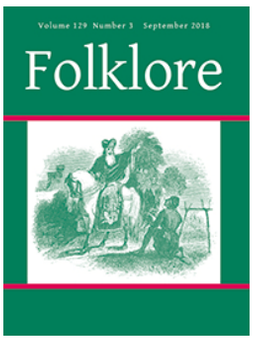

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THE DAVID BUCHAN MEMORIAL LECTURE, PRESENTED TO THE ELPHINSTONE INSTITUTE, THE UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN, 16 NOVEMBER 2017

Dream Some More: Storytelling as Therapy

Carl Lindahl

Abstract

This published version of the David Buchan Memorial Lecture (presented to the Elphinstone Institute at the University of Aberdeen) explores three manifestations of the interrelationships of storytelling, dreams, and healing. First, reports from the Colonial North American frontier suggest that *märchen* and tall tales performed therapeutic functions for the earliest European inhabitants of the Appalachian Mountains. Second, recent discoveries in neuroscience illuminate ways in which accomplished Appalachian narrators of the twentieth century combined plot and imagery to induce their listeners to transform traditional märchen into fantasy autobiographies and scripts for self-healing. Finally, survivor-to-survivor narration in the wake of massive disasters seems to heal in ways that both parallel and diverge from the healing techniques of folk fiction. Each of these narrative practices draws upon oral narration in an intimate setting to transform vulnerable members of the story-sharing community into 'overcomers'.

In the early 1970s, Maggie Hammons Parker of Pocahontas County, West Virginia shared a story recounting the earliest days of her family's history on the Appalachian frontier.[1] Her forebears settled in a place where only Native Americans had lived before. In her words,

> There was just … two families of the white people that lived there and all the others was Indians, and … they was an old Indian, he always come every day. They said after he got acquainted with em, he'd come every day and talk with em, and they liked that old Indian …
>
> They seemed like they was awful good people and good to em …
>
> And so, after a while, one of the Indians come, he told [my great-grandpa], … 'I had a dream last night … Always when we dream anything, our dreams has to come true.' He said, 'Now that's the way it goes with us' [Indians] …
>
> [Great-grandpa] had a gun, … awful nice gun. He wouldn't have took nothing for the gun, he said. And [the Indian] told him he dreamt about owning that gun. And so he couldn't do a thing but let [the Indian] … take the gun. He was afraid not to, I guess … Well, it pretty nigh killed him … and he didn't know what kind of plan to fall on to get his gun back.
>
> Finally … [after] a couple of weeks or more … he went over, he told em that he'd had a dream that night, and he said, 'I dreamt about owning my gun back and one of your ponies.'
>
> [The Indian] studied a while … before he said anything. At last he said, 'Take it, paleface, but dream no more.'
>
> And [my great-grandpa] took the gun and the pony. (Lindahl 2004a, 2: 607 and 609)

In this story, the Indians inhabit a world where dreams create waking reality—everything that enters your sleeping mind has to be true. The only way to keep your dreams from shaping your world is not to dream at all.

But in this traditional tale (several versions have been recorded in the United States[2]) it is not only the dream, but at least as much the *story*, that shapes reality. 'Whatever we dream comes true. Last night I dreamed that you gave me your gun': there is a rudimentary story here, a beginning—and before the narrator utters her closing words, we know how the second act of this little tale will end. The Indian tells his story to make his dream come true, and then Great-grandpa does the same: each telling bears real and powerful consequences.

It is through telling his story that the dreamer's dream becomes real. In fact, in the mechanics of this tale, it is the words that make the dream come true. The Indian has to tell his dream to make it come true, and Great-grandpa in turn tells his dream as a counterblow to come out ahead in the end. At the very least, the story is the agent of the dream. But the story could easily be more than that: it may well be the *real* dream, for in the majority of versions of this tale type, we are not told that any dream ever really happened. We are left with the possibility that each teller could have made up his dream in order to get what he wanted. In this frontier story world, there are no dreams without story. Story either drives the dream, or *is* the dream.

Maggie Parker's tale is not only about the power of dreams, and about how dreams become stories, but also fundamentally about Europeans' conflicted attitudes towards Native Americans. The dream episode recounted is just the first part of a two-act tale about Indian–white relationships. In the full-blown tale, this dream story prefigures an Indian attack. Maggie's tale presents two opposed sides of the native culture as seen by the newcomers. Before introducing the 'bad' Indian who will take Great-grandpa's gun, she has spoken of a generous old Indian who shares with white families. There is the generous old man, who wants only to give—games and stories. And there is the unnamed Indian who only takes from the paleface, until Great-grandpa beats him at his own game.

In the scene following the dream contest, the kindly old Indian returns. He comes to the settlers and warns them that members of his tribe are planning a sneak attack to kill them all. We may assume that the man who had to give back the gun and surrender a pony was among those bent on killing Great-grandpa and his family. But Great-grandpa survives by following the old man's warnings to shepherd his family to safety just before bad Indians attack. Among many other things, Maggie's story is saying: you can trust an Indian's words to be true, but you need to trust the Indian before you let him talk to you at all. In Pocahontas County, where most of the older families claim Indian blood, and most of those same families have passed on stories of fatal Indian attacks, such two-sided stories fill the important role of explaining how Native Americans could have been both the ancestors and the enemies of the Euro-American families who now inhabit the mountains.

In the world of story, we are all Indians. Through stories, we all dream—in spite of ourselves—and our dreams do indeed, in some strange and remarkable ways, become truth. Stories like Maggie's have a way of explaining and then shaping reality. The

reality that Maggie creates through narrative is a charter for the family's mixed feelings about Native Americans. Like most Appalachian families, she depicts Indians as both benign and threatening. In a few minutes' narration, she brilliantly condenses the remarkably conflicted attitude towards Native Americans that pervades the Appalachians. It would have taken her a thousand more words to try to translate these feelings into an analytic argument, and in the end even the most finely crafted argument would not be as persuasive as her little story.

Why? Because a plot seems to be the most important argument a human being can muster. A story acts upon us to make itself true. Psychologists are now beginning to discover that fiction holds more sway on its reader, and film on its watcher—than do rational arguments. In experiments with readers, Raymond Mar and Keith Oatley, among others, have shown that contrary to our stereotype of the mildly sociopathic bookworm, who uses books as a barrier to shut out the harsher world, people who gorge themselves on fiction tend to have greater social skills than those who do not (Mar, Djikic, and Oatley 2008; Mar and Oatley 2008; Mar et al. 2006; Oatley 2008, 2011). Fiction acts for them—in Oatley's (2008) words—as a sort of 'flight simulator', parading endless examples of how to act and how not to act with others. Those lessons are not retained in the conscious mind, but they stick nonetheless, and create an internalized inventory on which actions succeed and which fail in a given situation.

What is so compelling about a story? According to Mar and Oatley, 'Researchers have repeatedly found that reader attitudes shift to become more congruent with the ideas expressed in a [fictional] narrative' (2008, 182). Jonathan Gottschall, summarizing their findings, reports that 'fiction seems to be more effective at changing beliefs than nonfiction, which is designed to persuade through argument and evidence' (2012, 150). We might conclude from Mar and Oatley that 'stories are more important than information'. Yet I think it more accurate to say: in a traditional community, in an oral context, stories are the most important *kind* of information—the primary tools for teaching, conveying memories, and sharing values.

Dreaming Fear from the Frontier

As with fiction, so with visual storytelling: in experiments conducted by Marcus Appel (2008), watchers of television drama were coaxed by these acted-out fictions to view the world as a far more just place than did those who viewed the television news. The programmes operated with a kind of poetic justice that made good people and motives prevail and the good win out—and plots shaped by this worldview in turn moulded the minds and attitudes of the watchers.

Returning to the European settlers on the mountain frontier: The power of books to re-shape even the wildest environment is vividly illustrated in a court record dating from 1796 in which Daniel Boone—the archetypal frontiersman himself—testifies in a land dispute, involving a creek with the strange name of Lulbegrud.

In 1770, some years before Kentucky's first permanent European settlement, Boone and five fellow hunters were working their way through its wilderness. More than a quarter century later, Boone remembered 'we had with us for our amusement the *History of Lemuel Gulliver's Travels*' (his favourite book after the Bible) and they read this bestseller aloud together when opportunity allowed (Brown 2010, 2 and 49). One section that lingered in the listeners' minds was the account of the giant folk of Brobdingnag; Boone recalled the scene of a young Brobdingnag girl 'carrying him … to a town called Lulbegrud'.[3] This girl, Swift wrote, stood 'not above forty foot high, being small for her age' (2002, 80) and she was carrying tiny Gulliver to Lorbrulgrud, the capital of Brobdingnag and the 'Pride of the Universe' (Swift 2002, 83).

This story stuck with its listeners. Not long after their reading of this scene, one of the men went off to hunt. Quoting Boone: 'Alexander Neeley [returned] to camp one night and told us he had been that Day to Lulbegrud and had killed two Brobdernags in their Capital.' Neeley's words inspired a tall-tale guessing game: 'Only with some effort were his companions able to figure out that Neeley had been hunting at a salt lick by a creek and had killed two buffalo' (Brown 2010, 49). In Neeley's narrative, Kentucky transformed into Swift's land of giants. Neeley's jest became a reality, a place on the map. The men called the creek 'Lulbegrud'—the name the creek still bears. *Gulliver's Travels* was likely the first work of printed fiction ever to make its way into eastern Kentucky, and within days it was transforming the natural world and forcing its names upon the region's beasts and rivers.

Consider Daniel Boone's experiences in light of current psychological findings on dreams and stories. The deeply suggestive studies I have cited measure the powers of secondary means of storytelling. But as a folklorist, I must ask: can books or movies ever come close to matching the impact of a great traditional *oral* storyteller? Yes, Boone and his party read *Gulliver's Travels*, but note also that they read it aloud, and further that not long after reading it they began telling the stories of Gulliver's experiences as if they shared his fictional world themselves. By acting out *Gulliver's Travels* they made the story true. True enough to make the principal river of Brobdingnag a spot on the map up to this present day.

When the Hammons family arrived in West Virginia, oral storytellers had preceded them by half a century. The frontier memoirist Joseph Doddridge, who was born on the Appalachian frontier the year before Daniel Boone entered eastern Kentucky, recalled the entertainments of his childhood:

> Dramatic narrations, chiefly concerning Jack and the giant, furnished our young people with … amusement during their leisure hours. Many of these tales were lengthy, and embraced a considerable range of incident. Jack, always the hero of the story, after encountering many difficulties, and performing many great achievements, came off conqueror of the giant. Many of these stories were tales of knight errantry, in which some captive virgin was released from captivity and restored to her lover. These dramatic narrations concerning Jack and the giant bore a strong resemblance to the poems of Ossian, the story of the Cyclops and Ulysses, in the Odyssey of Homer, and the tale of the giant and Great-heart, in the *Pilgrim's Progress*. They were so arranged, as to the different incidents of the narration, that they were easily committed to memory. They certainly have been handed down from generation to generation, from time immemorial. (Doddridge 1912, 124)

Along with these tales Doddridge describes his childhood war games—practice for the kinds of violence that their fathers experienced and often died from. By 1778, when Boone was defending Boonesborough from Indian attack, Doddridge was a boy of nine growing up about one hundred miles to the east in a frontier fort. Boys' play was essentially playing Indian: kids practised throwing tomahawks, shooting arrows, and imitating the calls of birds and howls of wolves. This play possessed a sober and not so secret purpose, for as Doddridge explains, among 'young men belonging to nations in a state of warfare, many amusements are regarded as preparations for the military character which they are expected to sustain in future life' (Doddridge 1912, 121).

The more I think about these early accounts in their context, the more I feel that the stories acted out by Boone and his friends while alone in the massive woods, and the stories told by Doddridge's boyhood buddies in the midst of their all-too-relevant war games, were performed largely for one reason—to impose the familiar plots and characters from the world they had left behind upon a forbiddingly new and foreign landscape, and in the process render that landscape less frightening and more familiar. They drained the terror from that landscape by importing into it the well-known monsters of written and oral fantasy.

By 1820, when Doddridge wrote down his frontier memories, both the fears of the wilderness and the tales that functioned to name and tame it seem to have disappeared. He concludes his account by writing: 'Civilization has, indeed, banished the use of those ancient tales of romantic heroism; but what then? it has substituted in their place, the novel and the romance' (Doddridge 1912, 124). But here Doddridge was wrong. The oral stories *did* persist, and they continue to live in ways that only the tellers and their listeners seem to remember. A century and a half would pass between the time Doddridge first heard them and the time they reached the outside world in printed form—but they lived.[4]

It is my conviction that these oral tales persist because—more than the printed text, and even more than the film narratives that play before hundreds at a time drawn together in a theatre—oral storytelling in traditional settings constitutes a kind of shared dreaming. It was Karl Abraham, the man Sigmund Freud called his 'best pupil', who stated that shared narratives are to the society as dreams are to the individual.[5] Like a film seen in a movie theatre, an oral tale is shared, communally enjoyed, and that setting is part of its great power.

Story as Dream: Half Plot and Half Image

Folktales perform the work of darkness. It is the job of the storyteller to pull us into the world of dreams. With the lights out, the listeners see nothing on this earth as the story unfolds. But they experience 'a dream that can be heard'.[6] The process of traditional narration is an exercise in progressive sensory deprivation. The story unfolds in a darkened room, with nothing to see—either total blackness or in some cases the play of flames in a fireplace. As vision becomes increasingly limited, the voice of the storyteller fills the darkness, usually rhythmic and often whispery,

exercising a near-hypnotic hold on the listeners. As the room darkens, images take over. Under our eyelids we begin to see things. Marco Iocoboni is a leading figure in the research on 'mirror neurons'—parts of the brain that become intensely activated by what we see. He finds that the mirror neurons of people witnessing an act portrayed in a film will respond to the visual image as if they themselves were committing the act:

> Our brains re-create for us the distress we see on the screen. We have empathy for the fictional characters—we know how they're feeling—because we literally experience the same feelings ourselves. And when we watch the movie stars kiss on screen? Some of the cells firing in our brain are the same ones that fire when we kiss our lovers. 'Vicarious' is not a strong enough word to describe the effect of these mirror neurons. (Iacoboni 2008, 4; cf. Gottschall 2012, 61)

I maintain that the images we project on the blank screen of the night engage us at least as much as the movie images. The more vividly we see the story, the more the story becomes our own—not only because our minds have created the images, but also because in the act of seeing them our mirror neurons cause us to *become* what we have seen. Thus, a great storyteller can literally re-create the listeners by coaxing images from their minds.

Iacoboni, Oakley, Mar: most of the cited psychological studies of sleep, dream, and story were introduced to me in Jonathan Gottschall's *The Storytelling Animal: How Stories Make Us Human* (2012), a highly suggestive and often speculative survey of contemporary scientific studies addressing the big questions concerning how and why humans narrate. As I first read Gottschall I found myself sceptical and bemused, because his working definition of 'story' seemed to differ radically from the definitions typically put forward by narratologists. Gottschall appears to be writing about plotted narratives only about half the time; the rest of the time he seems to confuse narrative with *image*. I grew increasingly impatient with this seemingly sloppy and unfocused treatment until it occurred to me that the 'story' which Gottschall's writings described closely paralleled the ways that master traditional narrators describe the processes through which they learn, retain, and perform their tales.

Jane Muncy Fugate, the Appalachian narrator who has taught me more than anyone else about the storyteller's art, has spoken at length about how her grandmother altered traditional tales to heal Jane's emotional wounds. When Jane was three years old her mother left the family, and she lived alone with her father until December 1941 and the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. Her father, a former Marine, immediately re-enlisted and left to fight, leaving Jane effectively an orphan at age four. She was weak, undergrown, and beset with what the doctors now call 'failure to thrive'. Sidney Farmer Muncy, her sixty-seven-year-old grandmother, took her into the Kentucky mountain boarding house where she was living, and set about strengthening Jane by telling her stories. Jane credits Sidney with saving her emotional life—by shaping the tales into models for Jane to listen to and then *become*, all through the power of narrative suggestion.

Sidney's family possessed a large stock of traditional Jack tales centred on a boy hero. Sidney immediately transformed the storied Jack into her living granddaughter, and simultaneously moulded Jane into Jack. She changed the boy's name to create an

androgynous figure that a girl could more easily identify with. In Sidney's performances for Jane, Jack was christened 'Merrywise'; like Jane, Merrywise was young and small and appeared to be weak. But the name and traits of Merrywise suggested to Jane a way to thrive in the world. Drawing upon her grandmother's hints, Jane took an active role in her own transformation.

> When I look at the name Merrywise, you know, he was not only … the youngest, but he … could figure out things that [others] couldn't … And so, the message to me was, you can be little, and you can be frail, and you can be the youngest, and you can be alone, but you could also be the smartest. And the [name] Merrywise—'merry' meaning 'happy'—you could be happy. You could be happy and you could be wise and you can overcome. And so I thought of myself as that overcomer. (Lindahl 2010, 260–61)

Sidney based her art on the two essential tools of fairy-tale narration: the plot and the image. The Jack tales heard by Doddridge as a boy were structured to be easily remembered, and Jane's favourite story, the one that Sidney named 'Merrywise' after Jane's favourite character, possessed a plot ideal for conveying the idea that a seemingly weak child could become an overcomer. Merrywise is the youngest of three boys. His older brothers scorn him, but when the three set off into the woods it is Merrywise who knows what to do and through this knowledge saves them all. When the boys spend the night in a witch's house, the witch plans to kill the older brothers, but it is Merrywise who foils her plot and masterminds their escape. When the witch, striding in her magic seven-mile-a-step boots, catches up with them and hypnotizes the older brothers into jumping into a magic bag, it is Merrywise who, through sheer force of will, refuses to jump; she tries to catch him and force him in the bag, but he outruns her. When she grows tired, he runs to the bag, pulls his brothers out, and then coaxes her into the bag in their place; then the three boys weigh down the bag with stones, throw it into the river, and drown the witch (Roberts 1955, 42–45; Lindahl 2001b).

The plot is easy enough to remember, but what bore into Jane's memory and shaped her story were the hints of images tossed out by her grandmother. Sidney's verbal descriptions, like *märchen* images in general (think of the glass slippers, glass mountains, golden balls, and the other fixtures of the Grimm tales that we seldom see in pictures, yet always picture so brightly in our minds), tended to be vividly and richly suggestive yet sparse, bold outlines to be filled in by the listener (Lindahl 2001a, 81–89). At age eleven, when Jane first recorded 'Merrywise' for folklorist Leonard Roberts, the witch was the only character described in any detail at all, in these few words: 'An old woman came to the door who had long hair' and 'a long nose and she was really ugly' (Lindahl 2001b, 43). More than the characters, it was the witch's magic props that had the greatest power to stick in Jane's mind. Her seven-mile-a-step boots and the 'funny looking … puddin-tuddin bag' she used to trap her victims (Lindahl 2001b, 45). These images became palpably real for Jane, especially the puddin-tuddin bag, which evolved into a household term: any large or strange-looking bag became proverbially known as a puddin-tuddin bag in Jane's extended family (Lindahl 2004b). Even in this playful example, a shared-dream imagery shaped reality.

With just a few words, Sidney teased her tales to exert a greater pull on Jane. When, for example, Merrywise is sleeping near the witch, he lies awake and hears her whisper 'I'll get up and whet my knife; I'll get up and whet my knife', as she prepares to cut off his brothers' heads. At this moment in the story, Sidney would whisper suggestively to Jane 'Merrywise was too small to hurt the witch, so he listened to every sound she made, because that's what he *could* do'—such phrases were planted to assure Jane that being tiny and weak would not prevent her from becoming the overcomer (Lindahl 2010).

According to neuroscientists, the plot and the image—defining features of fairy-tale style—find their strengths in opposite parts of the brain. The left hemisphere contains the 'plotting' part: it controls speech and creates narrative order; the right hemisphere, incapable of producing speech, responds instead to visual stimuli, governing facial recognition and eye–motor coordination (Gazzaniga 2008a, 2008b; Gottschall 2012, 95–99). In those rare human beings whose right and left hemispheres do not communicate with each other, the left brain will always be able to construct a narrative explanation for an image, whereas the right brain will generate physical and emotional reactions to an image but cannot articulate what that image means. It would appear, then, that by combining easily remembered plots with powerful, emotion-inducing images, the fairy tale pushes the two sides of the brain to interact in extraordinary ways. The märchen seems designed to use every corner of the mind. It is a perfect vehicle for posing and working out serious community problems, and more influential than any argument for influencing action.

The plot of 'Merrywise' is not only easily remembered, but very old and diffused around the world. It belongs to the constellation ATU 327 and 328 in the international system for classifying folk fiction (see Uther 2004), which is broad enough to encompass both 'Hansel and Gretel' and 'Jack and the Beanstalk'—in which child heroes use their wits to avoid being eaten by a giant witch or ogre. There are hundreds of closely related versions—including 'Maol A Chliobain' and 'Kitty Ill-Prets' in Scotland, and 'Muncimeg' and 'Little Nippy' in the Appalachians (Bruford and MacDonald 1994, 185–90 and 455–56; Campbell 1994, 1: 295–307; Lindahl 2004a, 1: 287–93 and 352–53, and 2: 573–79 and 683–84; Roberts 1974, 228–32 and 363–64). The presence of similarly plotted story families over vast reaches of time and space indicates to me that the most persistent plots retain their popularity precisely because they can mean many things to many people. Such tales are popular because their relatively rigid structures have been shaped to accommodate huge variations in meaning. The tale becomes a matrix for working out major cultural problems. A few choice words can completely recast a plot to represent the teller's stand, or cater to the listeners' demands, on a social issue of immediate importance. Such well-known stories are collaboratively designed by tellers and listeners to sound out fault lines, the social fissures that the group needs to mend, and the hard choices they need to make as a group.

Embedded in the tale are cruxes that I call pressure points. A narrator can exploit them to push the tale towards one special meaning or another. A teller can pressure

the plot of 'Merrywise' to centre on the tension between the boy hero and his brothers, or upon the figure of the witch as a symbol for some societal or psychic evil, but Sidney's Merrywise was fashioned to help Jane discover her inner resources as a problem-solver. Sidney did such a persuasive job that she trained Jane to become the ultimate overcomer and problem-solver.

Jane was an adult before she consciously realized the import of many of the subliminal lessons that Sidney had packed into her performances of 'Merrywise'. Jane began volunteering to assist traumatized veterans in military hospitals and then became a psychologist herself. She now sometimes reshaped her grandmother's stories to treat her own patients. Jane became her grandmother, the creator of Merrywise, and also Merrywise himself. Sidney's shared dream came true: 'Merrywise' scripted Jane's future.

Just as the fairy tale condenses the strengths of the two opposed hemispheres of the brain—the plot and the image—it is the performance of the shared dream that ensures the unique power of the oral traditional tale as a medium for persuasion and healing, and gives the oral storyteller a greater power than books and movies to sway its listeners. A folk narrator can retain power only by sharing it. There are no Emily Dickinsons among traditional storytellers. You do not tell your tale to a wall and expect it to survive. Your art thrives only insofar as it engages the audience, and it can best engage them by actively, if silently, involving them in the story's creation.

Unlike a movie, Sidney did not impose her images on Jane—she merely hinted them. These suggestions gave Jane the power to *dream back* to the storyteller. Again, the fairy tale is designed to inspire images, but not to complete them. In the darkness of the shared dream, the fleshed-out images are born in the listener's own mind. Sidney never said a word about what Merrywise looked like, and this blank slate demanded that Jane shape something in the darkness. Fifty-eight years after Jane first heard 'Merrywise', she told me how she pictured the androgynous hero as Sidney was telling his story:

> He was small, smaller than the other boys of course, maybe up to their shoulders. And he wore sort of a knickers kind of clothing, like little boys would wear. He had a little boy haircut that maybe came down over his ears. It was sort of round, and he had freckles. I had freckles too. [My grandmother] always told me that *she* had freckles as a child … And freckles made you beautiful … And so, when I pictured Merrywise, I pictured Merrywise as sandy blond hair and freckles—sort of like me. Surprise. Surprise. (Lindahl 2001a, 88; original emphasis)

In dreaming back to the storyteller, Jane recreated Merrywise as herself. Jane's grandmother was a master storyteller because she was able to coax Jane into finishing the story, and through that act making it entirely about her. This is where the peculiar power of oral stories shows itself greatest: like a dream, it comes to us in the darkness; but unlike ourselves in a dream state, we are conscious. When a story is told, we begin dreaming back in ways that we tend to remember longer and better than the words of the story itself. In the end it is not the goal of the great storyteller to rob us of our imaginations, but to persuade us through hints that activate our power to fill out the dream. A great narrator will free us to surrender to suggestions and then take the lead as a creator.

Here, as well, the oral story is more powerful than a film: when we watch a film in a theatre, the director and cinematographer throw bright and brilliant images at us from the screen; but when the story comes to us as sound in the midst of darkness, we create our own images. The story comes from us and lives in us. We are actively and consciously co-creating the story. It is the fairy tale, more than any other narrative genre that I know, that has been shaped by the dreamlike process of its telling to provoke our active creativity.

This process of shared dreaming creates a special sort of consciousness by bringing together the opposite sides of the brain. In listening to great narrators explain their art, folklorists have found substantial evidence that the masters do little to remember the words of their previous stories, and that they do not memorize the plot in a verbal way, but rather that they *see* the story as they tell it. Donald Archie MacDonald explored the visual memories of Gaelic-speaking storytellers in Scotland; contemporaneously, in French Canada, Vivian Labrie noted how Francophone narrators 'saw' the stories that they told (MacDonald 1978; Labrie 1979, 1981). Jane Muncy has told us how she sees her stories. When she narrates 'Merrywise' today, she is translating into words the images engendered in her head decades ago—when Sidney told her the story—and harboured in her memories ever since. Shared dreaming calls upon the two hemispheres to mix the persuasive power of plot with the emotional impact of image in a way that few other sensory experiences can equal.[7]

Story as Shared Dream of Healing

I have called upon hard science to interpret what Jane Muncy experienced in hearing, telling, and healing through stories. Perhaps no science can ever prove that stories saved Jane's emotional life, but I trust the strength of her convictions. We may all want the science to back us up, but my first job as a folklorist is to represent *on their own terms* the people who share their culture with me—and in explaining Jane's art as she has experienced it, I believe I have done just that. I have drawn upon what I have learned from Jane and others to guide me deeper into the realm of the unprovable in speculating about why two centuries ago, in the midst of the Appalachian wilderness, Daniel Boone and Joseph Doddridge found orally narrated fantasies so compelling. But I also raise these questions because, on the basis of twelve years' experience, I am convinced that the healing properties of story-hearing and storytelling offer our best opportunities to heal communities afflicted by massive disasters.

For Jane Muncy, the story world was both a refuge and a warzone. It was a place where she could feel the full intensity of her own fears and yet begin to find a way past them because, first, she shared in a very real way the pains of her fictional alter ego, yet on another level she was fully aware that she was not facing witches and giants with knives poised to cut her throat; and second, after all, her story-self Merrywise ended up on top—he not only survived but prospered.

In 1979 I heard a French Canadian narrator tell an hour-long tale. I listened intently at the kitchen table to the old man's hypnotically whispery voice while his

grandchildren, off in the next room, laughed and played games. After his performance I asked the teller if his grandchildren liked hearing that story. 'They never listen to any of my stories', he said solemnly. 'But I will always tell them, because there has to be some place in the world where everything works out the way it should'. His stories had to be told, if only to himself. They remained his warzone and his refuge. Jane would understand.

At least as much as Jane, survivors of massive disasters need the refuge of story, but the stakes are more immediate when the narrators are in fact inhabiting a warzone—and the dynamics necessarily differ: the story they tell must be about themselves, and not in a coded way. It has to be *their story*. In 2005, in the wake of Hurricane Katrina, I was volunteering in a shelter in Houston, Texas, as some 250,000 survivors from New Orleans and elsewhere on the Gulf Coast flooded into the city. I was not there to record stories, but I could not avoid hearing them, without ever having to ask. I walked with one very tall, thin older gentleman to help him find a new pair of trousers long enough in the leg to reach his shoes. As we searched, he whispered his harrowing tale not to me, but—it seemed to me—simply to help himself believe that this was happening to him. To work for him the story could not be coded, or distanced, but his need for telling it was undeniably great (Lindahl 2006). Years later, visiting Japan in the wake of the great east Japan earthquake, tsunami, and nuclear meltdown, I told a survivor about the tall man who had told himself the story of his brush with death in Katrina. 'Yes', she said, 'I had to tell myself my story just to begin to understand it. That's the way it works'.[8] So, instead of projecting themselves into fanciful alter egos, disaster survivors must place their undisguised selves at the centre of their stories. Instead of reciting fictional series of events, they must tell their own experiences as best as they remember them. Crucially, just as in Jane Muncy's case, these narrators must own their stories.

When Hurricane Katrina hit, I had just published a book featuring oral narratives on deposit in the American Folklife Center at the Library of Congress (Lindahl 2004a). These included my recordings of Jane and her grandmother's life-saving tales as well as some personal accounts of the 11 September 2001 attack on the World Trade Center in New York City. The 9/11 stories had been recorded within a few months of the disaster by various interviewers. Some of the collectors were folklorists and other professional listeners, but the stories I found most powerfully, and most healingly, told were those recorded by the family, friends, and fellow firefighters of the narrators: people who had inhabited the warzone with the teller. Shared experience seemed to make the story easier to tell. The narrator was unafraid of crying or of being judged by the listener. On the basis of those disaster narratives, and with fellow folklorist Pat Jasper, I founded Surviving Katrina and Rita in Houston, the world's first project in which disaster survivors took the lead in documenting the experiences of their fellow survivors. We knew, on the basis of years of fieldwork, that such sharing of stories would be good for the survivors, but in fact we underestimated how good it would be for them. Surviving Katrina and Rita in Houston may have been the most successful group emotional healing project attempted after Hurricane Katrina. In Houston, various professional psychologists

instituted programmes that might have succeeded, but the survivors were too busy surviving to visit a therapist. Or—although psychologists were convinced that healing is enhanced when patients pay for their visits to therapists—few survivors could bring themselves to spend money on a 'shrink' when they had no job and yet a family to support. Or, as some of the psychologists were pursuing a programme of *reframing* (by which they meant helping the 'victims' find a happy ending to their stories), the survivors did not want to give up their stories to someone who had not shared, and did not seem to honour, their experiences. Many had arrived in Houston with nothing besides their stories and the clothes on their back. They had arrived under a cloud of alternative facts, media legends portraying them as looters and rapists. If they could only tell their stories the way they wanted to, they could show outsiders who they really were. For these survivors, as for Jane Muncy, their self-told stories *were* themselves.

Central to our project was the directive that only survivors interview survivors. In one day's training, half of the trainees told their stories to fellow survivors; the next day, those who had recorded the first day's stories would narrate to yesterday's storytellers. Everyone had a great deal of practice on both sides of the microphone. All had the experience of representing themselves in story as well as in doing their best to record and represent their interviewees. In this method, there is an echo of the shared dreaming inherent in traditional märchen-telling.

A further echo lay in the necessity of owning the story. Our project worked through a set of guidelines based on the idea of sovereignty over one's own narrative. The cardinal rule: the narrator is always right. Whatever she wants to do or say is okay. The 'interviewer' might ask a few questions, but nothing he asked was as important as what the narrator wanted to say. Much like the night-time story sessions in which Jane Muncy heard her grandmother's stories as they lay in the same bed, there was a bond of intimacy in the survivor-to-survivor storytelling sessions. The narrator might not know the interviewee, but their bond as fellow survivors made them immediately and fully trusting and respectful of one another. Nothing—no ethnic, economic, geographic, or political difference—could trump the bond of trust shared by fellow survivors. The survivor interviewer and the survivor narrator alike recognized that it was essential that the narrator own the story.

Today, in the wake of Hurricane Harvey, as my hometown is once again flooded with hurricane survivors, I am exploring how survivor-to-survivor stories work, and what makes them work best for healing: how their mechanisms of healing—do and do not—parallel those of traditional märchen-telling.

As in the shared dreaming of traditional narration, the survivor stories are created in collaboration with a listener whose experience is intimately connected to the teller's. Much like the frontier storytelling earlier described, survivor-to-survivor tale-telling has proved to be therapeutic for narrator and listener alike. But in divergence from traditional tale therapy, it is most important for the *teller*, rather than the listener, to own the tale. Yet it is worth remarking that in all of the situations explored in this article, self-sovereignty and ownership depend on intimate sharing, the sort that is not found in the mass, shared nightmare-scape of

the movie theatre or in the set-apart chair we settle in to read our books. There is a social base to our spoken dreams that reaffirms the fundamental importance of folklore as community culture, face-to-face culture.[9]

The need for such storytelling will never disappear. Intimate, oral storytelling appears to do more to ward off fear and foster self-healing than any other sort of narration. In this observation lies the greatest hope for disaster survivors worldwide. The horrendous frequency and scale of recent earthquakes, floods, hurricanes, tornados, and tsunamis ensure that there will never be enough behavioural health specialists to tend to the emotional needs of the survivors. Yet it appears that, for the great majority of survivors, no one is more qualified or welcome to record disaster accounts than fellow survivors, who are many in number, close at hand, and passionately committed to the sovereignty of all their fellow speakers' stories.

As the Indian in my beginning story recognizes, a person who dreams no more has lost his power—and his story, which are one and the same. All of us, when traumatized or otherwise in need of a warzone refuge, must dream some more.

Notes

[1] This talk is dedicated to my late friend and mentor, David Buchan, for whom the annual lecture series is named. For the opportunity to speak in David's honour, I thank the Elphinstone Institute and its remarkable staff: Director Thomas A. McKean, Lecturer Frances Wilkins, Research Fellow Julia Bishop, Teaching Fellow Nicholas Le Bigre, and Administrator Alison Sharmon, as well as their inspired students.

[2] All versions that I have identified to date were told in the United States. Baughman (1966, 340) identifies five variants from New York, South Carolina, and Georgia; Ancelet (1994, number 47) adds a sixth. The oldest citation I have yet identified dates to 1804. Baughman classifies the tale under motif number K66(aa) 'Indian tells commandant of fort that he has dreamed that he has been given one of the commandant's fine cloaks. The commandant gives him the cloak but tells him of dream in which the Indian has given the commandant a large and valuable tract of land. The Indian gives the commandant the tract but announces that they will dream no more, that the commandant dreams too hard for him'.

[3] The account of Boone's readings of *Gulliver's Travels* and the guessing game that followed was transcribed from a court record by Lyman Copeland Draper (1815–91) some time between 1835 and 1891, and can be found among the 491 volumes of the Draper Manuscripts on deposit in the Wisconsin Historical Society: MS 4C, 93–95. Accessed from microfilm on deposit in the Newberry Library, Chicago.

[4] The earliest collection of oral Jack tales from the Appalachian Mountains appeared in 1925, over a century after Doddridge's death. See Carter (1925).

[5] Abraham's most quoted version of this formulation is 'myths constitute the dreams of the individual' (Abraham 1927, 32). Freud's estimation of Abraham as his best student was shared with psychiatrist John Morris Dorsey (cf. Dorsey 1976) and may be found on the Freud Museum website: https://www.freud.org.uk/about/faq/ (accessed 2 April 2018).

[6] 'A dream that can be heard' is Lorenz Hart's line in 'Isn't It Romantic', from the Rogers and Hart musical *Love Me Tonight* (1932). Retrieved from the Lorenz Hart website: http://www.lorenzhart.org/romanticsng.htm

[7] Jane Muncy Fugate has spoken eloquently and at length about the ways in which she has learned, visualized, and retold her stories. Her words and interpretations, as well as some of my

interpretations, are published primarily in the following sources: Lindahl (2001b, 81–89), Lindahl (2004, 1: 279–92), and Lindahl (2009). On imagery in märchen and other forms of oral narration, see also Lindahl (1997).

[8] These thoughts were shared with me in Sendai, Japan in November 2012 by Murakami San, a survivor of the great east Japan earthquake of 11 March 2011. She told her narrative in Japanese words that were simultaneously translated by folklorists Koji Kato and Dale Anderson. For a brief description of Murakami San's disaster narrative and the circumstances in which she shared it, see Lindahl (2016, 245–47).

[9] The mechanics and implications of survivor-to-survivor narration are explored in Lindahl (2006, 2012, 2017; and particularly 2012, 154–59 and 173, which detail the specific strategies for eliciting those narratives that appear to be most healthful for the narrators).

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Carl Lindahl is Martha Gano Houstoun Research Professor in the Department of English, University of Houston, Texas, USA. Over the past two decades much of his research has focused on Appalachian folk narrative and storytelling in response to massive disasters, but he seldom seizes the opportunity, as he does here, to discuss both subjects in the same piece.