those who don't hesitate to value traditional narrative, for allowing audiences to once more encounter folk tales, fairy tales, epics and myths in something approaching the medium for which they were originally conceived. The pioneers should also be lauded for making a psychic food available that cannot readily be found elsewhere*.

* (The publishing of traditional tales in Britain is now more or less entirely confined to the children's 'gift book' phenomenon and thus subject to US market dictated censorship and impotent illustration. They are no longer the stock of primary reading schemes – and television, with notable exceptions, seldom serves the stories well.)

Part Four - Detailed Analysis

Educational Work

Introduction

Storytellers in Britain have collectively demonstrated that this ancient, primal educational tool can be applied in many areas of the curriculum and can accompany the continuum of life-long learning from infancy to all stages of adulthood.

It is relatively straightforward to make utilitarian lists of the myriad ways in which storytelling benefits contemporary education. For example, it develops:

listening and attentiveness;
visualisation and imaginative skills;
appreciation of the oral use of language;
a sense of narrative patterns and structures;
awareness of historical and global cultures;
awareness of literacy and the growth of literature;
awareness of the narrative foundation of much, if not most, art;
awareness of the need for inter-generational exchange and its rewards;
awareness of social responsibility and citizenship;
awareness of environmental responsibility;
emotional sensibility;
an opening to the fundamental questions of existence.
 In addition *storytelling helps the teaching of second languages.*

This is not the place to give a detailed explanation of how storytelling achieves all the above, however comment on one or two elements will give an idea.

Whilst this survey data was being compiled, the government (DfES) announced that renewed emphasis was to be put on the speaking and listening aspects of the curriculum, and have issued revised objectives. They've finally heard what storytellers have been saying at education conferences for years: before you can write a language you have to be able to speak it. The ability to articulate a language orally and with confidence depends on having well developed synaptic links that can speedily translate thought, memories and imagination into words... This is best exercised through the imperative of needing to communicate through the physicality of vocalised 'talk' – and moreover 'talk' that is, initially, firmly grounded in mother tongue vernacular. This is not the place to open the debate about the crisis in the decline of 'talk' in the home, but it is sufficient to remind readers that teachers and storytellers are working in that context. (There is now a mass of hard evidence that: excessive television watching, particularly in the crucial early years stage, profoundly hinders language development; that collective family meals and thus table-talk have been abandoned; that the bedtime story is disappearing, etc.)

One of the greatest achievements of storytellers working in England and Wales was to contribute their powers of inventiveness to the National Oracy Project (Schools Curriculum Development Council 1987 – 1992). British storytellers devised dozens of ingenious and practical models for group speaking and listening projects that demonstrated the capability of young people to develop repertoires of stories that can be delivered with attention-holding flair, witty insight and linguistic skill. These are now in worldwide use thanks to the miraculous process of ‘tradition’ – something that could be simply defined in modern terms as ‘the active transmission of knowledge through exemplary modelling’.

Storytellers have also done remarkable work with students who have reading and writing difficulties. Orality provides a structured framework for them to experience themselves as beings capable of sustaining narrative expression. This vital human experience is something from which they are excluded by a purely paper based curriculum.

Storytelling introduces children to their own imagination. Polysensual worlds are summoned within the individuals as their subjective imaginations combine memories of place, person, film and representative illustration into unique and extra-ordinary visions. The un-illustrated printed word also does this, but not in the same way: an oral story has no material form so an extra demand is made on memory because pages can neither be turned back (nor tape re-wound). Extra effort is necessary in the listening and this extra activity summons an enhanced attentiveness that gives the narrative a chance for profound penetration. Sometimes one finds that a child in an audience, even as old as thirteen, is responding in such a way that one knows they have never before caught their imagination in the act of surpassing the mundane.

Over the years storytellers have also pioneered many combined arts projects with other artists in schools. They have used narrative and the mythic image as a starting point for collaborations with potters, textile artists, puppeteers, illustrators, sculptors, dancers, etc.

The dispersed documentation on 20 years and more of inspiring work needs to be traced and housed under one roof.

Educational Data

The survey sought to find out how much work was being done in rural, suburban and inner city contexts. ‘Suburban’ includes small towns as well as the suburbs of large conurbations. The expression ‘inner city’ was understood as being used euphemistically to denote schools either with students from a high diversity of ethnic backgrounds or those that were in areas of economic deprivation. It should be remembered that most rural schools in the state sector are attended by pupils from low-income families. The survey also sought to establish what part the private sector played in the storytellers’ economy, (only 7% of children in Britain are privately educated, the state is responsible for the remaining 93%).

The survey looked at the scale of educational outreach work carried out on behalf of institutions such as environmental centres, theatres and museums.

The survey also looked at teacher and librarian training.

Data

Working with information provided by 37 performing artists – of whom 6 also work regularly in Wales – the following productivity information about one year's educational work in schools, museums and libraries is revealed:

(Please bear in mind that each 'event' may have consisted of *at least* three x 1-hour sessions.)

Primary School Work

Rural areas

26 storytellers did 212 events in English rural areas reaching 30,761 young people
 [5 storytellers did 56 events in Welsh rural areas reaching 8,690 young people]
 England and Wales Total: 268 events reaching 39,451 persons.

Suburban areas

26 storytellers did 292 events in English suburban areas reaching 53,229 young people
 [3 storytellers did 79 events in Welsh suburban areas reaching 11,150 young people]
 England and Wales Total: 371 events reaching 64,379 persons.

Inner City areas

27 storytellers did 374 events in English inner city areas reaching 62,714 young people
 [3 storytellers did 42 events in Welsh suburban areas reaching 6,477 young people]
 England and Wales Total: 416 events reaching 69,191 persons.

Primary Totals

A total of 878 events in primary schools in England reached 146,704 primary students.

A total of 177 events in primary schools in Wales reached 26,317 primary students.

Adding these figures gives a total of 1,055 events in primary schools in England and Wales that reached 173,021 children.

Secondary School Work

One third of the respondents (12) did no secondary school work

Rural areas

6 storytellers did 14 events in English rural areas reaching 1,453 young people
 [0 storytellers did secondary school work in Welsh rural areas]
 England and Wales Total: 14 events reaching 1,453 persons.

Suburban areas

15 storytellers did 47 events in English suburban areas reaching 6,339 young people
 [3 storytellers did 5 events in Welsh suburban areas reaching 775 young people]
 England and Wales Total: 52 events reaching 7,114 persons.

Inner City areas

12 storytellers did 31 events in English inner city areas reaching 5,267 young people
 [3 storytellers did 6 events in Welsh suburban areas reaching 1,260 young people]
 England and Wales Total: 37 events reaching 6,527 persons.

Secondary Totals

A total of 92 events in secondary schools in England reached 13,059 secondary students.

A total of 11 events in secondary schools in Wales reached 2,035 secondary students.

Combining these figures gives a total of 103 events in secondary schools in England and Wales reaching 15,094 secondary students.

Observations

Only one respondent was not involved with educational work. One person did 145 inner city primary schools events. (The second busiest worker in that field did 56 events). 12 persons did no secondary school work. Well over twice as many young people in inner city schools are being reached by storytellers as are being reached in rural areas. (These figures bear out the obvious point that rural schools are smaller).

The suburban figures reveal that 20% more work is being undertaken in inner city primary schools than in the suburbs and small towns, conversely 20% more work is being undertaken in suburban secondary schools than in inner city schools.

Comment

These figures clearly demonstrate that work in secondary schools is far less common than work in the primary sector. Just under a third of the respondents (12) did no secondary work. Combined figures for England and Wales show 103 Secondary school events against 1,055 primary school events – that is under one tenth.

There are numerous reasons for this disparity – firstly the curriculum is much wider in primary schools – storytelling can support the teaching of English, History, Geography, Art, Citizenship, Religion and Philosophy and much else (exciting

projects have been done exploring storytelling to support the teaching of both Science and Numeracy). In secondary schools the use of storytelling tends to be restricted to English and Drama. The inflexibility of secondary school timetables often makes it difficult for a storyteller to work with a whole year group in one day – which then leads to the school having to pay for two days' work.

The figures also suggest a matter of preference. A dozen of these storytellers may have chosen not to work with teenagers as work with them often demands very different skills from work with younger children and certainly requires a different repertoire.

It is interesting to note that, according to this survey, storytellers are a fifth more likely to work in suburban and small town secondary schools than in inner city schools. I would suggest this might be because inner city secondary schools might be less likely to dare to engage storytellers (however I would hazard a guess that had I been able to gather statistics from more of the Afro-Caribbean storytellers, this particular statistic might be rather different). A significant number of the suburban schools listed probably represent small towns where the inner city category might not necessarily apply; that said they will almost certainly contain many children with some form of deprivation in their backgrounds.

An Observation about the Writers in Schools Scheme in Wales

The figures for primary school work in Wales reveal that, on average, more work is being done there than by their counterparts in England. Most strikingly the work in the suburban category shows an average of 26 events per storyteller in Wales against an average of 11 events in England. This almost certainly reflects the fact that the Welsh Arts Council still supports a 'Writers in Schools Scheme' that pays schools 50% of the visiting artist's fee. This Regional Arts Board (RAB) subsidy began to be abolished in England in 1992, and has now completely gone. A source of major concern is that the inclusion of storytellers on that writer's scheme in Wales is currently under threat.

Comment

Here the figures speak loudly and those involved in assembling the costly bureaucracies of Creative Partnerships might do well to consider how the earlier, simpler, non-exclusive RAB models that once subsidised arts in education worked – and which trusted teachers and artists to collaborate directly and without interference. The schools advisory services that were also abolished in 1992 with the introduction of Local Management of Schools (LMS), have been quietly reinstated by most LEAs – and, though special advisory teachers no longer have access to budgets, they can still advocate good practice, identify keen teachers and point them towards sources of funding.

Private Sector Schools

Data

[No storytellers worked in the private educational sector in Wales.]

Prep Schools

13 storytellers in England did a total of 83 events in preparatory schools reaching 5,250 young people – however one storyteller did 50 events in private nurseries reaching 1,570 infants and this distorts this figure. A more representative figure would reveal that 12 storytellers did 33 events reaching 3,680 persons.

25 storytellers in England did no work in preparatory schools.

Independent Public schools

9 storytellers worked in public schools doing a total of 13 events to a total of 1,520 persons. One of those did three events, one two and the rest one each.

The total number of events in fee-paying schools was 129 events reaching 6,770 young people.

The total number of primary and secondary events in English and Welsh state sector establishments was 1,158 reaching 188,115 young people.

Comment

90% of the work done in schools was in the state sector and 10% in the private sector. 96.5% of the young people reached were in state education, 3.5 % in the private sector – confirming the obvious fact that classes in private schools are smaller.

Special Needs Schools**Data**

16 storytellers did 36 events for 2,053 young people in special needs schools in England. [2 persons did 9 events for 410 young people in special needs schools in Wales.]

2 persons in England both did 5 events each. The rest did between 1 and 4 events.

A combined total of 45 events for 2,463 young people took place in special needs schools in England and Wales.

Observation

Experience demonstrates that storytelling is an art form that is highly appropriate for the blind and visually impaired, for many wheelchair users and for those with physical disabilities. It is perhaps of questionable appropriateness for those who find themselves living with certain forms of mental disability, as it demands the ability to sustain concentrated inner visualisation to follow the sequential flow of time.

There have also been many worthwhile projects done exploring sign language and signing with the deaf.

Many more children with disabilities and wheelchair users are now able to be included in mainstream education.

Comment

These figures reveal that relatively little storytelling is being done in special needs schools, however if any of the visually impaired artists had been able to contribute to this survey these figures might possibly have told a different tale.

The small number of special school bookings might reflect the limited marketing resources available to storytellers.

I also suspect that a cost issue may be involved as, again, the facilitating effect of the Welsh Writers in Schools scheme could be making its presence felt in these figures.

This is an area for a future survey to investigate.

Tertiary Education

Storytellers can work in many tertiary contexts with students studying, Anthropology, Classics, English Literature, Comparative Religion, Media Studies, Folklore, Drama, Illustration, Dance, History, Art Therapy, etc.

Data

15 storytellers undertook 35 events in English colleges and universities for a total of 2,739 people. [2 persons did 14 events for 397 persons in Welsh colleges and universities – 7 events each]

A combined total of 49 events, reached 3,136 people in tertiary education in England and Wales.

Teacher Training

Data

25 storytellers lead a total of 118 teacher training/INSET events reaching a total of 6,786 teachers. (This figure includes 4 presentations by a team that reached 3,030 teachers, so a more typical figure might be 114 presentations reaching 3,756 teachers, giving an average attendance of 32 teachers per session.)

[In Wales 3 people did 9 sessions reaching 112 teachers]

Comment

Since 1992 - the year that the national curriculum and LMS were introduced, and specialist advisors with access to budgets were abolished – opportunities for teacher training have declined. My peers report that they are doing far less storytelling training in teacher training colleges than before. For the last three years I have been

casually asking any NQTs (Newly Qualified Teachers) I've encountered whether the names Iona and Peter Opie mean anything to them. Invariably their response is negative – a situation that would have been unthinkable 15 years ago. This is all the more worrying given the renewed emphasis on speaking and listening at the DfES and the new emphasis on citizenship and education for sustainable development.

Further Comments on Storytelling in Education

Storytellers have played – and continue to play – such a large part in education that they have directly influenced the national education strategy. For example, the national literacy strategy was drafted by an inspector whose strong appreciation of the patterns of oral storytelling came through his work with storytellers; the speaking and listening orders for the national curriculum were drafted by the National Oracy Project team, etc.

British storytellers have such a vast experience of working in schools – doing one off visits and residencies – that they are perhaps the most experienced and resourceful group of artists working in education. It is therefore extraordinary that not a single storyteller seems to have been consulted by those responsible for establishing the £27 million per year Arts Council administrated Creative Partnerships project... This suggests a paucity of informed advocacy for storytelling within ACE.

It was beyond the scope of this survey to make detailed enquiries about combined arts projects, however it should again be pointed out that many reports of fabulous projects that have been carried out in the past are probably still sitting in filing cabinets all over this island. There is nowhere for these to be archived nor a means of disseminating their findings. This leaves a situation where wheels are often being re-invented from scratch rather than beautiful carriages being built onto pre-existing chassis. The country needs an organisation to collate and disseminate this sort of inspiring information to teachers and other artists.

The legacy of creative educational work and experimentation in Britain is envied abroad.

All the above contributes strongly to the argument that the lack of a funded support system is preventing storytelling in England and Wales from realising its full potential. There are no resources to make storytellers' contributions and achievements in education widely visible and generally known through advocacy, effective marketing and celebratory showcasing.

The Storytelling Economy within (England's) Primary and Secondary Education System

Totalling the figures for work in state primary, secondary and special schools in England alone we get the following figures:

1,006 events reaching 161,816 young people

If the average cost of each of these events, including expenses, is taken as being £225, then these statistics suggest that, *from the work of these 37 storytellers alone*, a figure of £226,350 is being channelled from the English state education budget towards arts activity.

To this can be added a further 129 events in the private sector being charged @£250 = £32,250.

Observation

To get a sense of the national scale in England of monies brought into the arts from education, we could multiply the combined figure attracted by 37 storytellers – £258,600 – by the conservative factor of 3 (i.e. representing the achievement of 111 Storytellers in England). This gives us £775,800. (Estimates of the number of storytellers in England suggest it might be two thirds of this again.)

Comment

This calculation is included to make the point that, whatever the real figures are, current Arts Council England support for storytelling in no way begins to reflect, let alone match, this level of 'partnership' funding... and this is just the sum brought in from the primary and secondary schools aspect of storytellers' work, never mind the rest. (Creative Partnerships has set a precedent for demonstrating economic equivalents in this way.)

Educational Work on Library Premises

Data

The 39 respondents were asked to provide information about work with schools arranged by either libraries or the schools library services.

16 storytellers were involved with educational work for the library services (22 were not).

4 storytellers did 7 events in rural libraries reaching 285 young people.

12 storytellers did 26 events with suburban libraries reaching 2,225 young people.

9 storytellers did 19 events in inner city libraries reaching 1,314 young people.

[3 storytellers did 4 events in Welsh suburban libraries reaching 390 young people]

In total there were 56 events reaching 4,214 young people in English and Welsh libraries.

Only 3 storytellers did any librarian training: 5 sessions for 151 people.

Comment

These figures both surprised and dismayed me. They confirm that the once vibrant schools library service was effectively devastated by the introduction of LMS in 1992.

In addition to this structural tragedy the profile of storytelling within the world of librarianship has suffered two profound setbacks in recent years. Grace Hallworth's retirement to Tobago at the end of the '90's was to lose one of the nation's most magnificent advocates for storytelling and the recent death of Eileen Colwell meant the loss of the founder of the tradition of librarian storytelling. No one seems to have picked up the eminent mantles of these tremendous women. This raises the question of whether current conditions in the library service could ever again be conducive to encouraging the emergence of world-class storytellers from within the ranks of library staff.

For more information relating to libraries see pages 52 and 61 below.

Site Specific Educational Work

Storytellers research and create interpretive and supportive educational arts programmes for a vast range of specific sites and themes. Such projects include residencies as well as one off performances. These range from supporting museum and art gallery exhibitions, to working on historical heritage sites and in environmental centres. It also includes work with the educational outreach teams of theatre companies, arts complexes, orchestras, etc.

The 'artist-as-guide' invites schoolchildren to engage with creative responses to, or interpretations of, artefacts, artworks, a production or a site through the vision of the artist... To give credit, this highly rewarding work was largely initiated by The Commonwealth Institute in the early 1980's and brought to fruition by Eric Maddern when working with English Heritage from the late '80's to the mid '90s. It has evolved into one of the most exciting aspects of a storyteller's work.

Data

NB many of these events involved multiple sessions per day.

Rural areas

12 storytellers did 53 events in English rural areas reaching 3,315 young people
[1 storyteller did 2 events in Welsh rural areas reaching 90 young people]
England and Wales Total: 55 events reaching 3,405 persons.

Suburban areas

8 storytellers did 50 events in English suburban areas reaching 2,802 young people
[3 storytellers did 23 events in Welsh suburban areas reaching 2,490 young people]
England and Wales Total: 73 events reaching 5,292 persons.]

Inner City areas

14 storytellers did 115 events in English inner city areas reaching 12,203 young people.

[No storytellers did site specific educational work in Welsh inner city areas.]

England and Wales Total: 416 events reaching 69,191 persons.

Note: 1 person did 45 of these events as part of a long-standing contract with a national museum.

Totals for Site Specific Educational Work

A total of 218 events in England reached 18,320 young people

[A total of 25 events in Wales reached 2,580 young people.]

Adding these figures gives a total of 243 site-specific educational events in England and Wales that reached 20,900 young people.

Comments

It is interesting to note the difference between these figures and those reported for work in libraries. Very often museums and libraries departments sit under one council roof, so whereas there have been cuts in the funding of library activities, there may have been increased spending in the museums/environmental centre educational access budgets.

(See also the figures for site-specific public events on page 63 below.)

Part Five - Detailed Analysis: Community Work

Storytellers are peripatetic, versatile and ingenious at finding ways in which they can work for the mutual benefit of all concerned.

At it's most straightforward all that is required for storytelling to occur is a storyteller with a repertoire, an audience and a point of focus (acoustic, as well as visual) within a space. The immediate consequence of good storytelling is the creation of a community from strangers who have shared an experience of active listening.

A storyteller can work in several ways:

- a) through the content of the stories
- b) through the process of storytelling and oral transmission
- c) through both these things.

Community work – for example in healing activities – might involve the effect on the listener of the content of the story through the experience of following emotional journeys charted by the narrative – or it might involve the storyteller empowering someone by helping them find ‘a voice’, something to say and the confidence to say it and thus, by becoming the centre of others’ attention, be listened to. Because storytelling events can operate in a language that is perceived as vernacular (as distinct from literary) direct dialogues with the audience can be readily opened – leading to conversation and discussion if desired.

Another very strong area of community work can be explored with refugees, asylum seekers and newly arrived immigrants. All cultures have folk narrative traditions – and to a degree these stories are shared. A skilful storyteller can use this very effectively to bring out points of common cultural meeting – and greeting. Marina Warner writes:

Of course there are fairy tales unique to a single place, which have not been passed on. But there are few really compelling ones that do not turn out to be wearing seven-league boots. The possibility of holding a storehouse of narrative in common could act to enhance our reciprocal relations, to communicate across spaces and barriers of national self-interest and pride. We share more than we perhaps admit or know, and have done so for a very long time⁴.

Some community work borders on art therapy. Very powerful energies can be activated by storytelling work – particularly if life journeys, rites of passage and deep metaphors are being explored. Such work demands sensitivity and responsibility and there are obviously questions to be raised about the appropriateness of inviting artists

⁴ ‘From the Beast to the Blonde: On Fairy Tales and their Tellers’, Marina Warner, Chatto & Windus

to work in certain areas for which *specialist training* may be required. This is a very important discussion for another forum.

Community Work Data

Work with the Elderly

There are many ways in which storytellers can work with the elderly. For example, they can instigate storytelling exchanges amongst groups of elders in day centres etc. They can collect yarns, ‘turns’, recitations etc. They can support reminiscence workers. They can be witnesses and listeners to those who have something to say etc. They can help ‘grandparents’ develop their intergenerational storytelling and communication skills.

Data

In England, 118 events took place directly reaching 1,686 elderly people:
 4 people did 40 events that reached 593 elderly people in rural areas;
 6 people did 54 events that reached 781 elderly people in suburban and small town areas;
 3 people did 24 events that reached 312 elderly people in inner city areas.

NB 1 person on a contract with a special charity did 106 of these events.

[In Wales, there was 1 rural event that reached 25 people; 5 events reached 80 elderly people in suburban and small town areas and no inner city events took place.]

Comment

Setting the contracted work aside, these figures appear surprisingly low: possibly reflecting the increased role the private sector plays in care for the elderly.

Being involved with continuity and transmission, storytellers are keenly aware of the plight of the elderly and of the endemic ageism that blights British society. Even those developing arts funding policies are beguiled by the market-driven media obsession with the ‘sexiness’ (and spending power) of virile youth. Must ‘new’ always be synonymous with ‘young?’

It should also be noted that the statistics relating to work with community associations on page 45, probably involve audiences largely consisting of elderly and retired people.

Health Work

Storytellers have often worked in children’s wards, but some have also been involved with extraordinary projects with the terminally ill in hospices.

Data

In England, 32 events took place directly reaching 442 sick persons:

2 people did 3 events that reached 89 sick persons in rural areas;
 4 people did 8 events that reached 87 sick persons in suburban and small town areas;
 4 people did 21 events that reached 266 sick persons in inner city areas.

[Those who completed the survey recorded no comparable work in Wales]

Comment

Here the majority of events occurred in the inner city – perhaps reflecting metropolitan funding priorities and higher population densities, but, more obviously, the closure of rural hospitals.

Youth Work

The work storytellers do with teenagers ranges from using rites of passage narratives (as the starting point for creative and socializing discussions) to helping them gain self-esteem and confidence through developing their oral communication skills (oracy).

Data

In England, 89 events took place involving 1,599 young people:
 4 people did 11 events that reached 480 young people in rural areas;
 9 people did 17 events that reached 400 young people in suburban and small town areas;
 10 people did 61 events that reached 719 young people in inner city areas.

[In Wales, 1 person did 8 events that reached 400 persons in inner city areas.]

Comment

There has been a catastrophic fall in the number of council run youth clubs since Mrs Thatcher's second term of office, so it was encouraging to discover that there was some work continuing in this rewarding field. The situation has probably been helped by after schools club initiatives and these figures might reflect a priority for inner city youth provision.

Adult Special Needs Groups

Data

In England, 40 events took place involving 1,170 people with special needs:

3 people did 8 events that reached 321 people with special needs in rural areas;
 8 people did 23 events that reached 706 people with special needs in suburban and small town areas;
 3 people did 9 events that reached 143 people with special needs in inner city areas.

[Those who completed the survey recorded no comparable work in Wales]

Work with Community Associations

Storytellers are often invited as ‘after dinner speakers’ for voluntary and charitable fundraising groups such as the W.I, Rotary Clubs, Doctors Wives Associations etc.

It should be noted that this type of engagement is often undertaken for token fees or expenses only.

Data

In England, 124 events took place involving 2,900 members of charitable associations.

11 people did 92 events that reached 1,290 people in rural areas;

11 people did 25 events that reached 1,446 people in suburban and small town areas;

4 people did 7 events that reached 164 people in inner city areas.

[Those who completed the survey recorded no comparable work in Wales]

Comment

That the bulk of this sort of work happened in rural areas, and then in the small towns and suburbs possibly reflects retirement patterns: such organisations are often sustained by retired folk.

Special Interest Groups

Storytellers are sometimes invited to develop programmes of material for special interest groups such as gay & lesbian groups, writers groups, women’s groups, church groups, historical societies etc.

Data

In England, 50 events took place involving 1,574 people gathered through common interests:

6 people did 18 events that reached 706 people gathered through common interests in rural areas;

7 people did 15 events that reached 338 people gathered through common interests in suburban and small town areas;

6 people did 17 events that reached 530 people gathered through common interests in inner city areas.

[In Wales, 1 rural event reached 3 people]

Work for Community Groups Self-defined by Ethnicity

Storytellers sometimes work with groups defined by ethnicity such as Asian women's groups, Afro-Caribbean luncheon clubs, Irish centres etc. Sometimes this work is performance – often it is a mixture of animating exchange and story gathering.

Data

In England 6 people did a total of 8 such events confined to inner cities, that reached 284 people.

None were reported in Wales.

Children's Community Groups

Storytellers are occasionally invited to work with children's community groups such as the Guides, the Scouts and the Woodcraft Folk. Included in this category are the Federation of Children's Book Groups and church groups.

Data

In England, 12 events took place involving 719 young people:

4 people did 7 events that reached 460 young people in rural areas;

1 event reached 22 young people in a suburban or small town area;

4 people did 1 event each that reached 237 young people in inner city areas.

[In Wales, 2 rural events reached 75 young people and 1 suburban event reached 50 people.]

Comment

These figures are surprisingly small and possibly reflect the rapid decline of this sort of young peoples' organisation, particularly scouting groups. That said, The Federation of Children's Book Groups is probably an expanding organisation because the children are at all times under the watchful eyes of parents but storytellers, not having a product to market their names tend to be overlooked on this literary circuit.

Here is a context in which the advice of informed LDW's could make a difference.

Offender's Institutions

Storytellers can do very rewarding empowerment work with offenders. 70% of offenders have extremely poor literacy. Skilful storytellers can help such people gain confidence in their oral communication skills by giving them contexts to experience the expressiveness of their narrating selves – and provide a chance for them to be heard.

In England, 4 people did 9 events reaching 143 inmates.

[Those that responded to the survey reported no comparable work in Wales.]

Comment

About ten years ago there was a fair amount of experimentation with storytellers working in prisons and young offender units. I'm surprised at how little work appears to be happening at present and would hazard a guess that the demand for quantifiable written outcomes has meant that poets and writers are now doing most of this work.

Here again is a context in which advocacy by informed LDW's could make a difference.

Private Functions

In many traditions, community work for the professional storyteller often involved performing at births, weddings and funerals... or celebrating calendar festivals and commemorating milestone birthdays, wedding anniversaries etc. Increasingly, such work is reappearing in the context of the 'storytelling revival':

Data

In England 17 people did 57 private adult performances reaching 2, 689 people.

[In Wales 2 people did 4 private events reaching 160 adults.]

In England 15 people participated in a total of 38 children's parties reaching 683 children.

General Comment on Community Work

The range of community activities testifies to the versatility of storytellers, testing the mixed bag of repertoire to the limits. This work is particularly good for forcing the pace of skill acquisition by developing or apprentice storytellers. It challenges and exercises them and makes them address their limitations.

The evidence reported from Scotland suggests that storytelling has become an intrinsic part of many frontline community workers practice. This is because, of all the expressive narrative art forms storytelling is perhaps the most accessible: it is sometimes referred to as 'writing on the wind'. Most people are telling some sort of story all day long and so can become readily proficient at a casual, informal sort of story-chatting. The legacy of storytellers input in community contexts is far reaching.

The cumulative effect of these figures demonstrates the wide variety of communities in which artists (in this case storytellers) are working. From a financial point of view they are thus directly accessing funds from health and social services departments. Given the prioritisation of community health work by the Arts Council, it would be advisable for future surveys of this, or other art forms to find out the scale of what is

actually already happening, so that duplication or the creation of unnecessary layers of bureaucracy can be avoided.

It should be noted that either the staff of the recipient community organisation, or a community agency, usually instigate this sort of community work. So, no matter how delighted, willing and enthusiastic the beneficiaries of the event will be, they will rarely, themselves, have requested the artists by name. This means they seldom know anything much about the artist's work in advance. The artists themselves generally find these sorts of projects challenging, emotionally rewarding and creatively stimulating, however this type of work needs to be balanced with equal opportunities to work for the general public. (In the case of private functions the storyteller is also, in a sense, imposing his or her work on an audience who are primarily there for another purpose. As with community work, this too tends to be done under the constraints of anonymity).

Work open and advertised to the general public offers the artist genuine validation before individuals who have freely chosen to make a journey to attend an event. Understanding the implications of this subtle point of differentiation between the two areas of work is a deeply significant factor when considering the pastoral care of the community of artists. They need to maintain a healthy level of pride (self-esteem).

Part Six - Detailed Analysis: Publicly Accessible Work

The survey sought to find out how much access the public have to professional storytelling.

These figures are presented in two halves: part a) – work that is primarily intended for adult audiences and, part b) – work that is intended for families and children.

Section A) – Adult Events in Arts Centres and Theatre spaces

Professional performance storytellers long for opportunities to work with adult audiences in purpose built black box studio theatre spaces. They offer ideal conditions for the best presentation of their work. There is visual focus and, above all, silence. In conditions of neutrality (the equivalent of a writer's 'blank page') anything can be attempted from wild, light-hearted cabaret to very concentrated performances of complex epic narrative and sacred mythology.

Britain is internationally envied for its circuit of purpose built/adapted performance spaces that accommodate between 70 and 500 people. They also provide audiences with good seating and other comforts, something that cannot be guaranteed in most of the spaces storytellers work in.

Arts centres generally have professional marketing departments. With the exception of designated storytelling and literature festivals, they are often the only venues that really have the resources to let the general public find out about storytelling events. They can afford to create and maintain databases for direct mailing. High quality storytelling events benefiting from the endorsement and marketing facilities of respected venues, such as London's Barbican Centre, Warwick Arts Centre or the Purcell Room, sell out weeks in advance.

Data

In England, between 12 storytellers, 80 arts centre events took place for audiences totalling 6,168 adults:

3 storytellers did 7 events between them, for audiences totalling 695 adults in rural areas (average rural audience = 99);

10 storytellers did 50 events between them, for audiences totalling 3,406 adults in suburban and small town areas (average small town/suburban audience = 68);

10 storytellers between them did 23 events for audiences totalling 2,067 adults in inner city areas (average inner city audience = 89).

26 storytellers did no public adult performances.

[In Wales, 4 storytellers did work in 23 arts centres between them, reaching audiences totalling 2,893 adults:

3 storytellers did 10 events between them for audiences totalling 1170 adults in rural areas (average rural audience= 117);
 3 storytellers did 11 events between them for audiences totalling 1423 adults in suburban and small town areas (average small town/suburban audience = 129);
 1 storyteller did 2 events for audiences totalling 300 adults in inner city areas (average inner city audience 150)]

Note: One storyteller in England produced an anomalous figure of 22 arts centre appearances. Having made an enquiry, the figure includes his MC'ing of the events that he runs as a circuit promoter. (This means that some of the above figures might include duplication as it is possible that this person also introduced several of the events entered by others.)

The rest of the storytellers, in England and Wales, each averaged 5 public performances for adults in purpose built venues.

Observation

It was beyond the scope of this survey to look at audience demographics – however venue managers have frequently commented that the storytelling audience is very broad in social background and age range – and that it includes many who are not the venue's regular audience. In other words they are *new* audiences, validating storytelling as a vehicle for audience development.

Comment

These are profoundly disappointing figures for engagements in publicly subsidised venues. In fact they also speak of a more general crisis for public access to live arts in the circuit of purpose built/adapted performing spaces – but that is a discussion for elsewhere.

Some comfort can be taken from the fact that, when events happen, the audience averages seem fairly respectable. The relatively high rural audience averages are telling; perhaps suggesting a lack of competing entertainment.

(Interestingly, the EU has just awarded a 350,000 Euro grant to a theatre in Northern Sweden to research the appeal of storytelling. It seems that three local storytellers were consistently attracting far larger audiences than theatre companies in rural venues. The project aims to study what actors and playwrights can learn from the traditional storyteller's art.)

These figures also give the lie to a perception fermented by some in the storytelling world (and regrettably indulged), that certain figures with 'high profiles' are doing all the 'juicy public work'. An average of 5 arts centre appearances a year, carried out by under a third of this sample, is by no means a great deal of work.

During 1991/92, with £10,000 subsidy, the Crick Crack Club was able to mount 142 events in Arts Centres with relatively little difficulty. (This averaged £70 subsidy per

event – however it should be noted that the administration was undertaken voluntarily and such unpaid time could never be committed again). In those days literature officers seemed more pro-active and supportive of storytelling. As a condition of receiving revenue funding arts centres used to be obliged to have comprehensive arts programmes. This meant they were invited to be adventurous with their literature programming and what the Crick Crack Club offered was welcomed.

The story is now very different. For example, despite £29,000 of Arts Council Touring Scheme subsidy, a major literature festival seemed to find great difficulty setting up 27 events for a national tour by a select group of Britain's finest storytellers. The project was intended to bring storytelling into arts centres that had not promoted any adult storytelling performances before, but it more or less failed to break any new ground. The fact that more than a third of the grant was seemingly spent on administrative time can – and must – be used as evidence that storytelling needs to be promoted by experts who have mastered the arguments to sell it.

The Midlands based Storytelling Café is operating a successful series of less formal storytelling events – in the foyers and bars of art centres. They are benefiting from fortunate working partnerships with local LDWs.

Indoor Adult Performances in Other Venues

Storytellers need audiences. As the circuit of arts centres floundered in the 1990's or became more conservative in their programming, 'found' venues for storytelling had to be used by default. Storytelling is peripatetic and fairly 'lo-tech'. It can be made to function well in almost any conditions as long as there is a good acoustic, warmth for the audience and a simple point of visual focus can be constructed. It must be clearly stated that certain, central aspects of repertoire – such as ritual or sacred epic – are best served in purpose built theatre spaces; never-the-less a great deal can be achieved in village or community halls for enthusiastic audiences, often consisting of what English tradition affectionately calls 'Uncle Tom Cobbleigh and all'.

Data

In England, between 22 storytellers, 162 events took place in 'other indoor venues' for audiences totalling 8,063 adults:

12 storytellers did 84 events between them, for audiences totalling 4,193 adults in rural areas (average rural audience = 50);

11 storytellers did 42 events between them, for audiences totalling 2,396 adults in small town/suburban and areas (average small town/suburban audience = 57);

9 storytellers between them did 36 events for audiences totalling 2,067 adults in inner city areas (average inner city audience = 40).

15 storytellers did no adult performances in these types of venue.

[In Wales, between 2 storytellers, 3 events took place in ‘other indoor venues’ for audiences totalling 77 adults:

1 storyteller did 2 events for audiences totalling 47 adults in rural areas and the other storyteller did 1 event for an audience total of 30 adults in an inner city area.]

Observation

In most cases these venues will only have been able to offer minimal comforts to the audiences in terms of lavatory facilities, refreshments, comfortable seating etc. The performance area sightlines, lighting and acoustics will have been, at best, adequate.

Most of these events will also have had very limited marketing resources behind them.

Comment

More than twice as many adult events took place in these ‘found venues’ as in purpose built arts centres – though the audiences in the arts centres were twice as large. Over half of the events were in rural areas thus confirming (I suspect) the achievement of the Rural Arts Touring Schemes – one of the genuine success stories of arts initiatives in England that has been overlooked by metropolitan media.

Outdoor Events for Adult Audiences

Traditionally, professional storytellers also worked outdoors in fairs, festivals and markets (cf ‘The Storyteller’s Marketplace’ in Marrakech – now recognised as a world heritage site). Ambient noise levels from traffic and amplified music make it much harder for a voice to work in equivalent contemporary contexts, however some storytellers do find themselves working out-of-doors for adults, particularly in environmental centres, on heritage sites, and places like the Green Field at Glastonbury. Despite the risk of rain, they are often participants at events marking calendar festivals such as Apple Day and Midsummer Night.

Data

In England, between 13 storytellers, 50 outdoor events took place for adults. The audiences totalled 5,266:

11 storytellers did 32 events for audiences totalling 2,412 adults in rural areas (average rural audience = 75);

6 storytellers did 10 events for audiences totalling 912 adults in small town/suburban and areas (average small town/suburban audience = 91);

3 storytellers did 8 events for audiences totalling 1,942 in inner city areas. (NB.1 storyteller did an event for 1500 adults which distorts the averages, therefore I’ve adjusted the calculation to give a more realistic figure: average inner city audience = 63).

24 storytellers did no adult performances outdoors.

[In Wales, 4 storytellers did 8 outdoor rural events between them for audiences totalling 1012 adults: average audience for outdoor rural performances = 126.]

Observation

A further 106 outdoor events in similar venues took place for families and children.

Comment

The social demographic of people attending these (often free) events seems to be extremely diverse.

Public Events for Adults in Libraries

In the early 1980's great efforts were made to make use of public libraries as performance spaces for what is now termed 'live literature'. However during the late 1990's the role of the public library service was thrown into question by the arrival of information technology and the Internet. In the resulting disarray commitment to the development of libraries as public venues became piecemeal. However a recent DCMS review, 'Framework for the Future: Libraries, Learning and Information in the next Decade'⁵ may herald a return to some consistency in the development of a fresh strategy.

Data

In England, between 5 storytellers, 29 public adult events took place libraries for a total adult audience of 1,396 people.

1 storyteller did 2 events, for audiences totalling 28 adults in rural areas;
 4 storytellers did 25 events between them, for audiences totalling 1,296 adults in small town/suburban and areas (NB one storyteller did 13 of these events);
 2 storytellers did 2 events between them for audiences totalling 72 adults in inner city areas

33 storytellers did no adult performances in these types of venue.

[In Wales, 1 storyteller did 2 events for audiences totalling 20 adults in rural libraries.]

Comment

For at least a decade the Arts Council has encouraged local government to fund literature development worker posts. There are 16 salaried LDWs in England and the professional association has 203 members. Comments on the effectiveness of that investment with regards to the promotion of storytelling will be reserved for the end of this report. However it is important to point out here that the storyteller who did 13 events in small town/suburban libraries is also a promoter who has been able to establish a good working relationship with local LDWs. I suspect that many of the other public adult library events reported in this survey took place under this person's

⁵ published by the DCMS in 2004

auspices. This is not unconnected to the fact that storytelling as an art form in his region has benefited from a unique history of continuity: two successive RAB literature officers have been proactive advocates of community storytelling.

This relationship demonstrates what LDWs can achieve – if there's a will.

As has already been suggested, this survey indicates the absence of a voice advocating storytelling in the library service, and, as stressed librarians nervously watch their roles being transformed into that of 'info-store attendants' there seems little time to seek or develop one. (No storytellers seem to have been consulted in the preparation of the DCMS library review).

It is worth noting that the storytelling revivals in Catholic Spain, Portugal and France are highly supported by the public library services. This has led to extraordinary projects such as the 'Conteuses de l'Age d'Or de France' – an association of many hundreds of retired people who take the role of surrogate grandparents and tell stories in libraries on Saturdays; the extraordinary annual story relay which involves all of Portugal's 250 libraries and the utterly phenomenal annual storytelling 'Marathon' in Guadalajara, Spain. Here, all day and all night, over a full weekend, many, many members of the community – butcher, baker and candlestick maker – tell 5 minute stories on a stage in a courtyard to an audience of 1,500. During the weekend all 30,000 people of the town attend. All year long people come to the library looking for the story they'll tell the following year...

Salaried, visionary, trusted librarians started all these initiatives.

For more comments on storytelling and the library service see pages 29 above and 61 below.

Adult Work at Literary Festivals

Literature festivals such as Ilkley, Birmingham Readers and Writers, and Cheltenham have been sporadic supporters of adult storytelling events. Unlike writers and poets, storytellers do not have a product to sell and so do not have publishing companies behind them offering them to festivals at low, or even no, cost (the expenses being accounted for in promotional budgets). Storytelling events in literature festivals therefore require either sponsorship, grant aid or an enlightened commitment to both oral literature and genuine orality that will arrange budgets so that any risk of losses can be absorbed across the general budget. Both the Hay and Bath Festivals have demonstrated serious commitment to the art and have each commissioned a number of extremely well received storytelling pieces. These have entered the storytellers' permanent repertoires and gone on to tour nationally and internationally.

Data

In England, 13 storytellers did 20 events at literature festivals, for audiences totalling 1,935 adults.

3 storytellers did 1 event each at literature festivals in rural areas, for audiences totalling 320 adults.

9 storytellers did 13 events between them, for audiences totalling 865 adults in small town/suburban literature festivals.

3 storytellers did 4 events between them for audiences totalling 750 adults in inner city literature festivals.

24 storytellers did no literature festival work for adults.

[In Wales, 2 storytellers did 3 events between them for audiences totalling 320 adults in rural literature festivals]

Comment

The Commissioning of 'new work' by literature festivals is an important festive feature. The success of new pieces commissioned by festivals lies in the fact that the festivals have actively approached artists whose work they admire – and therefore wish to be associated with – to come up with new pieces of their own choice. The festival directors thus demonstrate their trust in the artists to follow their own muses and give them the freedom and resources to create organic work. Commissioning pieces to brief (or, worse, by competitive tender) restricts artistic freedom. Work produced to serve an agenda imposed by someone else rarely results in anything that is likely to enter a personal touring repertoire and thus has a limited legacy.

Adult Work in General Arts Festivals

Public access to adult storytelling is also offered by inclusion in the programming of general arts festivals.

Data

In England, 9 storytellers did, between them, 31 events in general arts festivals, for audiences totalling 3,042 adults.

8 storytellers did 17 events at arts festivals in rural areas, for audiences totalling 1,873 adults;

6 storytellers did 11 events between them, for audiences totalling 899 adults in small town/suburban arts festivals;

3 storytellers did 1 event each for audiences totalling 270 adults in inner city general arts festivals.

27 storytellers did no general arts festival work for adults.

[In Wales, 3 storytellers did 12 events in general arts festivals, for audiences totalling 850 adults.

2 storytellers did 1 event each at arts festivals in rural areas, for audiences totalling 190 adults. 1 storyteller did 8 events for audiences totalling 600 adults in small town/

suburban arts festivals and 2 storytellers did 1 event each for audiences totalling 60 adults in inner city general arts festivals.]

Comment

The combined figures for England and Wales show that nearly twice as many adult storytelling performances occurred in general arts festivals than in specific literature festivals – demonstrating that this is an aspect of live literature that has cross-over potential in general arts programming.

Adult Storytelling Festivals

I initiated and directed the first dedicated storytelling festival in Britain at Battersea Arts Centre in 1985 (under Jude Kelly's regime). It was internationalist in outlook, lasted 8 days (the last four of which sold out) and included an oversubscribed educational conference. It was followed by 8 sold out days in Waterman's Arts Centre in 1987 and, in 1989, by 15 days in the Purcell Room, Queen Elizabeth Hall and Voice Box at the South Bank Centre, with a touring circuit that visited 12 other arts centres. After this series of major building based London festivals, storytelling rapidly spread throughout England. In the late 80's /early 90's Cleveland, Norwich, Canterbury and Peterborough held annual weekend festivals for three or four consecutive years. In 1991 the annual Mid-Pennines Storytelling Festival began. This is a rural arts touring event using multiple 'found venues', and it continues to this day.

In 1992 a new form of annual outdoor weekend storytelling festival started on Wenlock Edge. Based on the English folk festival camping/marquee model, this now attracts 1,500 plus visitors and is the only storytelling organisation to receive fixed term revenue funding from the Arts Council in either England or Wales. In 1993 the Beyond the Border International Festival of Epic Singing and Storytelling began at St Donat's Castle in the Vale of Glamorgan. It is like WOMAD with stories and now attracts 2,500 plus visitors. Milton Keynes hosted a number of very large free storytelling festivals in the mid-90's – attracting 5,000 visitors. In the last four years an annual Lakeland festival has begun. In 2002 a new annual festival was launched in the West Country. There have been dozens of other one off mini festivals in different parts of England and Wales.

Data

In England, between 18 storytellers, there were 32 adult storytelling festival appearances reaching a total adult audience of 3,955 people. (Here there's a possibility of duplication in the audience numbers as several of these artists may have appeared in the same festivals – however they have given what appear to be very honest estimates of audience sizes for the sessions they did).

14 storytellers did 25 events, for audiences totalling 2,905 adults in rural areas;
5 storytellers did 6 events between them, for audiences totalling 900 adults in small town/suburban and areas;
1 storyteller did 1 event for 150 adults in an inner city area.

20 storytellers did no adult performances in storytelling festivals.

[In Wales, 5 storytellers did 8 events for audiences totalling 2,119 adults in rural storytelling festivals]

Comment

These figures confirm the scarcity of inner city building based festivals.

Adult Storytelling Clubs

Dedicated storytelling clubs are vital for developing storytellers, repertoire and audiences.

Britain's first storytelling club, The Crick Crack Club was formed in autumn 1987 to develop repertoire, skills and new talent in preparation for the South Bank Festival two years later. It operated in various pub theatre and café spaces in London, staging 26 weekly events over the autumn and winter of each year. It has always been a performance venue either showcasing new work or providing two hours slots to show experimental or developmental work. It featured one or occasionally two artists per evening and had a monthly sister club in Norwich (which continued until 2002). It ran like this for eight years until 1996. Then, due to events beyond my control, it had to become a monthly club, mounting ten events a year. This completely restricted the possibilities for risk taking if one wanted to maintain the audience numbers necessary to cover the costs of venue hire. (Though a festival of 'New Voices' was held in 1999.) When the Crick Crack Club was at its height (with a mailing list of 1,500), visiting performers from overseas commented that the audience had developed into one of the sharpest and most critical *in the world* – an audience that wouldn't indulge pretence, insincerity or complacency. They knew how to listen, they didn't need flirtation or flattery – they were there, intelligent, demanding, ready...

The Arts Council supported experiment in 1991/92 to establish a national circuit of monthly Crick Crack Clubs had the catalysing effect of galvanising dozens of monthly clubs into action all over Britain – on the basis that 'if we don't get something up and running ourselves the Crick Crack Club will!' Most of these clubs were based on the folk club model of 'floor spots' in the first half and a featured artist in the second half.

As the decade proceeded a balance established itself between 'performance' and 'floor-spot' clubs. And most have come to their own varying, yet organic, understandings of the dynamics of the relationship between amateur and professional storytellers. Some clubs immediately flourished; others bloomed for a while and then disappeared.

Many different formats have now evolved. Most events are held in pub rooms. The highly successful pub clubs in Hebden Bridge and Newcastle now hire small theatres for special events so they don't have to turn people away. For many years there was a

tremendous club in Leicester that regularly attracted audiences of 100 people in a medieval guildhall. In Dorset a 350-seater earth covered roundhouse was purpose built for storytelling (although sadly the genius visionary who built it resigned on the opening day in protest at the indifference shown to him by the education authority he worked for).

The Midlands based Storytelling Café refuses to use pub rooms on the principal that they are often too shabby and has run very successful programmes in libraries and the foyers and bars of arts centres.

It is worth pointing out that there are almost no pub rooms left to hire in London that are near to public transport access points. Pressure on housing is so intense that most former function rooms have been converted and let for accommodation – or are prohibitively expensive to hire. Confusion about public performance licences has also had an effect of the availability of low cost spaces. (Storytelling as an unamplified spoken word event doesn't need a license, but other performance activities may.) New legal requirements for disabled access have closed down other spaces.

Some of these clubs receive small programming grants but, with the exception of the Storytelling Café, all the administration is undertaken voluntarily.

Data

In England, between 21 storytellers, there were 96 adult storytelling club appearances reaching a total adult audience of 4,790 people (Here there's also a possibility of duplication in the audience numbers as several of these artists may have appeared in the same clubs – though generally it seems that roughly a third of any club audience is drawn from the pool of 'regulars', whilst the remaining two thirds are 'fresh ears'.)

10 storytellers did 32 events, for audiences totalling 1,505 adults in rural areas (average audience size = 47);

11 storytellers did 31 events between them, for audiences totalling 1,642 adults in small town/suburban and areas (average audience = 52);

15 storytellers did 33 events for 1,643 adults in inner city areas (average audience = 49).

17 storytellers did no adult performances in storytelling clubs.

[In Wales, 1 storyteller did 1 event for 150 adults in a suburban storytelling club]

Observation

It was beyond the brief of this survey to find out how many storytelling clubs there are at present, but the (non-comprehensive) Society for Storytelling website currently lists 54 clubs in England and 4 in Wales – most of these run on a monthly basis.

Marketing resources for most of these clubs are extremely limited. Postage and the maintenance of databases has become very expensive – so, though most try to send

out photocopied flyers at the beginning of each season (often 2 seasons a year instead of 4 to keep costs down), they increasingly rely upon the rather less effective medium of e-mail newsletters which, unless immediately printed out and pinned up, tend to be forgotten. Word of mouth plays a very large part in club survival.

An effective national information-clearing house is needed.

Comment

Here there is a striking balance between club work in the three different geographies. The fact that more storytellers did events in the inner city clubs testifies to several things: certainly that there is balance to the informal touring circuit nature of the clubs – but perhaps it also comments on the lack of public access to storytelling events in the inner cities. This is clearly reflected by the cumulative figures for all the events in this section concerned with public access to adult storytelling. Storytellers are trying to rectify imbalance themselves.

Other Adult Club Appearances

Occasionally storytellers are invited to work in other clubs – such as poetry and comedy clubs. Though the idea sounds straightforward these events are surprisingly difficult to pull off well.

Storytellers, poets and comedians are all working different kinds of magic necessitating very different disciplines of timing and audience relationship. Comedy audiences expect a laugh a minute and can get impatient because storytellers seem slow – though the next day they'll probably be able to remember the storyteller's story better than the comedian's jokes. Sharing the stage with storytellers sometimes makes poets and writers uncomfortable: trapped by the inflexibility of texts, writers can be thrown by the immediacy of a good storyteller's relationship with an audience. Combined events can become lumpy for all concerned – leaving whales beached, and elephants drowned. (The exception comes with charity benefit concerts when the audience expects the whole event to be a bit of a jamboree bag.) However, this is not to suggest that attempts at mixed programming should be abandoned, rather it is to caution that if quality is intended, careful programming is required based on a detailed knowledge of artists skills and repertoire.

Data

In England, 1 person did 8 such events and another did 2, for a combined audience of 330 adults.

1 storyteller did 1 event for a rural audience of 60; the same person did 4 suburban events whilst the other did 2, between them they reached a total of 180 people. The first storyteller also did 3 inner city events that reached 90 people.

36 storytellers did no adult performances in other club situations.

[In Wales, nobody did this sort of work]

Comment

This figure tells a story, though I'm not sure what it is. Have storytellers turned down invitations or simply not been asked? Have promoters learned from experience that it is risky? Does this figure point to a lack of collaboration between performance poetry organisations and storytellers?

Section b) – Publicly Accessible Work for Families and Children

Storytelling for family groups is challenging, as the audience will often range from 4 year olds to 12 year olds, and from thereon to the grandparent generations. Finding material that will appeal to such varying embodiments of life experience requires shrewd judgement and flexibility in performance. In schools it is possible to pitch stories that are exactly appropriate for each group, year by year, from ages 3 to 16.

At public events the size of family audiences can vary from a handful to several hundred – sometimes for no apparent rhyme or reason.

Publicly Accessible Events for Families and Children in Arts Centres and Theatre Spaces

Data

In England, between 8 storytellers, 38 arts centre events took place for audiences totalling 3,371 mixed adults and children:

1 storyteller did 3 rural events, for audiences totalling 52 mixed adults and children;
 5 storytellers did 22 events between them, for audiences totalling 2,404 mixed adults and children in suburban and small town areas (1storyteller did 13 of these engagements);
 3 storytellers between them did 13 events for audiences totalling 915 adults and children mixed in inner city areas.

29 storytellers did no public performances in arts centres for families and children.

[In Wales, 2 storytellers did work in 4 arts centres between them, reaching audiences totalling 23 adults and children mixed:

1 storytellers did 3 events in rural areas for audiences totalling 21 adults and children mixed;
 1 storyteller did 1 event for a small town/suburban audience consisting of one parent and one child (!!)]

Observation

Arts centres are one of the few types of venues that will acknowledge artists by name in their family publicity.

Comment

These low public event figures are even more surprising than those for adult events in purpose built arts centres, because the usual preconception – that storytelling is just for children – doesn't seem to have reached the ears of arts centre family events programmers. The huge discrepancies between the audience figures are probably attributable to specific local marketing conditions i.e. whether a venue has a well-established audience for family events. Perhaps this also indicates that the long-term squeeze on arts centre programming budgets has meant that family events (other than film showings) may have suffered terminal cutbacks. This bodes ill for future generations of audiences for live performance and is a question for a separate piece of research.

Other Indoor Performances in 'Found' Venues for Families and Children

Data

In England, between 11 storytellers, 64 events took place in 'found spaces' for audiences totalling 4,196 combined adults and children:

3 storytellers did 12 events between them, for audiences totalling 325 combined adults and children in rural areas;

5 storytellers did 33 events between them, for audiences totalling 3,106 combined adults and children in small town/suburban and areas (the same storyteller that did 13 arts centre events did 19 of these events – to an average of 150 per show);

4 storytellers between them did 19 events for audiences totalling 765 combined adults and children in inner city areas (a different storyteller did 12 of these events to an average audience of 10 people).

27 storytellers did no family performances in these types of venue.

[In Wales, 1 storyteller did 1 rural event for a family audience of 40]

Comment

The storyteller who did the relatively large amount of well-attended family performances (19 events) specialises in this sort of show and has found funding to produce appropriate marketing materials to attract first the bookings and then the audiences.

Outdoor Events for Families and Children

This is a large market for storytellers particularly during half terms, in summer holiday play schemes and at calendar festivals such as Halloween. 'Fun Day' and 'Country Fair' work is not easy, requiring good lungs and often some sort of attention attracting device such as a special coat, backdrop or musical instrument.

Data

In England, between 23 storytellers, 101 outdoor family events took place. The audiences totalled 8,695:

13 storytellers did 52 events for audiences totalling 4,268 combined adults and children in rural areas (1 storyteller did 16 of these events);

13 storytellers did 40 events for audiences totalling 2,025 combined adults and children in small town/suburban and areas (another storyteller did 20 of these events);

4 storytellers did 9 events for audiences totalling 2,402 in inner city areas (nb1 storyteller did an event for 2,000 adults which distorts the average for this category).

14 storytellers did no outdoor family performances.

[In Wales, 2 storytellers did 5 outdoor rural events between them for audiences totalling 965 adults and children combined. 1 person did 3 rural events for 675 people, 1 did 2 suburban events for 290 people.]

Comment

These figures demonstrate that some storytellers have specialised in this sort of work.

It would be interesting to study the social demography of this audience as this one is also very likely to contain a majority of people who wouldn't normally attend building based arts events.

Public Events for Families and Children in Libraries

Data

In England, between 9 storytellers, 31 family events took place in public libraries for a total audience of 1,364 people.

There were no events in rural areas;

5 storytellers did 18 events between them, for audiences totalling 1,035 adults and children combined, in small town/suburban and areas (average attendance = 57);

5 storytellers did 13 events between them for audiences totalling 329 adults and children combined in inner city areas (average attendance = 25)

28 storytellers did no family performances in these types of venue.

[In Wales, 1 storyteller did 3 events for audiences totalling 60 adults and children combined in rural libraries]

Comment

Apart from the disappointing infrequency of these events, the fact that the events in inner city areas drew less than half the audiences of those in suburban and small town areas seems significant. A study of audience demography might be telling in this case too.

For more comments on storytelling and the library service see pages 41 and 52 above.

Work at Children’s and Family Book Festivals

There do not seem to be many book festivals specifically dedicated to children and families – though most of the main literature festivals feature family programmes.

Data

In England, 2 storytellers did 1 event each in family book festivals. One was in a suburban and the other in an inner city context – both attracted 40 people.

[No storytellers did this in Wales]

Comment

This is a dismaying figure. Perhaps storytellers are considered expensive because without commercial product to promote, they cannot reap the benefit of a publisher’s marketing budget to subsidise their costs. This results in very little professional oral storytelling taking place for children in these events.

And this is sad.

An essential experience of narrative and language is being lost. Good storytellers are probably *the* most adept artists at the live activation of children’s imagination in Britain. Accompanying parents are also being deprived of an opportunity to witness a reminder of the equally vital alternative to bedtime reading – the *telling* of a bedtime story. Without book covers there is no physical barrier to non-verbal communication. The children are free to imagine beyond the parameters set by illustrations. A mother-tongue expressing narrative validates orality and, when alternated with the wonderful (yet distant) voices of authorship, intensifies the possibility of very memorable inter-generational bonding.

Family Work in General Arts Festivals

Data

In England, 8 storytellers did 19 family events in general arts festivals, for audiences totalling 1,399 combined children and adults.

3 storytellers did 5 events at arts festivals in rural areas, for audiences totalling 853 – however one of these performances was to 700 people;

5 storytellers did 13 events between them, for audiences totalling 470 people in small town/suburban arts festivals;

1 storyteller did 1 inner city event for family audiences of 75.

29 storytellers did no general arts festival work for families.

[Those respondents working in Wales undertook no general arts festival family storytelling]

Comment

This is a low figure. However it does once again belie the perception that, outside of education, storytelling is being perceived as being just for children – more than a third more events for adults took place in general arts festivals to an audience well over twice this size.

Publicly Accessible Site Specific Work for Adults, Families and Children

Storytellers research and create interpretive and supportive arts programmes for a vast range of specific sites and themes. Such projects include residencies as well as one off performances (often in the form of ‘story walks’ – whose inspiration lies in the Dinnseanchus of Ireland, the vestigial songlines of the western world). These range from supporting museum and art gallery exhibitions, to working on historical heritage sites and in environmental centres. The ‘artist-as-guide’ invites visitors to engage with a creative perception of artefacts or a site through the vision of the artist... This work has always felt ahead of its time and anticipated by 5 years the massive outbreak of popular historical and archaeological television series. However the part played by storytellers in all this work remains almost invisible to the media – and certainly the consciousness of the arts funding bodies.

Data

In England, between 25 storytellers, 391 site-specific public events took place for a total audience of 20, 882 people.

13 storytellers did, between them, 108 events in rural sites reaching 9,244 people;

11 storytellers did 224 events between them, for audiences totalling 4,378 people in small town/suburban and areas (However it is very important to point out that a team based in their own museum were responsible for 202 of these events reaching 2,022 people);

10 storytellers did 59 events between them for audiences totalling 7,260 people in inner city areas (1 person did 30 of these events reaching 5,000 people).

11 storytellers did not do this type of public work.

[In Wales, 1 storyteller did 1 public site-specific rural event for 25 people]

Comment

Despite the fact that major residencies account for the volume of numbers involved here, this still represents a significant example of how the public most frequently encounter the work of storytellers. In many cases the audiences are primarily visiting the site or the event – and chance upon the (anonymous) storyteller. The marketing associated with this type of event rarely publicises artists by name.

General Comment on Public Work for Families and Children

I'd like to reiterate that demographic study of most of these family audiences would probably reveal a highly diverse social mix – with many people encountering an event that is both a performance yet literary, and who might otherwise hardly ever attend either literary or professional performance events.

The Economics of Site Specific Work

The adding the figures from **English** site-specific educational work to these public access figures gives the following results:

Total educational events = 218
 Total educational audiences = 18,320
 +
 Total public events = 391
 Total public audiences = 20, 882
 = Total site specific events = 609
 Total site specific audiences = 39,202

Assuming these events are costing an average of £250 each, including preparation time and expenses, this represents a sum of £152,000 being brought into the arts economy by 37 persons. It is accessed from heritage budgets, civic museum and gallery budgets and environmental agencies.

When multiplied by the same factors that were used on page 40 with reference to the economy of educational work, we get the following:

The figure of £152,000 multiplied by the conservative factor of 3 (i.e. representing the achievement of 111 storytellers in England) gives us £456,000 (Estimates of the number of storytellers in England suggest it might be two thirds of this again.)

Comment

Again I've done this to make the point that, whatever the real figures are, current Arts Council England support for storytelling in no way begins to reflect, let alone match, this level of 'partnership' funding...

Part Seven – Training

The training of storytellers is a very big subject for discussion. It is accepted that performing artists such as actors, dancers and musicians should have training. On the other hand the literary precedent exists for writers to emerge from the blue, fully fledged – ‘born’ as it were. The position of the professional storyteller lies somewhere between these two examples. There is such a thing as a natural born-storyteller who arrives with everything instinctively in place, however, for others the potential exists for the application of a great deal of conscious technique to result in what appears ideally as natural, effortless-yet-energised performance. There *is* a great deal that can be taught.

Much greater differences than simple semantics lie behind the vocabulary of learning, consider: workshop, skill sharing, coaching, teaching, training, master-class; facilitator, leader, mentor, guide, tutor, teacher; participant, student and pupil, etc.

The time-honoured language that surrounds professional storytelling involves the concept of the direct transmission of knowledge through the side-by-side relationship of apprentice and master... and the long, intermediate period of being a journeyman jobber. Stable patterns of work are vital for this system to come into play.

Live and immediate professional storytelling calls on at least three creative skills to work simultaneously: the work of the author/composer – shaping the narrative and translating it into appropriate communicative language; the vocal, physical and spatial work of the performer and finally the work of the director – orchestrating the whole for, and in response to, the audience. These three completely different disciplines, composition, performance and direction take years to learn. At the same time a repertoire has to be developed, and vast languages of metaphor and iconography need to be understood and learned. It takes seven to ten years just for apprenticeship to end.

Contrast the difference in experience between a ‘floor spot’ storyteller in a folk storytelling club who tells one 15 minute story a month (i.e. 3hours of storytelling per year) and the 3 hours storytelling *per day* that many professional storytellers do 3 times a week. This means that the club storyteller has to make an enormous leap to become airborne in the professional arena and they have to face the fact that if they expect to be paid for telling stories then they must be able to do something that ordinary people can’t do... This leads to very serious questions for debate about access funding and the raising of inappropriate ambition. Access and excellence do not always make comfortable bedfellows.

Publicly Accessible Training & Workshops

Weekend Workshops and other ‘one off’ sessions

It is possible to view a workshop as a participatory ‘happening’ or arts performance in itself. It is a complete journey taken from a starting point to... wherever.

It is rare for a storytelling workshop to effectively involve more than between 16 and 20 people. So most storytellers will set their own limits on the optimum number of participants.

Data

In England, 12 storytellers lead 22 workshops between them, involving 264 adult members of the general public.

[In Wales, 2 storytellers each lead 1 workshop involving 30 adult members of the general public]

In England, 4 storytellers lead 39 public workshops between them, involving 1,943 children. (However one storyteller, with a more obviously theatrical show than most did 30 of these – linked to Arts Centre performances.)

[In Wales, no storytellers did this work]

Extended Courses

It seems possible to present an elementary practical, introduction to storytelling in 48 hours. What constitutes the ‘second workshop’ is something else entirely – and here a diversity of individual approaches kicks in, ranging from practical technique based teaching to psychodrama.

Data

In England, 3 storytellers lead one extended workshop each, involving a total of 34 adult members of the general public.

[In Wales, 3 storytellers lead 1 extended workshop each, each involving 14 adult members of the general public]

Professional Development

Storytellers can offer help to a variety of professionals (and voluntary workers) in addition to teachers and librarians. These range from therapists and environmental workers, to social workers and youth workers. Many of these people subsequently become what the Scottish Storytelling Centre classes as ‘community storytellers’.

In recent years a market has opened for what is known as ‘storytelling in business’ – such work ranges from developing communication skills to helping managers devise their ‘corporate narrative.’ It can be a source of very highly paid private sector work although some artists are ambivalent about the ethical compromises that entry into these markets entails.

Data

In England, 9 storytellers were involved with 26 professional development events involving a total of 1,084 professionals (half of these events i.e. 13, were with corporate clients)

[In Wales, 1 storyteller was involved with 3 professional development events reaching a total of 45 corporate clients]

Other Courses

It was beyond the scope of this survey to compile a list of training opportunities for storytellers. There are several places that offer annual weekend workshops and a few that offer weeklong courses (Festival at the Edge, Ty Newyth, Bledffa). The Performing Arts BA at Middlesex University includes a module on storytelling. There is a longstanding yearlong anthroposophical storytelling course at Emerson College in East Grinstead.

As far as I am aware the NALD training scheme does not work with storytellers.

This would be something for a further survey to explore.

Comment

In the latter half of the 1980's, Britain's first professional adult storytelling group, The Company of Storytellers (Hugh Lupton, Pomme Clayton and myself) was faced with an absurd dilemma – there was plenty of funding available for promoters to invite us to do workshops under 'access' schemes – but very little available to subsidise performances. Arguing that we couldn't introduce people to an art form that they hadn't experienced as audiences, we would only agree to do workshops if performances were arranged on the back of them – even if it meant we didn't receive proper dues. These workshops forged a double-edged sword for us – on the one hand we inspired and sired a generation of storytellers – on the other hand we succeeded in creating competition for ourselves. This was the first intimation of an ongoing debate about amateur/professional conflicts of interest. It is a discussion rich with paradox.

Long-term observation by senior professional storytellers in many countries concurs that it takes between 7 and 10 years of intensive work experience for a distinctive individualism to emerge in a storyteller and for them to amass sufficient repertoire to work in all the fields that the job can offer. True mastery doesn't begin to appear until after 15 – 20 years have passed. This means it is incredibly important to invest in younger storytellers, their energy is important because there's a very long way for them to go.

As storytelling is an unregulated art form – lacking any systems of accreditation – it is important that high quality knowledge and technique based training is available for those who come to recognise they actually do need to learn more, (though ultimately experience is the greatest teacher). First hand accounts from participants reveal that the quality of currently available workshops varies enormously – this is partly to do with the way they are marketed, the terminology used and the expectations raised. The matter of who teaches the teachers is a perennial question in all disciplines.

Mentoring and 'workshop workshops' would certainly help raise general standards of work.

The prerogative of tutors on longer courses to audition prospective participants should be accepted without challenge. There is a well-established precedent for this in art, music, dance and drama training. Writers often have to submit examples of their work before becoming eligible for course places or bursaries.

In the late 1970's it was still possible to get Arts Council training grants for technical training in the arts – assistance to go on proper technique based music courses, mime courses etc. When the Thatcher Revolution arrived all the training grants were diverted towards developing the do-it-yourself business management and marketing skills of 'the artist-as-service-provider'. Since New Labour came to power it has perhaps been a little more possible to get training grants but it still involves a degree of manipulating the art-speak of 'Go See', 'R&D', 'collaboration', 'partnership' and 'skill share'.

Speaking from experience, too many of the courses I teach are for participants delegated to attend from funded organisations. They are thus attending on salaried time. Self-employed free-lancers need help with gaining equal access to skills development opportunities. They can rarely afford to pay their own way, particularly as training course fees are generally inflated (because organisations are paying for places rather than individuals).

I believe that help should be offered to storytellers to take on apprentices and that worthy apprentices should be offered financial support to get themselves apprenticed. These arrangements should be brokered. (West Midlands Arts once had a scheme that appropriated the word 'apprenticeship' – but there was nothing rigorous in their understanding of the traditional implications of the term. It is the Master's prerogative to set the syllabus!)

Academic Study

It was beyond the brief and resources of this survey to gather information about the possibilities for the academic study of storytelling.

That said, Middlesex University includes a storytelling module as part of its Performing Arts degree course and the University of Glamorgan is in the process of establishing a department looking at community storytelling. The Folk Studies Department at the University of Sheffield has also done some work with the subject. A 3year AHRB funded research study at the University of Kent at Canterbury has just come to an end.

There may well be other courses elsewhere and this would be an area for a further survey to look into.

Comment

To my knowledge, at least 4 PhDs related to storytelling have been completed in England and Wales during the past decade – and several more are in the pipeline. Only one seems to have attempted to directly address the storytelling revival: the others have either focussed on living fireside/folk traditions or on the tangential influence of storytelling on theatre. As far as I know there has yet to be an in-depth academic exploration of the implications of the resurgence of a professional, performance based contemporary storytelling tradition in England and Wales (as defined and reported by this survey). It would be interesting to see studies that accepted that storytellers are involved in a consciously creative artistic process in a similar way to which, for example, the work of theatre directors, playwrights, poets and authors is critically accepted and consequently studied. Robert Bringhurst's book 'A Story as Sharp as a Knife'⁶ makes an eloquent case for this.

When something requiring new study paradigms emerges, there must always be a temporary 'catch 22' period whilst the world of academe adjusts itself to provide adequate and informed experts to supervise the awarding of honours that confirm expertise – but this situation should naturally rectify itself through the passage of time. Exciting plans to create a Wales International Community Storytelling Centre based at the University of Glamorgan appear to be under way. Hopefully another organisation will emerge to study professional and performance storytelling.

At present, many of my peers, along with myself, remain to be convinced that any academic institution (on either side of the Atlantic) has yet produced any true experts on the storytelling revival. Our evidence is that although dozens and dozens of students have used the handful of remaining tradition bearing Scottish travellers as 'informants', none of the most widely experienced performance storytellers have ever had their work studied as 'field work'. The data from this survey suggests that the contemporary revival of storytelling presents an expansive and dynamic field ripe for exploration. Our collective hope is that this potentially intellectually rewarding area for cross-discipline enquiry will be opened to students of the narrative arts, students of the performing arts, anthropologists, educationalists and forward-looking folklorists.

This survey offers evidence that something is happening that throws up lively paradox, dilemma and fascinating conundra at every term. The process of finding out what that is would surely develop tremendous mental muscles and rigorously exercise reasoning processes.

⁶ 'Masterworks of the Classical Haida Myhtellers', Volume 1 translated by Robert Bringhurst Publ Douglas & McIntyre 2001-2004

Part Eight – International and Collaborative Work, Media Appearances

International Work

Data

5 storytellers based in England did 13 work trips abroad reaching audience totals of 5,670

2 storytellers based in Wales did 3 work trips abroad reaching audience totals of 1,500

2 storytellers based in England did 9 bookings in either Scotland or Northern Ireland reaching 750 people.

1 Storyteller based in Wales did 2 bookings in either Scotland or Northern Ireland reaching 400 people.

Observation

British storytellers are lauded throughout Europe and in Canada. Since 1985, they have worked particularly closely with the Norwegians and the French. They inspired a storytelling revival in Norway to the extent that the National Drama School teaching programme was amended to include a two-year ‘oral communications’ course. (The now retired head of that course, Professor Marit Jerstad, recently said ‘We must open our eyes, recognise and celebrate the fact that we are right in the middle of what future generations will look back on as having been a ‘Golden Age’ of international level storytelling’.) British storytellers have also influenced the course of the development of storytelling in Sweden, Holland and Germany. In turn, it must be said that the French have influenced many of the English and Welsh storytellers.

The values of multiculturalism and *anti-nationalism* that are a given amongst most of the urban English storytellers have been transmitted to the storytellers in many European countries.

Over the years the Beyond the Border International Storytelling Festival has invited storytellers to South Wales, from Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Japan, Senegal, Uganda, Haiti, Cuba, India, Bangladesh, Egypt, South Africa, Quebec, Canada, Nunavut, America, Mongolia, Turkey, Greece, Norway, Germany, Holland, Sweden, France, Belgium, Ireland, Scotland and - by virtue of the many global diasporas - from many other lands and cultures. Whenever funds have permitted, these artists have toured.

This has opened the way for a great deal of genuine creative exchange - with European storytellers regularly appearing at the Beyond the Border Festival and exchange programmes of storytelling master-classes. The EU sponsored storytelling initiative during the 2001 Year of European Languages (in Portugal, Spain and France), has left in its wake a successful legacy of loosely connected, roaming pan-European storytelling conferences.

Contact with surviving professional epic performance traditions (particularly Central Indian Pandvani) has had a perceptible influence on the way performance storytelling is evolving on this island. The British Council, through their International Initiatives Programme have been particularly helpful in facilitating these inspiring events.

The relationship with the USA is a little more ambivalent – many first-nation tradition bearers have been invited here, as have a number of European and African descended Americans. Comparatively few British storytellers have been invited to work there. This is partly to do with the complexities of getting work permits – but there are deeper cultural issues at stake. There is almost no state funding for the arts in the USA, so everything operates in a very different and highly competitive manner: one can occasionally catch wind of a whiff of protectionism that doesn't necessarily welcome competition from international artists. There are also other cultural factors involved for discussion elsewhere.

Very occasionally other organisations in England bring in storytellers from overseas.

The Media Profile of Storytelling

Data

The storytellers were asked about broadcast media appearances, the categories and replies are given:

Number of appearances in England

Cable/Satellite TV: 2 people x 1 each

Regional TV: 5 people did 8 appearances between them

National TV: Zero

Regional Radio: 14 people did 44 appearances between them

National Radio: 4 people did 5 appearances between them

[One person from Wales was featured on one regional radio programme]

23 people made no broadcast media appearances.

Observation

In recent years *The Times* newspaper has taken storytelling seriously and regularly reviews events, but no other papers have followed that lead. This is partly because very few storytelling events have marketing departments working on their behalf issuing press releases, making follow up phone calls, etc.

Producers at BBC Radios 3 and 4 regularly approach storytellers with ideas to make programmes that will help raise the profile of storytelling, but they are nearly all blocked by prejudice higher up the commissioning system. (I get 3 or 4 calls a year from producers who pick my brains and I know I'm not alone). Every year half a dozen editorial interviews get through, but it is very rare to hear an extended story

being ‘told’ – as opposed to ‘read aloud’ – on national radio. Somewhere there is a profound fear of the surrender of control obliged by unscripted narrative.

Comment

Every 4 or 5 years the term ‘storytelling’ and other associated words become buzzwords: presently ‘narrative’ is in the air and two years ago ‘metaphor’ seemed to have currency. This is fine and good because behind it there is an acknowledgement that we are beings that work with a language that has constructed minds to think in terms of past, present and future and of cause and effect. We respond well to narrative communication. However such is the aggressive dominance of the authority of literacy that the primacy of the spoken word is often, even wilfully, ignored. One’s word is no longer trusted as a bond; everything has to be given in writing. Paradoxically it is a truism that ‘word of mouth is the most effective form of communication’. (cf the riddle, Q: ‘What flies swiftly from one side of the earth to the other and just as easily through time?’ A: ‘A reputation.’)

Cross-discipline Artistic Collaboration

The telling of a story is the starting point for many other forms of artistic expression. The story, or moments from it, can inspire sculpture, illustration, film, music, dance, theatre, puppetry, poetry, novelisation, pottery, fabric work etc. Storytellers can share the stage with artists from other disciplines – or be involved with workshops that combine multiple creative skills.

Data

15 storytellers collaborated with other artists – if the art form was specified it was mainly with musicians. Two also worked with fine artists/sculptors.

8 did between 1 & 5 events
 4 did between 6 & 10 events
 1 did 15
 1 did 50
 1 did 100
 1 did 120

One person said that a third of their work was with other artists.

(One person added that 60% of their work was carried out alongside disabled performers.)

Part Nine – Funding and Agency Support

The survey invited respondents to try to estimate how much of their work was directly afforded by the organisations who employed them, and how much was dependent on project grants that the organisations had had to secure special funding for. This was very difficult and most respondents felt they were hazarding informed guesses. I regret that the phrasing of the question also caused some confusion, however 21 people had a go:

Data

7 said that more than 90% of their work was directly funded and therefore 10% grant aided to the employing organisations.

3 said 80 % of their work was directly funded and therefore 10% grant aided to the organisations.

3 said 70 %– 80% of their work was directly funded and therefore 20% - 30% grant aided to the organisations.

2 said 60% of their work was directly funded and therefore 40% grant aided to the organisations.

2 said 50% of their work was directly funded and therefore 50% grant aided to the organisations.

3 said 30 – 35% of their work was directly funded and therefore 65% – 70%% grant aided to the organisations.

1 said 10% of their work was directly funded and therefore 90% grant aided to the organisations.

Comment

These figures are very difficult to extract meaning from without being related to the amount and type of work that each person was doing. A very thorough examination of this survey's statistics might yield patterns but this sort of information needs to be obtained through a more detailed survey and more clearly phrased questions.

[What is clear is that three storytellers working in Wales stressed the importance of the Welsh Writers in Schools subsidy to the viability of their work]

Direct Grant Applications

The survey only enquired about direct applications for personal projects, it did not address promoters or organisational grant applications. It did not enquire about failed grant applications.

10 people were successful in gaining project grants that supported 47 events (This needs to be seen in the light of 3,930 events...)

1 person secured funding for a very large residency that employed 8 storytellers to work in 8 schools in a London borough. The same person did 36 days worth of work for Creative Partnerships. Nobody else reported Creative Partnership projects, but this is unsurprising as that initiative only really got airborne late in the year from which most of these statistics were gathered (2002).

Comment

Time-consuming experiences of making grant applications that have met with rejection – often accompanied by excuses that reveal woefully inadequate understanding of the art, its aims and history, have caused many storytellers to give up applying for project grants. Organisations in receipt of revenue or core funding to pay for the administrative time involved with making applications are in a massively advantaged fund raising position.

Funds brought to Arts Activities from Other Sources

If one tallies a little information gleaned from this survey, it's possible to get a sense of what estimated funds this sample of 37 storytellers are bringing into England's cultural marketplace from non-artistic budgets. The figures from the respondent's educational work in England are as follows (see page 40 above):

£226,350 - from the English state education budget to arts activity.

£32,250 – from the private educational sector

Add to this the £152,000 estimated from site specific work (see page 64 above) and we have 37 artists bringing £410,600 into the cultural market (NB the calculations include travel and other expenses).

Multiply this by the conservative factor of 3 to get a sense of the fuller scale of storytelling activity in England and we have **£1,231,800** being brought by storytellers into the English cultural market. (As has been said before the real figure is likely to be two thirds of this again.)

Comment

Grant applications often ask for evidence of matched funding or funds from other sources. This is undeniable proof that the efforts storytellers are bringing huge funds towards cultural activity. We would like to see the Arts Council find some way of reciprocating this.

Literature Development Workers/Officers

The respondents were asked to indicate how many events had been carried out at the invite of literature development workers.

Data

9 storytellers worked with literature development officers in England, doing a total of 42 events

- 1 did 1 event
- 3 did 2 events
- 1 did 4 events
- 1 did 5 events
- 1 did 10 events
- 1 did 16 events

[1 worked with one officer in Wales on one event]

Comments

This exposes an extremely troubling figure: only 42 events were the result of partnerships with literature development workers/officers. 2 storytellers did more than half of this work between them and I suspect that the same few LDWs were involved with several of the other artists. 42 events out of the total of 3,938 events reported in this survey corresponds to just over 1%... put another way, 99% of the work from this sample was achieved without the assistance of those whose professional remit includes supporting live literature. Regrettably, I suspect that this is an accurate reflection of the national picture.

Given the huge funding that has flowed into creating the infrastructures that uphold literature development, these figures bear sad witness to the LDW's collective failure to recognise storytelling as an integral aspect of live literature. Their Arts Council funded, National Association for Literature Development, (www.nald.org) has 203 professional members. It claims to be 'Collecting the Evidence' and 'Leading the Thinking'. Here is some evidence and I would ask them to think.

Literature development workers need to reflect on the primary relationship of orality to literacy and of storytelling to live literature. This lack of an awareness of the need for understanding must be due in part to a decade of equivocal leadership from both the ACE literature department and from their professional association.

In 2002 – to celebrate 20 years of storytelling revival, The Crick Crack Club held a major weekend conference in an East-End music hall. It was an advocacy event specifically designed to give literature development workers/officers an insight into the many dimensions of storytelling. Despite months of notice, only 4 came and of them, only one had been able to make the time to attend the whole event... Thankfully many storytellers, enthusiasts and members of the general public gave their support. (And an anthology of startling papers awaits publication – when time can be bought to complete the editing). To my knowledge only two of England's literature officers have ever attended the Beyond the Border Festival, one briefly in 1994 and the other in 2003. I don't think any LDWs have ever attended this festival yet it was born of the centrepiece of the bid that won the original UK Year of Literature contest in the days when the Arts Councils of England and Wales were still one.

Something is remiss here.

Standards in Storytelling

In 12 months the work of 37 artists in England and Wales is reaching 338,983 people through 3,938 engagements. Multiplied by a factor of 3 to get a very conservative sense of the scale of storytelling in England and Wales we get 111 artists reaching 1,020,531 people through 11,814 engagements in one year...

But of course quantity of work does not necessarily correspond to quality of work.

In all art forms the skills of practitioners range from inspired to competent, to poor. It is well understood that in, say, acting or poetry writing, a vast pyramid of talent supports the 10-15% of superlative artists. Professional storytelling is no different, but as it is currently a completely unregulated art form there really is a very great range of differing standards – some work is truly accomplished, verging on genius whilst much other work is plain or woolly. In poetry there is at least a convention that reputable publishing houses endorse quality: in the world of storytelling, festivals and club promoters must take it upon themselves to play a comparable role.

A storyteller can set his or herself up by simple self-declaration. In a locality where there is little competition they may find themselves rapidly in demand particularly as there is a ready and viable market in education. Unless their patrons have seen other storytellers they may not have yardsticks by which to make comparisons. Sometimes storytellers that some might judge as being barely competent, find they can make worthwhile careers... In contrast there are some extremely gifted and exciting storytellers who may be doing far less work than they should be doing because their strengths do not lie in administration and self-marketing. (And, of course, the reverse applies in equal measure!)

A lack of knowledge about what constitutes best practice in professional storytelling, means that the field is also exposed to exploitation by opportunists – such as struggling writers, actors and children’s entertainers who, wanting to add a money earning string to their bow, attend a couple of workshops and then put themselves on the market. Poor work, and in particular boring or whimsical work, can harm, and indeed has harmed, the reputation of the profession. This means that exemplary public showcasing is essential for raising standards (One mustn’t forget that ‘the public’ can include teachers, librarians and others who are in a position to bring storytellers to the people they work with).

The raising of standards does not imply standardisation; in fact it means quite the opposite. To hold the attention of a paying audience of strangers for two hours requires a great deal of experience, skill and talent. As has already been said, mastery can take ten years (and more) to acquire. When it emerges it is accompanied by a

tremendous impression of individuality. The charge of ‘sameness’, implying dull standardisation, which is sometimes deservedly levelled at some storytellers, may lie in the fact that they are still struggling to find their way. The cocoons of wildly different butterflies look the same.

The distinguishing feature of an authentic storyteller – whether professional or amateur – is his or her repertoire. It is something that takes years to develop and is something that cannot be faked. Such is their burning love for a psychic material sourced way beyond the limits of the individual imagination, that the best storytellers dedicate their lives to becoming living repositories of (for the most part) a common heritage of traditional tales. You know you’re with such a person when they can barely open their mouth but a story jumps out – and their spirit becomes infectious.

To give examples of what this can mean, in the professional tradition, the 24-year-old Central Indian Pandvani singer, Ritu Verna, carries within her slight 5’ frame the entire Mahabharata – this narrative, were it to be written down, would be 18 times as long as the Bible; the aged Scots traveller, Duncan Williamson, Britain’s national living treasure of the fireside tradition bearers, really does know two thousand stories (about ten times the complete Grimm’s collection).

The Arts Council’s declared aim to support artistic excellence commits it to making value judgements when awarding grants and to be accountable for those decisions. There is no democracy in the gifting of talent. Therefore the issue of standards cannot be evaded if there is to be growth in the awareness of what constitutes excellence in professional storytelling. It behoves Lottery and Arts Council decision makers to make efforts to identify expert assessors who are seriously interested in understanding this art form according to its own terms and needs.

The Public Image of Storytelling

The primary concern of most good storytellers is content, so storytelling may have an image problem in a society that, when set against conditions in the developing world, is pathetically enslaved to marketing and the whims of fashion. Off-the-record conversations with members of the National Association for Literature Development reveal that many storytellers do themselves, and the general image of storytelling, little good by readily conforming to the stereotype of the storyteller as a time-warped ex-hippy who wears rainbow sweaters, embroidered waistcoats and crushed velvet loons in order to peddle nostalgia to children, etc... And though one might mutter that in an ‘advanced society’ we surely aim neither to pre-judge people by appearance nor to categorise and dismiss – (tolerance and understanding come through opening and listening) – concern with image is a factor in the present game of life. So, to simply gain freedom to function, it would make strategic sense for storytellers to pay more attention to the semiotic side of self-presentation. That said, one look at the average earnings of most storytellers reveals that they have very limited resources to pay for developing anything but the most basic self produced marketing materials. They find

it very difficult to produce print materials that stand well alongside brochures produced by publishing houses and core funded arts organisations.

PART TEN: Summary of Survey Findings

These figures relate to the year 2002 and are based on the work of 37 professional storytellers in England and Wales. There may be as many as **350 professional/semi-professional storytellers in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.***

ENGLAND TOTALS:

The work of 37 storytellers:	Total Events	Total Audience
Education and Library Events	1713	207877
Community Events	525	14496
Public Events	1253	76305
TOTAL	3491	298678

To arrive at a *very* conservative estimate of how much work is being done in England, multiply the above figures by a factor of 3, i.e. the work of 111 storytellers. (The reality may be as high as 2/3rds again.)

WALES TOTALS:

The work of 7 storytellers:	Total Events	Total Audience
Education and Library Events	320	31840
Community Events	17	609
Public Events	110	9050
TOTAL	447	41499

COMBINED ENGLAND AND WALES TOTALS:

The work of 37 storytellers:	Total Events	Total Audience
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* There is a small discrepancy between these figures and the ones given on page 31. The slightly larger figures above are the result of tallying numbers event by event. Several respondents had made small errors in their own calculations.

Education and Library Events	2033	239717
Community Events	542	15105
Public Events	1363	85355
TOTAL	3938	340177

RELATIVE GEOGRAPHICAL WORK SPREAD:

According to the most recent census (2001) the UK population was 58,789,194

England's population was 83.6% of this: 49,138,831

Scotland's population was 8.6% of this: 5,062,011

Wales' population was 4.9% of this: 2,903,085

N Ireland's population was 2.9% of this: 1,685,267

The population of London was 7,172,000. This is nearly one and a half times the entire population of Scotland and is on a par with the entire population of Sweden. It represents 14.6% of the English population

28.3% of the English population live in rural districts: about 13.9 million people. The population of London is more than half the entire rural population of England.

ENGLAND:

The work of 37 storytellers:	Total Events	Total Audience
Rural Events	848	68486
Suburban/Small Town Events	1103	94399
Inner City Events	1278	104397

WALES:

The work of 7 storytellers:	Total Events	Total Audience
Rural Events	123	14712
Suburban/Small Town Events	140	17350

Inner City Events	61	8527
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COMBINED ENGLAND AND WALES GEOGRAPHICAL DIVISIONS:

The work of 37 storytellers:	Total Events	Total Audience
Rural Events	971	83198
Suburban/Small Town Events	1243	111749
Inner City Events	1339	112924

NB These figures do not include work in independent schools, tertiary education, private events, training or the corporate sector

INTERNATIONAL WORK:

The work of 7 Storytellers:	Total Trips	Total Audience
International Trips	26	8320

PART ELEVEN: Conclusions & Recommendations

The Need for Subsidy

One of the two critics of this survey initiative wrote expressing the misgiving that it might *'do more harm than good.'* The author cited several sets of statistics, similarly gathered, which were presented to various arts boards and councils in attempts to get support for folk festivals and folk clubs. He warns: *'The result was that Arts Council officers replied that, since these folk events were so successful without Arts Council funding, surely it was best they just make their own way. If presented with evidence that most storytelling activity takes place without Arts Council money, this fact may convince them they need not give anything at all to storytelling.'* I appreciate the caution, however I have confidence that this is far from a 'like with like' comparison.

I have argued extensively elsewhere that the origins, aims and workings of the *professional* storytelling revival in England have little to do with the folk music scene and that comparisons are generally unhelpful – tending to obscure and muddle. To highlight an immediate and obvious point of non-comparison, the folk revival is able to support a significant live economy because a well established product, namely commercial recordings (CDs etc) *pre-market* the artists through advance purchase and radio play etc. They also provide the artists with an alternative income to live work. Folk music is mainly experienced via a major medium that has no serious equivalent in storytelling.

It is not contentious to assert that the historical roots of the storytelling revival in England are urban, multi-cultural and based in the worlds of literature, education and performance (the documentation exists). *These are all fields in which the necessity for subsidy is already well recognised.* Indeed, as mentioned in the introduction, the Arts Council have given a verbal commitment that storytelling falls within their literature department's brief. Storytelling has many extraordinarily rich roles to play for all sectors of society at all ages. It is entertaining and at the same time, subtly and deeply educational.

The evidence presented above paints a picture of versatile, hard working and dedicated artists constantly on the move. As freelance workers they have little option but to say 'yes' to every job that comes their way. Financial survival obliges these storytellers to work on wildly differing orders of narrative for an extraordinary diversity of audiences, in an astonishingly challenging range of different contexts. This is a very uncomfortable hand to mouth existence with modest financial rewards (cf pages 24 and 31 above). The work tends to be highly seasonal – often leading to the unhelpful situation of overworked and exhausted artists 'flying on autopilot' in the late autumn – followed by little or no work in the first three months of the following year. As the figures have also demonstrated most of this work is invisible and unacknowledged, which can lead some to crises of self-esteem.

After successful storytelling sessions, be they in a library, museum, heritage site, environmental centre, teacher training college, pub-club, theatre, wedding reception,

elderly day care centre, after-school club, wherever... people of every shape, size and description approach storytellers to say: ‘That was great! Where can we hear more?’ And here’s the rub, the storytellers cannot tell them. They cannot tell them with confidence how to access more storytelling – let alone storytelling of guaranteed quality. They can hardly point them to a single venue that promotes public storytelling for adults or families on anything like a regular and frequent basis and they cannot point them to a magazine or web-site that has comprehensive, up-to-date, accurate information about what is happening. As I’ve said, there are venue shaped holes at the heart of storytelling.

The statistics gathered from this small, but representative sample of storytellers demonstrate clearly that storytelling holds its own as an art form alongside the full range of other live literature activities, yet when comparisons are made with the resources available to them, the odds are stacked unfairly against it.

The long-standing funding imbalance between storytelling and the revenue funding granted to other literature organisations needs to be redressed in order for the achievement of storytelling to be given the respect, credit and dignity it deserves. To avoid mistakes, funding must be offered as the result of a genuine and subtle understanding of the art, its potentials and its needs.

To release those potentials, the storytelling revival needs immediate revenue funding to be awarded to a number of organisations to make up for *years* of neglect and to acknowledge and reward a sustained effort that is internationally admired.

To bring this work into the open, rightly celebrate the best practice and above all make it truly and equally accessible to all, there is an urgent need for public arts subsidy to be targeted on the development of storytelling’s core administrative and marketing frame-work in accordance with a well thought through national plan. *This should be the first priority rather than simply funding dozens of one off, ephemeral projects.*

The emergence of deeply embedded touring circuits would follow from having administrators able to build up relationships with venue programmers and other clients in the educational and community arts sectors. Growing stability would allow some space and light to enter claustrophobic work patterns and allow artists to be free to be true to their own muses and daemon drives. Above all steady rhythms of work would allow apprenticeship systems to develop around those who have knowledge to transmit. Investment for the future is a priority.

Specific Funding Recommendations

The Arts Council’s officer with national responsibility for Storytelling, Adrian Johnson, recently made a recommendation in an article for NALD that *‘surely it is time for every Arts Council office to explore how each governmental region of the UK*

could at least support a dedicated 'Storytelling Development Worker' to be in place by 2008? In England, for example, this would amount to around 10 dedicated post holders. A modest level of growth. Dare I say – and with some sadness – that this suggestion typifies a great deal of the Arts Council's current cart before the horse thinking? It reveals a lack of trust in the artists themselves. The last thing storytelling needs is public funding being diverted towards the salaries of yet another layer of managers and consultants to mediate between artists and the public – particularly when there are already many salaried LDWs who should be doing this in the course of their daily duties.

If the Arts Council is really prepared to demonstrate a commitment to supporting storytelling then investment must be targeted on the creation of stable, *artist-lead* infrastructures to support and market it. (The Royal Shakespeare Company is lead by a theatre director with a back up administrative team etc...) In terms of the bigger picture, 10 administrators/marketing officers spread amongst 4 or 5 organisations in different regions would make a revolutionary difference and still represent what Adrian Johnson calls a 'modest level of growth'.

At present, storytellers carry out most of the administration and marketing of storytelling on a voluntary basis without professional support. They fit it in 'ad hoc', whilst struggling to make a daily living and pay their bills. What hope could there be for any true efficiency? Their administration ranges from club and tour organising, to mounting training sessions, maintaining mailing lists, information sharing, self marketing, mutual marketing, advocacy and making grant applications, etc. This work is not necessarily their forte – and why should it be? Some of the very best storytellers are more in demand than others (though not necessarily working as they would wish – to tell Beowulf, The Iliad, Russian fairy tales and East Anglian fen tales, all in one week is psychically stressful. Would that that artist could tour just one of those programmes for four days in a row, as theatre companies, dance troupes and musicians do!); as an ironic consequence, they are even less able to find time for effective administration and are thus caught up in a kind of wind blown chaos.

Given the diversity, reach and range of work already evidenced by this survey, how much more would be possible if a small number of key storytelling organisations were to be given offices, admin staff and proper marketing teams to help realise the visions of their artistic directors? Properly paid, competent, full-time administrators would free collective groups of artists to do what they do best: their art. Time and space would appear for storytellers to research, create and explore new work, new ways of working and new places – one project at a time; just as most artists are able to work in other performance disciplines. Structures would appear that allowed apprentices to receive proper and planned attention.

Above all, stable patterns of top quality work and display would permit existing audiences to consolidate and new ones to develop.

It really would be extremely unhealthy if Arts Council revenue funding for storytelling were to remain restricted to one organisation in one part of the country – a folk-style festival in a rural part of the West Midlands. At the very least, modest core funding should be *pro-actively* awarded to a number of diverse promoting and touring agencies freeing them to develop and demonstrate distinctive house-styles and areas of expertise. The bestowing of unsolicited funding to Festival at the Edge and Apples and Snakes has established clear precedents for such funding interventions.

The alchemical adage, ‘To make gold you must first have gold’, holds as true in the subsidised arts world as anywhere else. With revenue funding these *organisations* would be able to afford to spend time seeking funds from other sources, build partnerships, professionalise the presentation of their public image and grow. (Many charities and funding bodies prefer to support organisations rather than individuals.)

The funding of distinctive groups with reputations for excellent work and proven track records would also mean that the responsibility for standard setting, training, accreditation and endorsement could thus be pushed an arms length away from the Arts Council. This is very important – and would be a clear demonstration of trust.

The Arts Council already supports numerous national information service providers and discussion/advocacy groups, such as The Poetry Society and The National Association for Literature Development, NAWA etc. It also intervened in setting some of these up. The Society for Storytelling should immediately be given professional administrators so that it can slash its membership fees and be transformed into an effective, *pro-active collector and disseminator of comprehensive information* – rather than remain an expensive source of arbitrary information, lacking the full hearted support of many of the most senior storytellers. (If it were deemed a worthy organisation offering good value for money, then prominent storytellers would sing its praises from the edge of the stage and quadruple its membership in six months.) The SfS has no business other than much needed information dissemination, advocacy and providing a forum for debate. It does not have a mandate for promoting performance events or providing training as these involve value judgements that would compromise its democratic base (which is why other independent promoting organisations need simultaneous funding). The SfS should be helped to become no more – and no less – than a fabulous information-clearing house.

The Arts Council may find the idea of investing in infrastructure stabilisation ‘unsexy’ – but were it to remove the frame-works from the art forms it already funds there would be a wholesale collapse of cultural economic-ecosystems. All that storytellers are asking for is equal treatment, the redress of an imbalance and the levelling of the live literature playing field. It is not a question of ‘robbing Peter to pay Paul’, but a question of finding the willingness to fight for an overall increase in the literature department’s budget to accommodate this. Strong arguments and evidence exist and can be readily gathered.

Perhaps the most important and far reaching consequence of supporting the infrastructures of storytelling – and thus raising the public profile – would be the elevation of its status. It could then become a visible and attractive field for more artists from ethnic minorities to enter. It is generally difficult for artists from immigrant communities to justify entrance into the arts world because of its arbitrary economy. Musicianship, acting and authorship are known to offer the possibility of glamour and status... but it is a truly exceptional person who risks becoming a storyteller – what's that?



FINIS

20 Books Recommended for Further Reading

- ‘Masterworks of the Classical Haida Mythtellers’, 3 Volumes translated by Robert Bringhurst Publ Douglas & McIntyre 2001-2004
- ‘The Other Side of Eden’ Hugh Brody, Faber 2002
- ‘Italian Fairy Tales’ Italo Calvino, Pantheon 1980
- ‘The Growth of Literature’ N. Chadwick and H. Munro, 3 Vols Cambridge University Press 1934
- ‘Peasants Tell Tales: the Meaning of Mother Goose’ essay by Robert Darnton in ‘The Great Cat Massacre’, Penguin 1985
- ‘The Powers of the Word’, Rene Daumal
- ‘Rasa’, Rene Daumal, trans LL Levi, New Directions, 1982
- ‘The Implied Spider: Politics and Theology in Myth’, Wendy Doniger, Columbia University Press, 1998
- ‘The Voice that Thunders’ - collected essays, Alan Garner, Harvill 1999
- ‘Conference of the Birds: the Story of Peter Brook in Africa’, John Heilpurn, revised ed 1989
- ‘Winter Pollen’ - collected essays, Ted Hughes, Faber 1994
- ‘Traditional Storytelling Today’ ed Margaret Read Macdonald, Fitzroy Dearborn, 1999
- ‘Mirror of the Marvelous’ Pierre Mabilie, trans J. Gladding, Inner Traditions Press 1998
- ‘Orality and Literacy’, Walter J Ong,
- ‘The Language and Lore of School Children’, Iona and Peter Opie, Oxford University Press
- ‘Indian Fairy Tales’ A.K Ramanujan, Pantheon 1988
- ‘Technicians of the Sacred’ ed Jerome Rothenberg, University of California Press revised ed 1992
- ‘Symposium of the Whole: a Range of Discourse toward an Ethnopoetics’ ed Jerome Rothenberg, University of California Press, 1983
- ‘What the Bee Knows’ - collected essays, PL Travers, Aquarian Press, 1989
- ‘The King and the Corpse’ - collected essays, Heinrich Zimmer, Bollingen

Acknowledgements

I would like to heartily thank the artists who took the time to complete and return the survey. Many commented that they found it an illuminating exercise and I hope that they will have found the results equally interesting. I would also like to thank those that communicated their apologies as well as those that began to complete forms but couldn't finish because of time constraints. The original completed forms have been lodged with the Society for Storytelling archive.

Further Information and Feedback

To obtain further electronic copies of this report and of the original survey questionnaire and also of the completed excel spreadsheets, contact me via e-mail at the address below.

I would also welcome any feedback on this survey though I can't promise to enter into a correspondence.

Ben Haggarty

Please e-mail your comments to: epicstory2@aol.com