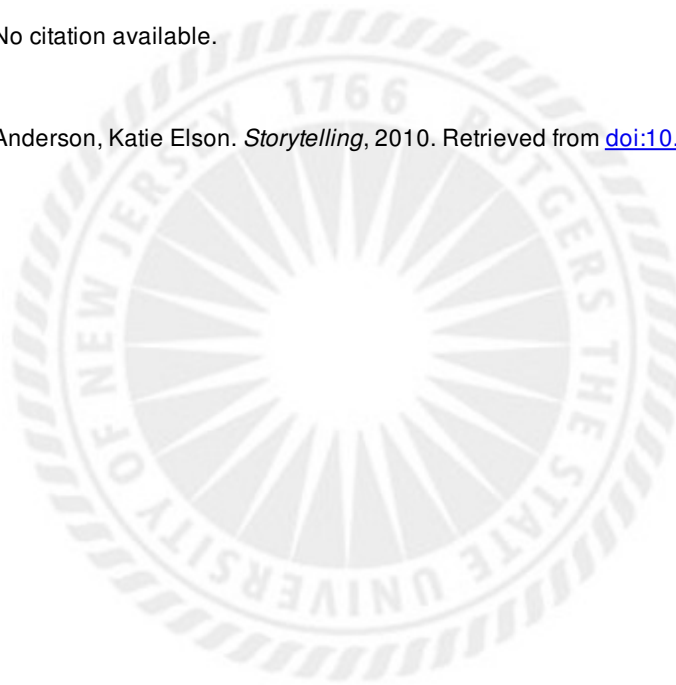


Storytelling

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Chapter 28- 21st Century Anthropology: A Reference Handbook
Edited by H. James Birx

Storytelling

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Once upon a time before words were written, before cultures and societies were observed and analyzed there was storytelling. Storytelling has been a part of humanity since people were able to communicate and respond to the basic biological urge to explain, educate and enlighten. Cave drawings, traditional dances, poems, songs, and chants are all examples of early storytelling. Stories pass on historical, cultural, and moral information and provide escape and relief from the everyday struggle to survive. Storytelling takes place in all cultures in a variety of different forms. Studying these forms requires an interdisciplinary approach involving anthropology, psychology, linguistics, history, library science, theater, media studies and other related disciplines. New technologies and new approaches have brought about a renewed interest in the varied aspects and elements of storytelling, broadening our understanding and appreciation of its complexity.

What is Storytelling?

Defining storytelling is not a simple matter. Scholars from a variety of disciplines, professional and amateur storytellers, and members of the communities where the stories dwell have not come to a consensus on what defines storytelling. Scholars tend to place storytelling within the broader topic of folklore, a term also surrounded by debate, but generally agreed to be the beliefs, practices and tales of a people which are passed on primarily through oral tradition. The complexity of defining storytelling continues with debates regarding the meanings of the

words *story* and *teller*. There is agreement that storytelling, in its simplest form, is the act of communicating an event (or sequence of events) to an audience, using words and/or physical movement.

This simplified explanation of storytelling does not capture the interactive, cultural, and living essence of storytelling. It is necessary to look at more details which include the origin of the story (oral or written), the Who, What, When, Where and Why of the performance, the type of story, and the emotional and cultural implications of the storytelling event. The finer points of these details are debated and discussed among those attempting to provide a definition of storytelling.

Traditional vs. Non-Traditional

Much of the debate in the definition of storytelling stems from the acceptance or denial of the different types of storytelling. Some scholars accept only the traditional forms of storytelling, the strictly oral; i.e.: non written communication of a story that has always been passed down orally, never written. The traditional forms of storytelling are considered to be the unadulterated forms of oral tradition, stories shared within a group passed down through the generations by people regarded as experts in the telling of the event. The stories from this tradition are culturally significant, often religious or spiritual and deeply tied to the traditions of the community. In traditional storytelling there is usually a trained, experienced narrator, or professional storyteller. Examples of traditional storytelling are myths and legends. Non-traditional forms of storytelling can be told by non-professionals, embrace different methods of delivery and present stories that are not necessarily only oral traditions. Contemporary examples of non-traditional storytelling are urban legends, personal narratives or vernacular storytelling, and original stories crafted by a storyteller.

Oral vs. Written

The conflict between oral and written is often at the heart of the struggle to define storytelling. Purists will claim that storytelling is the continuance of oral tradition only, excluding any texts that have been written. This exclusion however is difficult, considering many ancient oral traditions have been written down in order to be preserved and were never studied in their actual oral form. The only way that modern culture has access to such oral traditions as the epic poem, *The Odyssey* is through its written version. Walter Ong explores the relationships between oral and written in his book *Orality and Literacy*, which is often cited by current scholars who seek to present distinctions between oral and written storytelling. These scholars have explored and presented terms such as oral literature, narrative literature and literary tradition to distinguish the oral from the written. Folklorist Jack Zipes (1994) points out that oral tradition was not replaced by literary tradition, but rather there is evidence that the literary traditions are influenced by the oral tradition. Stith Thompson (1951) also speaks about the difficulty of separating written and oral traditions in his book. A purely oral tradition in storytelling not only excludes written traditions but also new overlooks new technologies. It is generally agreed that simply reading a text is not storytelling. However, taking that text and breathing life into during a performance is considered by some to be as valid a storytelling event as recounting an oral legend.

Formal vs. Informal

Descriptions of storytelling are usually of formal events such as bard singing an epic poem or an elder teaching children their creation story. Early scholars and some professional storytellers will emphasize such formal events in their discussions of storytelling. However there also exists the no less important act of informal storytelling. A formal storytelling event takes

place when there is an audience that has gathered for the specific purpose of listening to a story. The storyteller has selected specific stories to share with the expected audience. Examples of formal storytelling include epic poems performed in theater, elders in a community sharing experience with the younger members, teachers telling stories in the classroom, campfire ghost stories and storytelling festivals. Informal storytelling is the kind of storytelling that takes place everyday with everyone. Everyone is a storyteller in informal storytelling. Recounting the day's events at the dinner table, passing an urban legend on to a friend, sharing a family memory are examples of informal storytelling.

Historically, the descriptive details of storytelling fell to the folklorists and anthropologists, who were the greatest contributors to the earliest scholarly studies on storytelling. German folklorists Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm, British folklorist Andrew Lang and American folklorists Stith Thompson were some of the first to look at folklore and storytelling academically. It is important however that the definitions provided by individuals from other disciplines (art, library science, history, psychology, religious studies) and the storytellers themselves are not ignored. Such definitions emphasize the emotional, artistic and professional element of storytelling. It is best to consider all of the details when working towards a definition of storytelling.

The National Storytelling Network broadly describes storytelling as “an ancient form and a valuable form of human expression”. They acknowledge that the term storytelling can be used in a variety of ways, acknowledging the vast something or other of the something. Their website (www.storynet.org) describes their definition of storytelling as containing the following five elements: interactive, uses words, uses actions, presents a story and encourages the active imagination of the listeners.

While previous definitions of storytelling tend to be narrow and biased towards the discipline conducting the research, current attempts such as from the National Storytelling Network are more inclusive. Today's definitions are careful to acknowledge that all definitions of storytelling are relevant. Recent scholarship on storytelling does not attempt to dispute previous definitions, but instead embraces the different theories for a complete interdisciplinary understanding of the term. Storytellers Carol Birch and Melissa Heckler (1996) attempt to bridge the "philosophical, professional, academic, regional and cultural divides" (p.9) that take place when defining storytelling. According to them, one of the most challenging aspects of the study of storytelling is in respecting all of the different models that are presented by the various groups who study and analyze storytelling.

One of the ways this challenge is met is by approaching the definition of storytelling by focusing on its function and history, emphasizing less of the aesthetic elements and more on the role within society. These functions of storytelling include education (of children and adults), socialization, validation, explanation, passing on of historical and societal information and entertainment. Understanding why people tell stories and what purpose the act of storytelling serves is an important part of defining the term. The most widely read and accepted functional study is William Bascom's (1965b) "Four Functions of Folklore". These four functions are summarized in Leeming and Sader (1997) as providing escape from reality, validating ones culture, educating and maintaining conformity. Other functional approaches include Margaret Read MacDonald's (1999) "Fifty Functions of Storytelling" and Robert Georges (1969) "Towards an Understanding of Storytelling Events".

In order to accommodate the different types of storytelling presented in this chapter, the term storytelling will be broadly defined as the culturally important act of presenting an event or

series of events, true or fictional, through some form of communication; oral, written or visual to an audience that is or is not present at the time of the presentation. Storytelling is a vital part of all cultures past, present and future. The details as to how and why it got that way continues to be debated and discussed.

Origins of Storytelling

Discussions regarding the history of storytelling frequently present the statement that storytelling has been called the oldest and the newest of the arts. Individual authors' interpretations of this vary, but it is apparent that storytelling has been around since humans have been able to communicate. In pre-literate societies, oral tradition and visual was the only way to pass on important historical and cultural information. The act of passing this information on to the next generation in songs, chants, pictures, dances, and stories is storytelling. As with the definition of storytelling, the theories on the origins of storytelling vary according to scholars of different disciplines. Each discipline focuses on specific theories and provides evidence to support them. Storyteller Ann Pellowski (1990) provides a nice summation of the many theories addressing the cultural, historical and psychological significance of storytelling. These include the theories that storytelling emerged from a basic human need to share their experience with others, a need to provide entertainment, a need for beauty and form and a need to record history and social norms.

This need for beauty and form was met by talented and skilled individuals who could provide an aesthetic performance of the events. In the early days of storytelling, everyone was a storyteller, individuals chanting, singing, and telling stories within family units and within their communities. It is theorized that as time went on, some people became better at telling stories and honed their skills to become professionals. These talented professionals are the earliest

examples of traditional storytellers, known by different names worldwide. Parkinson (2009) presents descriptions of some, including bard (Europe), seanachie (Ireland), ashik (Turkey) and griot (West Africa). These individuals were charged with preserving history and culture while also entertaining through formal storytelling events. A vital element of society, storytellers were held in high regard by their communities. The function of traditional storytellers has changed with the advent of written history, but these individuals continue to be necessary in order to educate and entertain.

“Tell me a story”

When discussing storytelling, the word story is generically used to describe the event being communicated. These events have also been called folk narratives, oral literature or more specifically by their individual classifications such as myth, legend or folktale. In general, use of the term story is inclusive, though perhaps not all together accurate. The Oxford English Dictionary defines *story* as, “a narrative, true or presumed to be true, relating to important events and celebrated persons of a more or less remote past; a historical relation or anecdote.” This definition describes legends and myths, but it is at odds with the description of fairy tales and other tales, which are not always presumed to be true and do not always relate important events or celebrated persons.

The term narrative is often used when discussing storytelling, so exploring the word narrative may lead to a better understanding of the meaning of story. The OED definition for narrative is “an account of a series of events, facts, etc., given in order and with the establishing of connections between them”. This statement appears to describe the events however more flexibility is necessary in order to allow for modifications in the order of events and connections. The definitions provided by the OED do not sufficiently capture the essence of the word “story”

in storytelling. The story in storytelling is alive, changing each time it is told, depending on the teller, the audience, the context and the intent. This modification through time and culture is a significant aspect of the definition of story. The adaptability of a story to the needs and intent of a storyteller and an audience is vital to the nature of storytelling.

The dictionary definitions do not capture all of the meaning of the word story within the context of storytelling. In some cases, the word folktale is used in lieu of story. Used in this context, the term folktale is used to describe any type of story. This however leads to some confusion as the term folktale is also often used to describe a specific type of narrative.

American folklorist and anthropologist William Bascom (1973) proposed the term “verbal art” to refer to subcategory in folklore that included myth, legends, fables, riddles, and tales. This term however was never widely adopted. The word story remains the most accepted way to describe the traditional and non-traditional narratives performed by a storyteller,

Traditional: Märchen and Sagen

One of the first documented attempts at cataloging and classification of stories was by Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm of Germany. The Brothers Grimm or Grimm Brothers have become synonymous with children’s fairy tales, with much credit given to them for their compilation and presentation of traditional stories. In their publication, *Kinder-und Hausmärchen (Children’s and Household Tales)* the brothers divide their collected stories into two categories, Märchen and Sagen. Märchen can best be described as enchanted tales, or fairy tales. While not all Märchen include actual fairies, the characters and events in these stories are magical, involving the supernatural and take place in mysterious realms. Sagen is the term used to define stories that are historical, taking place in the actual past, with mostly human characters. The closest English translation for this term is legend and should not be confused with the word saga, which is used

to specifically refer to the legends of Scandinavian cultures. Märchen is still widely used today to refer to any sort of tale that involves the supernatural and is used interchangeably with fairy tale, folk tale, magic tale, and fable. Legend has generally replaced use of the term Sagen to refer to the traditional, historical stories of a culture.

As others followed in the footsteps of the Grimm Brothers, more categories and sub-categories were developed to classify the different types of stories that were encountered in the field. Some stories did not fit neatly into the Grimm Brother's categories and needed their own place. One such type of story is myth, which can be thought of as a combination of märchen and sagen, as it is a historical, heroic story with magical creatures and a supernatural element.

The challenge of assigning stories to specific classifications was taken on by those who sought to collect, classify and analyze them. These individuals were the earliest known folklorists. In the early 1900's Antti Aarne, a Finnish folklorist wrote, *The types of the folktale; a classification and bibliography*. Aarne assigned a type number to the tales, attempting to classify the known stories of the time. In 1932, Aarne's work was updated by American folklorist Stith Thompson and published as *Motif-index of folk-literature; a classification of narrative elements in folk-tales, ballads, myths, fables, medieval romances, exempla, fabliaux, jest-books, and local legends*. The update to Aarne's classic work included further clarification of the type by looking at the individual elements of the story (location, characters, and lessons) along with the story as a whole. Each recurring narrative theme or motif of a tale was classified and assigned a motif number. It was in this classification of stories that the earliest scholars began to see similarities in the oral traditions around the world, prompting further scholarly study of the stories within a culture's folklore.

The classification of stories continues to challenge scholars today, especially with the emergence and discovery of new non-traditional stories. William Bascom (1965a) proposed use of the term “prose narrative” to describe a category within verbal art that included three traditional types of stories, legend (sagen), folktale (märchen) and myth. Terms such as fairy tale, fable, saga, tall tale, animal tale, hero tale, and epic can generally be assigned to one of these three categories, though not all will agree with these distinctions. Some non-traditional stories such as urban legends are also found within these headings, but other non-traditional stories such as personal narratives require their own category.

Legend

While there is no direct translation of the Grimm Brother’s classification Sagen, the English word that best describes the meaning is legend. The word legend has its roots in the Greek and Latin words for “to gather, to read”. The direct translation of the German word “sagen” is “to say”. The combination of these concepts results in the basic idea of storytelling itself: gathering, reading and saying. Earliest use of the word “legend” was in reference to the lives of Christian saints, which were written down, but shared orally and considered to be true. Through time however, use of the term legend began to mean the unbelievable or impossible, which is not an accurate description. In describing the events of individuals in present space and past time, legends are considered to be the most historical and believable type of story.

Legends may be considered the most historical type of story but it is important to note that they are not history. They are historical in nature because they are assumed to be true, even if they are not verifiable. Legends take place in a specific time and location in the present world, unlike the supernatural worlds of other story types. The characters in legends are real people and true historical figures, but the events are not always true to history. The characters in legends can

be common folk and unnamed individuals or specifically named kings and heroes. The events, while not historically accurate are considered to be real events in the sense that they are believable and plausible. Common themes in legends are the struggle against evil and super human feats of courage, strength and intellect. Legends are localized, deeply tied in with the religion and culture of a region. Folklorists, anthropologists, psychologists and other scholars look to legends to help understand the history, religion and culture of the legends owners. Some examples of well known legends are those of King Arthur, Johnny Appleseed, Davy Crockett, and Jesse James. Epics and hero tales such as *The Anied* and *The Iliad* meet the criteria for legend and are often included under the broader label of legend.

Folktales

The Grimm Brothers used the term Märchen to refer to tales of wonder and magic. They distinguished these from the historical Sagen because these magical tales are accepted as fictional narratives of less than likely to be real events. A popular translation of Märchen is fairy tale, as many of the stories involve the actions of small magical beings known as fairies. The terms fairy tale and folktale have been used interchangeably. Specifically, only those tales that have fairies as characters are true examples of fairy tales, but the term has been broadened to include stories without small magical beings. The term folktale is used to refer to any traditional narrative, written or oral, that is assumed to be false. The broad term folktale includes tall tales, animal tales, fables and fairy tales. The characters in folktales are usually humans alongside animals (some with human traits), trolls, ogres, fairies, witches, goblins and other magical creatures. The events in a folktale take place “Once upon a time”, meaning that they do not refer to specific times and events as legends and myths do. This lack of specification is a key element of folktales allowing for the appearance of the same tale across many cultures. For example,

there are several instances of “Cinderella” stories in various cultures, each with its local customs and characters, all with the same underlying plot and theme. Folktales, unlike myths and legends are not intended to be taken as serious lessons on history and culture. Their main purpose is to entertain, though there are examples of folktales such as Aesop’s fables that teach morals and warn against bad behavior.

Myth

Myths, like legends are considered to be accounts of true events. Unlike legends, myths take place in a remote time and space. The events in myth occur in a world that exists well before the current world, or sometimes even in a different world. The characters in myth are supernatural, usually deities, animals, or humans with special powers. The word myth comes from the Greek *mythos*, “to make a sound with the mouth” and has been incorrectly used to describe untrue statements or beliefs. Despite their supernatural nature, myths are considered to be truths, in many cases, religious truths. Myths are deeply rooted in a culture’s belief system and tied to their spiritual and personal understanding of the world around them. Myths serve to celebrate origins, explain mysteries such as natural disasters, and soothe fears of the unknown. Well known examples of myths are the stories of the Greek and Roman gods and goddesses, and creation myths of North American Indians. Due to their religious and philosophical nature, myths have garnered the attention of scholars from those disciplines as well as folklorists and anthropologists. According to Segal (1996), anthropologists such as Frank Boas and Ruth Benedict have looked to myth to help explain cultures and their belief systems. While anthropologists and folklorists include myth within the realm of folklore, there are scholars who look at myth exclusively. These scholars consider themselves to be mythologists and their collection and study of myths to be mythology. Comparative mythology takes the extra step of

comparing myths of different cultures, looking for universal themes and origins. Important scholars of myth include E.B. Tyler, Max Müller, James Frazer, Joseph Campbell and Jaan Puhvel.

Non-Traditional: Urban and Contemporary

Non-traditional stories are those stories which are not considered to be a direct part of or descendent of a communities' oral tradition. They do not fit the description of myth, legend or folktale, though they may share characteristics with these traditional forms. More contemporary in nature, non-traditional stories transcend the traditional model of story, adding deeper dimensions to the definition of storytelling. Not all of the mentioned forms of non-traditional storytelling are recognized by everyone to be true forms of storytelling.

Urban Legend

Originally, stories collected by scholars came from the oral tradition of rural areas. In the first half of the twentieth century, scholars began to look to the stories being passed around in cities, both oral and written. Scholars referred to these as urban legends, contemporary legends or modern legends. The spread of urban legends takes place informally through casual conversation and different modes of media (newspaper, email, etc). Urban legends differ from traditional legends in that they lack specific names and times. The characters in the legends are often a "friend of a friend's friend", the place is not always specified and the time is the recent past. The details are vague, providing room for modification and adaptation. Like traditional legends these stories are presumed to be true or at least based on true events. The themes are cautionary usually warning and advising the listener, less historic and heroic than traditional legend.

Early folklorists took note of the commonalities in urban legends among different cultures. In the past, it was less likely that these stories had been spread from culture to culture and more likely that the common themes were universal. Today the origins of specific urban legends are less apparent as they are spread and modified so quickly in today's global communication via email, blogs, social-networking and video sharing sites. These legends are consistently changing and being adapted to the time and place they are transmitted. Examples of different variations across cultures have been explored by American folklorist Jan Harold Brunvard. His book, *The vanishing hitchhiker: American urban legends and their meaning* was the first of many in which he provides descriptions and variations of common urban legends, such as the vanishing hitchhiker, spiders in the hair, and murderer hiding in the trunk. The popularity of urban legends in the United States today is proven by the many books, websites and even television shows that attempt to collect, prove, and debunk the myriad of stories about that friend of a friend and their unfortunate experiences.

Personal Narrative

Personal narratives are the individual stories of a person or group of people. They are presented in both formal and informal settings and through diverse mediums. An example of formal personal narrative is StoryCorps (<http://www.storycorps.org>), "whose mission is to honor and celebrate one another's lives through listening". StoryCorps provides people with the means to record and archive the stories of themselves and their loved ones. Another example provided is the theatrical performance of one's life story, or vernacular storytelling (Preston, 2009). Informal personal narrative takes place everyday as part of daily conversation. Personal narratives are the true stories of real people, told by the actual person experiencing the events.

Telling one's own story is an important way to pass on family history, influence and teach younger generations and even provide therapeutic or psychological healing.

Organizational Stories

The power and influence of a good story has not gone unnoticed by organizations.

Organizational stories include stories told both within an organization and without. Stories within the organization serve to inspire, educate and help members make sense of the organization. The stories usually involve the leadership of the organization in day to day events. These stories can serve to validate the corporate culture through everyday examples as well as provide a personal side to management. Raspa (1999) provides an example where the CEO of IBM does not have his ID to gain entrance to a secure area. The guard refuses him entry, even though she recognizes him. He calmly waits while someone is sent to get his ID card. This story provides those within the organization with assurance and security as to the importance of doing their job, regardless of who is in front of them. Many organization stories have made their way into the public, such as the legend of how a post-it-note was created. Raspa (1999) describes how an employee was first denied permission to conduct the research, but ended up doing it on his own time. When the successful product was launched, he was eventually rewarded for his diligence. Stories like these help the public remember a product and at the same time provide positive reinforcement about the company that makes the product. Some instances of organizational stories can actually be considered advertisements. Another form of organizational story is when individuals in leadership positions use personal narratives to inspire others. The story of great success through hardship is often repeated by politicians and business leaders in

order to provide their audiences with an emotional connection and understanding of them personally.

Digital Stories

According to Fields and Diaz (2008), a digital story is a video that conveys a dramatic point, using any combination of images, video, music and voiceover. The majority of digital stories are personal narratives, as individuals and organizations use this technology in order to share events in their lives with a large audience. Digital stories are created by amateurs and professionals with a variety of tools. They take place formally and informally. In 1990, the Center for Digital Storytelling (www.storycenter.org) was founded in order to “assist people in using digital media to tell meaningful stories from their lives”. The Center teams with communities and organizations to create formal digital story events such as the Capture Wales project for the BBC (www.bbc.co.uk/wales/audiovideo/sites/galleries/pages/capturewales.shtml). The center also provides information and workshops for teachers who are interested in using digital stories in the classroom and for individuals interested in creating their own digital stories. Digital stories are active and some cases collaborated on by many individuals. This sense of community in creation continues in the presentation. Fields (2008) explains that a digital story allows people to connect socially beyond their communities with a diverse and vast audience. Vastly different from the early scholars’ ideas of traditional storytelling, digital storytelling provides a new dimension to the study of storytelling.

The study of storytelling

The first acknowledged scholarly work about stories is Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm’s 1812 publication, *Kinder und Hausmärchen*. Prior to this publication, the legends and lore of a culture were not highly regarded by intellectuals. There are previous examples of collectors of tales,

such as Charles Perrault who collected and transcribed children's fairy tales at the end of the 17th century. However these collections were thought to be childish and primitive and not given much scholarly attention.

The brothers Grimm are considered to be the first to introduce the field work research method involved in collecting stories. They did not distinguish between oral and written, all stories they encountered were transcribed. According to Kamenetsky (1992) there was some disagreement between the two when it came to presenting the collected stories. Jacob felt that the stories should remain unaltered, while Wilhelm wished to modify the stories to be more literary. The final outcome produced stories that were modified, yet remained loyal to the tradition of the story.

The Grimms's work inspired other scholars around the world to collect and present their country's stories. Early collectors include Alexander Afansyev (Russia), Joseph Jacobs (English), Peter Asbjornsen (Scandinavia), and Jeremia Curtin (Irish). As stories were collected and presented, scholars began to see similarities in themes. These themes were cataloged and classified in Aarne's *The Types of Folktales*. The collection of stories and other oral traditions (riddles, songs, etc) came to be known as folklore, and those who studied it were folklorists. By the beginning of the twentieth century, scholars had recognized connections between these stories and other academic disciplines such as mythology (already its own academic field), anthropology, and ethnography. In Leeming and Sable (1997) it is stated that British scholar Andrew Lang is attributed with being one of the first to recognize these connections. Other contributors to these connections include Vladimir Prop, James Frazer, Stith Thompson and Franz Boas.

The connection with anthropology in American academia is evident in the fact that much of the early study of folklore occurred within anthropology departments. According to Dorson (1972) The American Folklore Society, founded in 1888 was sustained by anthropologists. As anthropologists began to see storytelling as a vital part of the cultures they observed the study of folklore took on more prominence. Anthropologists such as Ruth Benedict and Franz Boas had previously explored the importance of myth in a culture. These studies were expanded to include all stories as valuable to culture. Dorson (1972) explains that Franz Boas encouraged his students to collect and analyze the oral literature of a culture. This action made the collecting of stories a valid part of anthropological field work. The connection between anthropology and folklore is also evident in the statement by Dorson (1972) that members of the English Folklore Society referred to themselves as anthropological folklorists.

For many years, folklore studies were included within anthropology departments and courses. It is stated in Leeming and Sader (1997) that American folklorist Stith Thompson taught the first folklore class at Indiana University. While also working on the update of Aarne's classification system, Thompson and his students began working towards the legitimization of folklore as a separate academic department. At the same time that folklore was working to establish itself in the world of academia, storytelling was becoming popular in libraries. According to Pellowski (1990), by 1927 most libraries had begun to conduct scheduled storytelling events. The storytelling in these events was based on the written word, with librarians being trained to make the stories come to life. These practitioners of storytelling in libraries and other public places are no less important to the field than the academics who research it. Librarians and storytellers such as Augusta Baker and her students Ellin Green, and Anne Pellowski have contributed a great deal to the discussion and definition of storytelling.

Brunvard (1976) explains that in the 1950's and 1960's folklorists began to flex their independence from anthropology departments. Folklorist Richard Dorson was a strong advocate for folklore as an independent discipline. He replaced Stith Thompson at the Indiana University where the first Department of Folklore was established in 1963. With the establishment of more departments and courses specific to folklore, academics from different backgrounds turned towards folklore. This led to different perspectives and new ideas and during the 1960's the traditional study of folklore was challenged.

Early scholars of folklore focused on the oral and written traditions of mostly non-literate cultures. The focus of these scholars was on the actual text of the stories. Collectors transcribed, and recorded the words, often ignoring the context of the story's performance. In the 1960's, American folklorist Richard Bauman introduced a method of looking at the text within its performance. Bauman (1986) encouraged his peers to include the teller, tale, audience and occasion in looking at the whole storytelling event. This method has been adopted by most researchers today. Descriptions of this method of fieldwork are included in Jaber Gubrium's *Analyzing Narrative Reality* and Bauman's *Story, Performance, and Event: Contextual Studies of Oral Narrative*.

As more recent studies focus on the performance and emotional aspects of the field, storytelling has moved from being a part of the field of folklore to being recognized by some as its own interdisciplinary field. Already appearing in library science departments due to the tradition of children's storytelling, courses on storytelling are now being taught in departments of communication arts, anthropology, folklore, liberal studies, education, media studies, information studies, theater, art, writing, psychology and even business and management.

Courses range from the history and theory of storytelling to its technique and practice. A few schools world-wide offer advanced degrees in the field.

The theory and practice of storytelling is not limited to academia. Professional storytellers have been learning and studying storytelling along with trained academics. Before there were professional organizations, storytellers passed their knowledge and skills through inheritance, guilds and apprenticeships. Today, storytellers learn the art in a variety of additional ways. Pellowski (1990) describes five ways in which storytellers are trained; through inherited function or office, apprenticeship by guild, apprenticeship by individual, school (formal and informal) and imitation. Storytellers perpetuate their art through workshops, festivals and publications and organizations. Publications include practical advice and how to guides on conducting effective storytelling events.

While American universities were trying to determine where folklore and storytelling should reside, professional storytellers were trying to keep the art of storytelling alive. According to storyteller Joseph Sobol (1999) a storytelling revival took place in the United States beginning in the 1970's. In response to this renewed interest in the art of storytelling, the first National Storytelling Festival took place in 1973 in Jonesborough, Tennessee. Two years after this successful festival, the National Association for the Perpetuation and Preservation of Storytelling was formed. Currently known as the National Storytelling Network (renamed in 1994) this organization is a place for storytellers to connect with each other in order to share, learn and improve the art of storytelling. Special interest groups within the network address contemporary uses of storytelling such as storytelling in organizations, uses of storytelling in higher education and therapeutic storytelling. Internationally, organizations are also addressing the importance of storytelling. In a global environment, more people are able to connect through the universal

human need to tell a story. The International Storytelling Center (www.storytellingcenter.net) focuses on the power of storytelling to elicit understanding among cultures and change in the world.

The power of storytelling is universally accepted by both academics and professionals. They do not however always agree on the theories, approaches and definitions of storytelling. As storytelling studies develop, the paths of academics and professionals are getting closer, bringing the emotional and spiritual to the theoretical and practical. There are examples of individuals who have been able to bridge the divide between the academic and professional world by teaching and performing. Helping to build this bridge is a journal that according to its inaugural issue (Sobol, 2004) seeks to “create a marriage of emotionally connected research and intellectually open, exploratory storytelling”. The editors and reviewers of *Storytelling, Self, Society: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Storytelling Studies* are both academics and professionals. Using both perspectives, the journal seeks to explore the applied fields of storytelling (organizational, educational, therapeutic, etc...) while remaining dedicated to the artistic and performance studies of traditional storytelling studies.

Current Trends

The importance and value of storytelling to all cultures has been proven by a number of researchers in a variety of areas. As a distinct part of every culture, it can be determined that storytelling is vital to all human civilizations. Traditionally the term storytelling has conjured up images of children’s bed-time stories, rural folk spinning yarns, epic poems and tribal chants. All of these images are indeed examples of storytelling, but storytelling is no longer limited to these images. Storytelling also takes place everyday in our own here and now. Storytelling occurs around us, influencing, teaching, healing, and entertaining us. Storytelling’s ability to enrapture

an audience has brought it the attention of politicians, corporations, therapists and governments. Current trends involve the application of storytelling in untraditional places and uncustomary ways.

Stories have always appeared everywhere in the day-to-day events. Now however, they are showing up in unconventional areas such as the corporate board room, advertisements, the campaign trail, and the therapists couch. Corporations are embracing storytelling as a means to not only define their culture for their workers but to present themselves in a positive way to their consumers. Advertisements for a variety of products include stories of the designers, creators, and users. Politicians have recognized the importance of storytelling to connect with audiences. Political candidates attempt to personalize their cause, providing personal narratives of their own, while also presenting the stories of their supporters and constituents. Therapists are acknowledging the healing powers of storytelling and story listening as people attempt to make sense of their surroundings.

Education has always been a function of storytelling and storytelling has always been a part of education. Current trends however place a stronger emphasis on the use of storytelling in education. While stories have been included in the classroom during story hours or free time, stories have begun to appear within the curriculum of all subjects. Educators, like politicians and corporations see storytelling as a tool to inspire and influence. Not only are stories being presented to students, but students are also learning how to create and share their own stories through digital storytelling.

As with many disciplines, current trends flow towards the new technology that is available. Storytelling and Storytelling Studies are no different as they spread to a digital platform. While non-traditional areas are embracing storytelling, storytellers, both amateur and

professional are embracing new technologies to continue to entertain and engage audiences in traditional and non-traditional ways.

Technology and the Future

Storytelling began as a way to educate and entertain using the current forms of communication available to humans, words and gestures. As communication technology developed, so did the nature of storytelling. With the written word came the ability to write down the stories and share them among other communities. As technologies grew, so too did the reach of storytelling. Stories have been spread over the phone, via fax, in emails, on radio, television, film and other forms of media. New forms of communication have allowed not only for the broader dissemination of stories but also for unique experiences for both the teller and the listener. Storytelling is no longer limited to the live performance of an event in front of a single audience. It is an understatement to say that the Internet has had a profound impact on storytelling. With the emergence of collaborative and communicative applications, known as Web 2.0 storytelling has reached more listeners and inspired more creators while also providing a connection between the two. The rise of technology has been blamed for a decrease in oral tradition and a loss of traditional storytelling. However, recent examples might argue that technology is strengthening both traditional and contemporary storytelling by making it available to a larger audience.

Audio

As soon as the technology became available, collectors of stories began to record the spoken words of storytellers. These recordings were used for the purposes of transcription and not often made available to other researchers or the public. Fortunately with the change in emphasis from text to context, researchers began to share the audio events. Audio has allowed

not only for improvements in fieldwork but it allows for the sharing of stories in the way in which they were intended. The act of storytelling implies that there is a listener. Audio technology allows for listeners even if they are not present at the time of the telling. Recordings and radio have been the usual technology for transmitting stories. Recently, podcasting has become a fixture in the storytelling world. Podcasting is similar to radio but without some of the limitations of radio. A listener is not limited to the time that the event is being produced, but has the option of listening at a more convenient time. Podcasts may be downloaded and used with mobile technologies. Podcasting is performed by professionals and amateurs, as recordings can be created easy to use and inexpensive software. Public libraries have embraced podcasting as a way to expand their storytelling services to a wider audience than just those who can attend the events in person. Podcasting has provided exposure to storytellers that were once known only locally, making their stories available globally.

Visual

Some of the earliest examples of storytelling are pictographs and drawings. Human were able to convey historical and culturally important events through pictures. Technology today has allowed for a return to this simple form of storytelling. Digital technology allows for the ease of capturing and sharing digital images. These images can be put together to form a story or sequence of events. Sites that provide global sharing of pictures, such as Flickr (<http://www.flickr.com/>) provide a forum for the telling of visual stories.

Video has had an influential role in both the study of storytelling and storytelling itself. With an emphasis on the entire context of a story performance, the addition of video technology to field work has greatly improved a researcher's ability to analyze an event. Digital stories, or videos depicting an event or sequence of events are by far the greatest example of the impact of

technology on storytelling today. The emergence of digital stories has provided a new dimension to the world of storytelling. Professional, amateur, traditional, non-traditional, formal and informal stories all meet in digital space, sharing audiences and crossing boundaries. Video sharing sites such as YouTube (<http://www.flickr.com/>) return storytelling to the age of when everyone was a storyteller, providing the platform for anyone to share their stories.

Social

Storytelling is social in nature, bringing together a teller and a listener and connecting them with a shared emotional experience. New technologies are providing more outlets for the sharing of information, emotions, ideas and day to day events. Social networking software, or applications that allow for the sharing of pictures, websites, articles, audio or video are in heavy use today. These applications do not just allow a person to share their stories; they also provide a forum for comment, questions and conversation. Social networks create communities and conversation, connecting the teller and listener as with traditional storytelling events. An interesting question for the future is whether the personal narratives told on blogs, micro-blogs and social networking sites can be defined as stories.

The Future

Storytelling is in a sense ageless and timeless. It has always been and is not likely to cease to be as long as human are able to communicate. The past is not forgotten simply because there is a new future. Instead, the future is built upon past stories and previous studies. The role of the storyteller may not be easily defined, but a there will always be a teller of stories. The definition of story may be disputed, but the fact that the events, however they are classified are important to the teller and the listener are not argued. The future of storytelling studies is moving

towards an interdisciplinary cooperation with storytelling professionals. Storytelling itself builds on its past while embracing technologies of the future. Specifically with the community driven and social technologies, storytelling will be shared, created and enjoyed by broader audiences than ever before. These social and sharing technologies offer an interesting outlook for the future of storytelling.

Summary

Telling and listening to stories brings a community together with a shared emotional event and helps them relate to each other and to the world around them. Along with the need to pass on vital cultural, historical and moral information, there is an innate human need to provide explanations for things that are not understood. While storytelling perpetuates cultural heritage and helps individuals make sense of the world, it also fulfills a basic biological need for entertainment and escape. The function of storytelling has not changed, but the means by which storytelling takes place has. Storytelling has moved from the formal tradition of oration by a professional to a three minute video of a ten year old interviewing their veteran grandfather for a school project. The importance of storytelling continues today as it did in the past. Future storytellers may find other ways to present narratives of events but their ancestors traditions of storytelling will always be a part of the event.

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