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Maja Bumberak (see right) and her 'source' storyteller at Buda Castle where she received the Master of Folk Arts award.

*[Apologies from the editor for squeezing this in here and having a couple of solid pages of text—I was so short of space There was no way round it! It was Andrew who put Maja and I in Touch though.]*



# TRADITION AND MODERNITY

*The Present Day Storytelling Scene in Hungary by Maja Bumberák, storyteller, Budapest*

When looking at the storytelling scene in Hungary one is struck by an interesting duality. On one hand, the nurturing of folk traditions, including the telling of folktales, as well as the tradition of ethnographic tale research has a rich history, while on the other hand, the international trend or what is sometimes called the modern “storytelling revival” is only beginning to take hold in Hungary. The Hungarian storytelling world is in a flux. Many different strands are present, and the various groups working with storytelling emphasize different aspects, depending on their background, their previous experiences, and scientific approaches, and the way they want to put stories to use.

Those coming from the world of ethnography or folklore-studies, tend to put more emphasis on the “authentic” form of oral storytelling *that is keeping in line with the way stories were passed on at the occasions of oral storytelling in traditional local communities*. They seek ways of applying this form of storytelling and making it a living practice in today’s context. Accordingly, here it is emphasized that storytelling is something that has its traditional structure, style, context, its rules, its do-s and don’t-s. Even so, it has to be stressed that although “authenticity” is always a keyword for folklorists, they are seeking ways how these oral tradition can remain vibrant parts of the present, how they can tie into people’s lives today, how they can bring people together, strengthen community ties, transmit values – and generally animate culture. Some people coming from this background, tend to have a very strict notion about which kind of stories are to be told and which are not, and sometimes they do not recognise the importance or even the legitimacy of various forms of applied storytelling in modern days. In this mindframe, the primary function of storytelling is entertainment.

The other significant strand present is what we could call applied storytelling, which in Hungary is a flower that has many colourful petals. For those invested in applied storytelling (for example story therapy or folktale-pedagogy) the focus is obviously not so much on “traditional authenticity”. They are more concerned with the here and now, and how tales help us understand our present situation (vis a vis their interconnectedness with the ancient, indeed “eternal” modes of the human state). Thus, the authenticity of the story does not so much lie in following the rules of performance in oral tradition, but in finding the right story for a certain (pedagogical, therapeutic etc.) situation, passing it on in a safe environment and enhancing self-knowledge or certain skills. Here passing on the story can mean reading it aloud, or even reading it in silence, or individually, before the group session – however, there is a trend now emerging that live oral storytelling is preferred and practised.

What I personally find more important and prefer to emphasize is how the representatives of the various groups involved in working with stories and oral storytelling can inspire and enrich one another, and how the palette of storytelling can get richer and more colourful in our country. It is my experience that there are more and more initiatives taking root, often independently of each other. In the past few years we can see exponential growth both in the general popularity of story-telling, as well as in the amount of professional trainings, workshops and lectures being offered.

The present article cannot endeavour to give a full overview of every group working with storytelling, but a few examples – with which I have had personal experiences - are telling..

The strand of healing storytelling has become known as story-therapy or tale therapy. There are various schools and initiatives. As a forerunner of the modern healing storytelling strand, Márta Antalfai, a psychologist founded her “Treasure-hunter” folktale therapy method based on Jungian psychology. She started passing on the method more extensively only about 10 years ago. It became part of the curriculum of Complex Art Therapy department at the John Wesley Theological College. Ildikó Boldizsár coming from the field of Hungarian literature and ethnography, elaborated her *Metamorphoses story therapy training* groups about a decade ago, and has become the most well-known propagator of folktale therapy in the Hungarian scene. By now many of the people she trained have

already started their own therapy groups in various fields of life. Metamorphoses therapy is based on the concept that there is no life situation that does not have a fairytale equivalent, and uses the level of interpretation where elements of the story can also be considered as parts of our own soul.

Mária Bajzáth, who developed her folktale-pedagogy method, comes from the world of pedagogy and educational science. Working as a primary school teacher, she understood the wonder and value of folktales and their significance in education at a very early stage of her career. For almost twenty years she was integrating and incorporating folktales into the curriculum in many creative ways, and made it part of the everyday life of her 6-10-year-old students. Mária Bajzáth has been passing on her folktale pedagogy method in adult education for teachers and experts from various fields for 6 years, and by now about 800 people, mostly teachers have attended her training course. Her aim is to show ways of applying stories, riddles, folksongs, folk-games in education in a playful, non-didactic way, where the magic and many levels of stories can freely appear and evolve in the listeners - without any rationalising and analytic processes - and learning takes place by being involved in entertaining, artistic activities connected to a complex variety of folklore material.

If I consider my own path in the world of Hungarian storytelling, I am one of the people, who has experience in a relatively wide variety of approaches within Hungarian storytelling scenes.

Personally, I arrived to the world of storytelling via folktales, when in 2007 – as a graduate student of Art- and Socio-therapy – I started thinking about possible ways of applying the rich and healing symbolism of folktales with groups of disadvantaged women. Then I completed various story therapy courses and workshops, and later Mária Bajzáth's folktale pedagogy training. Having gained a foot in the world of applied storytelling, I came upon the course at the Hungarian Heritage House on Hungarian folk narratives and traditional storytelling 2011. The state sponsored institution strives to preserve all forms of folk traditions seeking to re-educate teachers, social workers and the general public about such traditions. They started their 60-hour course entitled "Traditional storytelling – Hungarian folktales" in 2007. The key figures of this course – among other renowned experts and storytellers – are ethnographer Gergő Agócs and Judit Raffai, who have trained about 200-300 people the last 11 years. As written in their course description: 'This accredited course aims to provide the knowledge necessary for the authentic presentation of Hungarian folk narratives. The course material embraces the ethnographic, literary and dramatic knowledge underlying genuine folk storytelling.' The course was explicitly launched in order to fill a methodological gap behind folk storytelling. Whereas folk music, folk singing and even folk dancing had been taught for decades, there was no similar form of education concerning storytelling. The course featured experienced ethnographers and folk storytellers as teachers. The theoretical part of the course focused on the tradition and history of Hungarian folk narratives, their regional characteristics and – keeping in line with the Budapest-school of folktale research - the greatest figures of Hungarian folk storytelling. The first students of the course founded a storytelling circle where one can freely share and listen to stories. The event has been organised every 3rd Thursday of the month for ten years now! Also, mainly by students of this storytelling training was founded the Meseszó (Word of Tale) Association of Hungarian Storytelling and Oral Folklore, whose members are promoting oral storytelling that is in line with the Hungarian tradition of telling folktales. And it was this course which opened the path for me to the essentials and wonders of old-old traditional stories, and triggered and inspired me to become an oral storyteller who recreates the story again and again in the moment. From 2012 I became member of Gárembucka, Storytellers of the Sun and Moon, and the initiative of holding monthly storytelling evenings for adults in downtown cafes and community places in Budapest.

In Hungary, the traditional occasions of storytelling taking place in local communities where stories were passed on in an oral tradition (from mouth to mouth) - unfortunately do not exist anymore, but there are still old people who – in their youth – were experiencing such events. Between 2011-2015 I had the privilege of collecting folk stories first hand from one of the very few sources still available – an elderly lady, widow Bárány Antalné, Strehó Margit living in a small village in the north of Hungary, who could still recount the stories passed on to her in her childhood. For a storyteller, this kind of connection is priceless and a great opportunity to learn. In 2012 I received the *Young Master of Folk Arts Award* in the category of storytelling partly for my efforts in collecting and researching tradi-



tional folk tales. One year later, Bárányi Antalné received the *Master of Folk Arts Award* in the category of “folktale-telling” and keeping tradition alive.

The last seven years – beside telling stories at various scenes from kindergarten to school and festivals - I have been involved in various applied storytelling projects – for example in temporary homes for families, or for three years as a volunteer storyteller in state homes for children (who, for various reasons cannot live with their parents) as part of the project of a private founda-

tion, Folktale-Center, supporting children in state care.

From 2012 on – when I was invited to perform at the international Storytelling Festival of Raccontamiunastoria, in Rome - I have been getting acquainted with the international scene of storytelling as well. In 2014 I had the privilege of becoming a member of the then forming “Storytelling Peace Council”, which is an informal-professional network of storytellers committed to and doing applied storytelling for bettering the world and bringing peace at many levels.

At the moment there still only a few Hungarian storytellers active in the international storytelling scene, and there are not many workshops and trainings yet held by international storytellers in our country. I do hope that this number is going to increase and I am doing my best to forward it.

Due to the storytelling revival and the above mentioned strands, there are now hundreds, or probably thousands of people in the Hungarian speaking world (note that there millions of Hungarians living outside the Hungarian state) who have started to consciously use stories and folktales in their work. And the practise of oral storytelling is also becoming more and more popular. Of course there are initiatives arriving from the international scene, for example slam poetry, or even MythOff events (interactive events where telling myths take place, originally initiated by Irish Claire Murphy and introduced here by storyteller Csenge Zalka) which we have held together with a small group of storytellers at least once a year since 2015.

How many professional storytellers are there in Hungary, you could ask. Well, this questions is not easy to answer. If by professional we mean a certain standard, we could say that there are a few dozens. If you ask, whether someone can live on it, then maybe there are 10-20 left.

All in all, we can say, that in the last decade we have been witnessing the evolution of a nascent field in Hungary, that of modern revival storytelling. It is more and more popular among the general public as well as in various professional fields ( eg. business, marketing, coaching), and there is a big interest for events involving personal storytelling. While due to my many years on the subject, I know a lot of groups connected to storytelling, it is amazing to again and again encounter workshops, events, projects that are totally new even for me.

As we know, the world of storytelling is in itself profoundly rich and complex, and we may tend to grasp only slices (certain aspects) of it at the beginning. However, with a bit of openness and wonderment, we can understand its world and values more and more deeply and fully. For me the different approaches are opportunities to compliment and enrich one another. Having worked with both, and indeed, having gained some experiences with the international storytelling scene, it is evident for me that all of these stands bring very important qualities to the table, or to go back to the rainbow image, they are all indispensable colours in the rainbow that is story-telling.