

Storytellers of Children's Literature and their Ideological Construction of the Audience

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Introduction

In recent decades there has been renewed social and academic interest in organized storytelling and storytellers in contemporary industrialized societies. Folklorists, storytellers, and other commentators speak of a “revival” of storytelling as manifested in the growing number of storytelling events in different social fields. For example, storytelling is valued as *cultural form*, maintained through festivals, professional organizations, and public funding schemes for the arts. It is also consumed as *entertainment*, in stand-up comedy, storytelling cafés and pubs, or formal recitals. Finally, it is a field with *professional applications* in areas such as therapy, education, or business (Stone 1998; Wilson 2005; Sobol 2008). As a result, there is a line of theoretical and applied scholarship that has attempted to examine this revitalization. This scholarship has been carried out, on one hand, by constructing a coherent portrait of contemporary storytelling in different national and regional contexts, such as Canada (Stone 1998), the United States (Sobol 2008), or Britain and Ireland (Wilson 2005; Harvey 1989); on the other hand, this has been done by developing conceptual tools to assess and train in contemporary storytelling practices (Ryan 2008; De Marinis 1987).

In parallel with these developments, since the 1970s linguistic anthropology has moved to performance-oriented forms of narrative analysis (Bauman 1986; Hymes 1981; Kapchan 1995; Finnegan 1992). This paradigm shift, associated with the development of the ethnography of communication, focuses its attention on the production and presentation of narratives as emergent and socially constructed events. From this perspective, full-fledged verbal performances are seen as one end of a continuum of discursive practices in which speech is keyed in special ways (Bauman 1977; Sherzer 2002; see also Wilson 2005). Precisely because speech practices are construed along a continuum, the analytical tools developed to examine the most elaborate forms of verbal art can be applied to a variety of narrative events and linguistic formats. This has allowed ethnographers of communication to legitimately move their attention from formal narratives and storytelling in oral “traditional” societies (e.g., Hymes 1981) to the peripheral “folk traditions” of industrial societies (e.g., Bauman 1986; Harvey 1989) and, finally, to storytelling and narratives in a variety of informal and institutional contexts in contemporary urban settings. In this last development, storytelling to children inside and outside schools has received particular attention (Juzwick and Sherry 2007; Poveda 2003; Casla et al. 2008) and has been an important resource in the revitalization of storytelling (Wilson 2005).

Despite this accumulated scholarship, not all potential research questions have received equal attention. When studies focus on storytellers (the only area we will comment on in this paper), certain themes have been consistently explored while others have been neglected. Contemporary storytellers' biographies, identities, and professional trajectories have been the focus of several works (Harvey 1989; Stone 1998; Sobol 2008), but their own theoretical constructions about storytelling and performance as literary events have not received equal interest. This is unfortunate since, as Ruth Finnegan (1992) has pointed out, within the anthropologically and ethnographically based approach to verbal art as subscribed to by many of the authors cited above, issues of local aesthetics and thought "call for specific treatment in that, although in the past usually subordinated to the collection and analysis of textual material, the subject is now starting to be discussed in its own right" (131). Further, there is a potential relationship between storytellers' aesthetics and thoughts and their own (varied) professional, social, and formative trajectories that needs to be empirically and rigorously explored in order to provide a more complete picture of contemporary narrators than is currently available in the literature. In one of the few studies on the topic, Fiona Collins (1996), a professional storyteller and researcher, explored British storytellers' views on how children work with stories. She gathered her data by mailing questionnaires to other storytellers, and her study did not seem to have any clear theoretical conceptualization, so the results hardly stand up to the linguistic anthropological agenda set out by Finnegan and others.

In contrast, the relationship between text, author, and reader/audience (and the meaning itself of these categories) has been a central theme of contemporary literary theory and criticism. Concepts in literary theory have been developed for written texts, but, as Finnegan (2005) argues, a broader definition of literature would make these theories relevant to performance studies. Similarly, Michel Foucault (1996) argued that both oral and written texts can be examined within the language-work-literature matrix and conceptualized as literary artifacts; thus, from this perspective, literary theory can also be applied to the study of oral performances. More important for the purposes of this paper, since there is a lack of anthropological studies focused on storytellers' local ideologies about their audiences, we will take the categories developed in literary criticism as the starting point of our analysis of the empirical materials we collected.

One strong move in literary theory, especially in works that have been more accessible and better received among educators and children's literature professionals, is *reader-response theory* as developed by Louise Rosenblatt (1978). For her, the aesthetic and distinctive experience of a literary text is produced by the reader's individual, active appropriation of the text, and interpretations of the text are thus as varied as are its readers with their unique personal histories. For educators, this framework has important practical implications: by stressing how readers matter in literary analysis, students and children as recipients of literature have been given particular consideration. Yet, this focus on students takes place within well-developed theories and institutional arrangements about children and childhood in formal education. For example, expectations in relation to how children respond to literature are constrained by how children's development is defined in the psychological theories that are dominant in educational practice and teacher training. Further, collective experiences with literature and books in school take place within the age-matching arrangements that are common in formal education. This in

turn defines how audiences and their dispositions are defined. More generally, in the case of children's literature as a specific field of literary production, the construction of the audience/reader has overlapped directly with how childhood has been constructed at very different (but intertwined) levels. This includes dominant discourses about human development in a given historical period, such as German Romanticism and its view of children as spontaneous, innocent, and untutored (Warner 1994:188); particular theoretical traditions, such as how psychoanalysis has interpreted fairy tales (Bettelheim 1981); or even how emblematic authors construct and represent their potential readers (e.g., Roahl Dahl, to cite a well-known example).

Contemporary developments in professional training in storytelling and drama have also placed the teller's relationship with the audience in a privileged position. Here discussions gravitate around the type of intimacy or distance that should be sought with the audience and even how this relationship should be used as a criterion to assess the genuine nature of the storytelling event. Further, an intimacy/naturalness-distance/theatricality continuum has been used to identify variations across storytelling traditions in different regional contexts, such as the United States and Britain (Wilson 2005), or has been associated with storyteller's personal and professional trajectories (Ryan 2008). More generally, Marco De Marinis (1987) shows how an important part of contemporary dramaturgical productions, training, and theorizing gravitates around what is required socioculturally and psychologically from the spectator for a productive and engaging reception of the performance.

Finally, focus on the recipients of literature has allowed literary criticism to re-examine the history of literary production and theorizing in relation to how the recipient was constructed. These works build on the classic distinction between written *literature* and *drama* and their respective receptive figures (reader and audience), but despite the divisions there are some common themes. In a review of literary criticism, Robert De Maria (1978) shows how four major figures of English-speaking literary theory (Dryden, Johnson, Coleridge and Frye) have very different constructions of the ideal reader. These characterizations vary along a number of dimensions. One axis refers to the reader's sociohistorical grounding, which varies from Johnson's reader who has no particular interests, does not inhabit a provincial time or place, and is a citizen in an ideal capital untouched by temporary modes or fads to Coleridge's view of the reader's experience as something deeply psychological, personal, and particular (464). A second element is how readers' competencies are collectively assessed. Here both Dryden and Coleridge make a distinction between types of groups of readers, ranging from a large mass of "mob readers" or "middle sort of readers" to a small minority of cultivated and judicious readers who are better equipped to appreciate and disentangle literary works (465). These last distinctions are much more explicit in historical analyses of drama. Since theatrical performances are public events, forms of socio-intellectual stratification that may exist in any given society are usually highly visible in terms of who consumes theater (or different types of theater) and how this consumption takes place. These divisions are incorporated into playwrights', and/or actors', theorizing about their audiences. There is surprising crosscultural and historical consistency in the type of variables that are considered relevant in these theories. For example, Jacob Raz (1976) discusses how Zeami, a fifteenth-century Japanese dramatist, developed an extraordinarily elaborate theory of the audience organized around elements such as social status,

critical ability, mood at time of performance, and place of performance, and did so largely to take into account the differences that were involved in performing for nobility or for commoners. In a completely different context, Michael Neill (1978:342) discusses how, in the seventeenth century, Caroline English theater began making distinctions between “court and city taste” and later changed to suit the needs of a selected and informed play-going public who eventually promoted their tastes and preferences through patronage of “private” theaters and performances.

To recapitulate, developments in literary theory, the resurgence of storytelling as a visible and organized social activity, and the agenda set out by an anthropologically based analysis of verbal art converge in our central research question, which examines how practicing storytellers construct their audiences. We draw on a set of semi-structured interviews with Spanish storytellers who work with children and explore their discourses and informal theorizing about children as literary storytelling audiences. In particular, we focus on the connections between two themes:

I. *The personal and professional trajectories of storytellers.* Through the interviews we trace the social fields (e.g., formal teacher training, drama/fine arts, amateur interests, and so forth) that may have had a significant effect on how they confine their discourses about children and childhood.

II. *The organization of storytellers’ informal theories about children as storytelling audiences.* Drawing on some of the dimensions that the literature reviewed above suggests may be relevant, we examine storytellers’ theories in relation to aspects such as the role of age as an organizational element, the ideal characteristics of the storytelling setting, children’s background and knowledge, and the social climate of the narrative event.

These questions are developed under successive headings and discussed globally in the conclusions. As we explain in the method section, the analysis is qualitative and primarily inductive. Yet the paper will also address as a research question the effect of experience and training in formal educational settings on storyteller’s discourses—taking into consideration that these storytellers work primarily outside of school settings. Specifically, we hypothesize that substantial contact with the formal educational system and its apparatuses (training schemes, theories, and so on), at any point of storyteller’s personal-professional trajectories, will provide the most clearly identifiable and articulated categories for a discussion of children as storytelling audiences.

Method

The data in this paper consist of ten semi-structured interviews conducted with twelve professional and amateur narrators¹ who work in Madrid (Spain) and who were participants in a

¹ We will use the terms “storyteller” (a common term in English-language research) and “narrator” as interchangeable synonyms to refer to the participants in this study. They are respective translations of *cuentacuentos* and *narrador*, the two terms most often used by the interviewees and in the Spanish-language research on the topic.

larger project on literature socialization and storytelling for children in three urban informal educational contexts: a library, a children's bookstore, and a public park. As part of the larger study, their performance in one of these settings was video-recorded and an interview was conducted as a follow-up to the recorded performance. Interviews lasted about 90 minutes and took place in the first half of 2005. The interviews were conducted by David Poveda and centered around three themes: the storytellers' personal and professional trajectories; their current experiences and involvement in storytelling or other activities related with children's literature; and, finally, a commentary on the recorded performance.

This corpus of interviews is analyzed around two topics: patterns in storytellers' work trajectories and the organization of their informal theories about children as storytelling audiences. There are two important methodological observations to make in relation to how the results should be interpreted. First, because this study is based on a small number of participants, any patterning and grouping of these storytellers and their ideologies should be considered tentative. Second, storytellers were contacted as part of a study that did not have "the storytelling community" as its initial focus. Unlike other studies explicitly focused on storytellers, the narrators examined here were not contacted through their own professional organizations or networks or because they represented a particular storytelling movement (regional, stylistic, thematic, professional, and so on)—which does not preclude these connections being revealed after the fact. They were contacted because they told stories in one of three settings that were examined in detail as sites for children's contact with literature. Thus, the "common link" between the storytellers (how and why they work with children) was partially imposed on the participants by the logic of the study.

Having said this, it is important to stress what these storytellers do represent. Based on our observations before, during, and after the time of the study, the participants in our research are a good sample of the type of narrators who occupy the major out-of-school storytelling spaces (such as libraries, bookstores, shopping malls, parks, or hospitals) available to children in a large Spanish metropolitan area such as Madrid. The variability among our participants in relation to formative trajectories, expertise, and storytelling styles is representative of the diversity that is found in these storytelling spaces. This variability also provides a good basis to explore the research questions that we have outlined in the introduction regarding how Spanish storytellers who perform for children construct their child audiences, and the role that contact with formal educational discourses plays in these constructions.

The Personal and Professional Trajectories of Storytellers for Children in Madrid

The sample of storytellers interviewed for this study represents a varied group of professional and amateur storytellers who perform for children and adults in Madrid and other regions of Spain. If the sample is taken as representative of the Madrid (or Spanish) storytelling community—something that should be done with caution—there are several differences from the way storytelling communities are described in other contexts that should be pointed out. In contrast to the United States and England (Wilson 2005; Sobol 2008), it does not seem possible to identify a "historical narrative" across storytellers that points toward a critical formative

period in a (possible) Spanish storytelling revival—for example, associated with crucial periods in Spain’s recent social history such as the Spanish political “transition” of the 1970s or the renaissance of Spanish contemporary culture in the early 1980s. While participants agree that currently there is broader interest and that there are more professional opportunities in oral storytelling, their incorporation into the “storytelling movement” is defined by their own idiosyncratic personal-professional trajectories. Also, in contrast to Canada or Britain (Stone 1998; Wilson 2005), there do not seem to be clearly defined and bounded “storytelling streams,” such as oral tradition, education, theater, therapy, business, and so on, with which storytellers identify. Rather, these storytellers working in Madrid often perform in a variety of settings, with varied audiences and with multiple intentions, and define their current practices and choices by a combination of personal preferences and emergent (happenstance) opportunities. In Madrid, there seem to be a number of overlapping and loosely defined “storytelling circuits” in which these storytellers participate, such as regional libraries, local libraries, denominational schools, pedagogically innovative schools, early education centers, storytelling cafes, cultural events, promotional events sponsored by publishing companies, and others. Yet it is not common for any of the storytellers to specialize in one of these circuits and none of these circuits is sufficiently consolidated to be independently self-supporting for these narrators. Finally, almost all participants report collaborations (either in the past or currently) with other storytellers, cite other colleagues whom they have met through their work or training, have explicit and traceable connections between them, and speak of certain formalized networking activities (e.g., web-pages and forums, storytelling festivals, and so on). Yet it is not possible to identify through these interviews clearly formed “intentional storytelling communities” (Stone 1998) or established professional associations (Sobol 2008) in Spain—even though, interestingly, several interviewees speak of “intruders” in storytelling activities and make claims to certain necessary professional requirements to become a competent narrator.

It is an open question whether this scenario indicates that Spanish storytelling is in an “early formative period” or has become a stable profession. Perhaps these tentative observations would be very different if access to storytellers had followed other research paths more common in folklore studies of storytellers (such as through their own professional-personal networks) or if the primary focus of investigation was not storytellers working with children. These are questions that only further research can resolve. What can be said from the interviews is that Spanish storytellers who work with children are a versatile group of narrators who perform in a variety of settings and who arrived at storytelling through different personal-professional paths. More importantly, all participants produce a coherent personal narrative to explain how they “ended up” in this line of work. Table 1 provides a descriptive summary of each narrator, showing professional background, current spectrum of storytelling work, and the personal-professional connections that exist among them.

Table 1: Summary of Storytellers' Trajectories

<i>Name²</i>	<i>Background</i>	<i>Current work</i>	<i>Personal-Professional connections</i>
<i>Pepe Pérez</i>	Degree in primary education teaching. Worked in after-school support programs and in experimental pedagogical groups. Trained in storytelling through workshops.	<i>Schools, libraries, parental associations, municipal cultural events, hospitals, regular section in a regional television program. Performs for all ages (infants, children, adolescents, adults) but is trying to avoid nighttime performances in adult storytelling cafés.</i>	Based in Seville. Travels to Madrid occasionally to perform.
<i>Mónica Garrido</i>	Degree in biology. Training as a sociocultural animator. Extensive volunteer work in out-of-school programs. Trained in storytelling through courses and workshops.	<i>Schools, libraries, commercial centers through publishing house events. Performs primarily for school-aged children, trying to avoid adult storytelling cafés.</i>	
<i>Renuka</i>	Unknown academic background. Trained in storytelling through workshops.	<i>Part-time volunteer and semi-professional storyteller. Regular voluntary activity in a hospital, schools, children's bookstores, municipal libraries, and adult storytelling cafés. Performs for all ages.</i>	Mother (Renuka) and daughter (Clara). They have participated in the same workshops. They perform as a duo for adults (and also individually), and plan to do so for children. Interviewed together.
<i>Clara</i>	Degree in performing arts. Trained in storytelling during her studies and in later workshops.	<i>Schools, municipal libraries, children's bookstores, and adult storytelling cafés. Performs for all ages.</i>	
<i>Sheila and Daniel</i>	Worked in a family-owned factory in Argentina that eventually closed. Self-trained puppeteers. Became full time street and travelling artists. Moved to Spain some years later.	<i>Regular performances in Madrid parks. Occasional hired events in schools, birthdays, commercial centers. They perform only for children.</i>	Married couple who work together and began their career in Argentina. Currently they have a daughter and son who are also street-performing puppeteers. Interviewed together.
<i>José Fontana</i>	Trained as a puppeteer through workshops in Argentina. Used street-puppet performances as a means of support during several	<i>Regular performances in Madrid Retiro park. Occasional hired events such as birthdays. Only performs for children.</i>	Friendly relationship with Daniel and Sheila, given their common national background and that they

² Following current conventions in folklore studies, we will use participants' actual names, those by which they introduced themselves and by which they are referred to among colleagues; these may be different from the particular "characterized nicknames" they may use for some performances or when they work with other colleagues.

	years of “bohemian travel.” Trained as a teacher, worked in rural schools. Became a puppeteer in a formal company with international tours and arrived in Europe.		share the same working space (the street-performing avenue of Retiro park in Madrid).
<i>Esther</i>	Trained and worked as an occupational therapist. Studied illustration through workshops and became a published illustrator and author of children’s literature. Currently owner, with other partners, of a children’s bookstore.	<i>Storytelling events and other workshops in her bookstore. Only done for children or for adults interested in children’s literature.</i>	Esther and Violeta Monreal refer to each other as author-illustrator(s) of children’s literature. Violeta Monreal has occasional sessions in Esther’s bookstore.
<i>Violeta Monreal</i>	Degree in fine arts. Worked in design for several years. Became an illustrator of children’s books and educational materials, later also an author. Well known for her illustration techniques.	<i>Storytelling events about her work in schools, bookstores, and libraries. Performs only for children.</i>	
<i>Mercedes Carrión</i>	Degrees in drama-performing arts from Lima and Budapest. Extensive international career as a performing artist, narrator, magician, and educator in the performing arts. Pioneer in organizing workshops for storytellers in Madrid.	<i>Schools, libraries, cultural centers. She coordinates a program for children in the library system of a city in the Madrid metropolitan area. She currently performs primarily for children.</i>	Alicia Merino and Rafael Ordoñez have been students in workshops conducted by Mercedes Carrión and they explicitly recognize her formative impact.
<i>Alicia Merino</i>	Degree in journalism, worked for several years in journalism. Trained in storytelling through workshops and later through a degree in drama-performing arts.	<i>Libraries, schools, cultural centers and events. Works with musicians and in theater-like productions. She primarily performs for children but also for adults.</i>	
<i>Rafael Ordoñez</i>	Unknown academic background. Works as a state employee in a clerical position. Trained as a storyteller through workshops. Is also a published author of children’s literature.	<i>Libraries, schools, cultural centers, children’s bookstores in storytelling events about his work and about other stories. Stand-up comedy and storytelling in cafés. Performs for all ages.</i>	

These individual trajectories can be grouped into a limited set of paths into storytelling. Potentially, these paths indicate the patterns for becoming a storyteller for children in Madrid or Spain. Among the participating narrators there seem to be four converging routes:

1) *Storytelling through work in non-formal education and literacy promotion programs*: One group of narrators—Mónica Garrido and Pepe Pérez—became storytellers for children through

their involvement in informal/non-formal educational programs for children and youth. Their initial training concentrated on alternative educational programs, either as an outgrowth of formal teacher training or directly through training as a non-formal educator. Both of these storytellers concentrate their work in publicly funded institutions and programs (such as libraries, schools, cultural centers) that usually have an active role in the type of literacy promotion measures that are designed for children and youth in Spain (Clemente 2004). Currently, they are able to work full-time as storytellers and “literacy promoters” (*animadores de la lectura*) and engage in privately funded events (e.g., publishing events in commercial centers) only out of economic necessity. They are trying to avoid nighttime performances in cafés for adults since it does not fit their current interests or lifestyles (Pepe Pérez mentions health reasons and Mónica Garrido had an infant son at the time of the interview).

2) *Storytelling through drama and the performing arts*: A second group of participants entered storytelling for children through advanced training in drama studies. Mercedes Carrión, Alicia Merino, and Clara have completed training in drama and other performing arts and are full-time professional narrators at different stages in their careers. Renuka (Clara's mother) is an amateur and volunteer narrator but has participated in workshops similar to those of her daughter. For all these participants, narrating for children is one part of a varied set of storytelling activities across contexts and age groups and may be more or less prominent in their current activities depending on emerging professional opportunities and interests. For example, Mercedes Carrión (the more senior narrator among the participants) is currently fully involved in publicly funded literacy promotion programs while Alicia, Clara, and Renuka perform in various settings. Alicia works in theatrical productions and performances with musicians and actors, and Renuka and Clara are developing a repertory for adult storytelling cafés alongside their work with children.

3) *Storytelling through involvement in children's literature*: A third group of participants engage in performances for children as part of their professional involvement in the world of children's literature, either as author, illustrator, or bookseller. Violeta Monreal and Esther fit clearly into this category. They have established careers as authors/illustrators of children's literature and concentrate their work in contexts that are part of the “world of publishing” (bookstores, promotional events, collaborations with commercial publishers, book fairs, and so forth). Storytelling sessions for these participants highlight much more clearly their individual “authorship”: Violeta presents only her own stories and attempts to turn her sessions into demonstrations of her creative process, while Esther tells stories in her bookstore, selecting the themes and books that she wishes to promote commercially.

4) *Storytelling by becoming a puppeteer*: A final group is composed of the puppeteers who participated in this study. The three puppeteers interviewed—Sheila, Daniel, and José—have very different professional life histories from the rest of the narrators in the study but show some remarkable similarities as a subgroup.³ They work only with puppets for children and entered

³ In fact, it is debatable whether puppeteers should be considered part of the contemporary “storytelling scene”—certainly Daniel, Sheila and José do not see themselves as part of it. However, they fit within the design of

this profession mostly through an artisan-like self-taught process. Although throughout their careers they have performed in various settings and countries, including theaters and festivals, their main work takes place primarily in Retiro Park,⁴ and they have elaborate discourses about being “street artists” and about their contribution to this park as a public cultural space. Finally, in their interviews these three participants (and only these three) spontaneously connected their work with puppets with their own spirituality—Daniel and Sheila are practicing Catholics and José explained that he is also a Reiki master.

These four trajectories should be seen as open and flexible schematizations and not as closed categories designed to label all Madrid storytellers working with children, since even within the sample there are narrators who cannot be fitted into any of the above patterns. Rafael Ordóñez, who holds a full-time position as a state employee, considers himself a narrator who tells stories as a hobby even though he has a busy working agenda, performing as often as two or three times a week. His training stems from drama (through workshops conducted by Mercedes Carrión), and he regularly performs for adults, although he is also an award-winning author of children’s literature and is frequently invited to libraries and bookstores to talk about his work and other stories. In short, he would seem to have elements of the first three strands we have described, but these are combined in such a way that this narrator could not be fitted into any of the available categories.

In sum, the participants in this study became storytellers through different personal paths, yet there are also some general patterns that can be tentatively identified. For the goal of this study, one relevant feature of these trajectories is the role that formal education plays in them. For some participants, storytelling grew out of—or was incorporated into—their training as teachers. Others come with different professional and academic backgrounds but work closely with schools or formal educational programs. Finally, still other narrators do not have any official relationship with formal schooling through either their training or habitual storytelling work, although most do perform in schools occasionally. This observation helps answer one of the initial research questions regarding the “effect” that contact with the devices of formal schooling has on narrators’ discursive constructions (that is, ideologies) of the audience.

Storytellers’ Ideological Construction of the Audience: The Role of Formal Education and Other Sources of Influence

In this section we explore four dimensions of narrators’ discourses: (a) preferences for or indifference to an age-homogeneous audience; (b) the role of children’s background and

the original study since they work in an out-of-school setting that makes available to children literature and literary discourse. Also, puppet performances (by other artists) are occasionally present in some of the contexts that have been mentioned so far, such as libraries, bookstores, cultural centers, or schools.

⁴ Retiro Park (*Parque del Retiro*) is the historical emblematic public park of the city of Madrid—similar to Central Park in New York. It is located in the center of the city, and is a privileged leisure place for inhabitants and visitors to the city. During the weekends it is well known for the amount and variety of “spontaneous” events and performances that take place in the park throughout the day.

competencies in their appreciation of stories; (c) formality/distance vs. informality/intimacy as ideal conditions of the storytelling setting; and (d) the role and meaning of children's participation during a storytelling session. Contact with the formal educational system, in its various forms, seems to play a structuring role in the first two dimensions ("age" and "background"), while the other two ("participation" and "idealized conditions") appear to be connected with other factors of their professional trajectories. However, as we will also see, these dimensions are deeply intertwined in storytellers' discourses and we separate them here only for analytical purposes.

Age as a Structuring Dimension of the Audience

Narrators working in close contact with the educational system, telling stories frequently in schools or participating in publicly funded literacy promotion programs, show an explicit preference for age-homogeneous audiences, organized in similar terms as an age-graded school-year system. Storytellers whose main narrative work does not take place in schools do not show this preference and may even find advantages in the diversity offered by an age-heterogeneous group, which is characteristic of audiences outside school settings. In this dimension, an initial degree in teaching is not as important as extensive professional experience in schools, which may or may not be a follow-up to a degree in teaching. The most telling instances of such differences are the contrasting views of Violeta Monreal and Rafael Ordóñez, two authors of children's literature with backgrounds unrelated to education.

Violeta Monreal works extensively in schools and even defines her role in somewhat "instructional" terms—as helping children and students develop a particular aesthetic vision that formal education does not promote. She also has a very clear position on what should be the disposition and organization of her audience:⁵

You could say I have perfect environments. For me the bookstore ((where she performed and was recorded)) is the least perfect environment that I can have, the one I have least control over what I want to do (...) I always ask for children of more or less the same age. They should never be lying around the floor, never, never, never (...) They should be sitting on a chair, they should be comfortable, they should not be too many. If they are seven years old then they should be about seven to eight, but not maybe a three-year-old and an eight-year-old because what you tell a three-year-old is not the same as what you tell an eight-year-old (...) Through arrangements made by publishers, I sometimes can control this a lot because it's in a classroom in which all this is arranged and children's ages are controlled.

Yo tengo, digamos, ambientes perfectos, lo de la librería ((donde actuó y fue grabada)) para mí es el ambiente menos perfecto que puedo yo tener, menos controlable, para lo que yo quiero hacer (...) siempre pido que sean homogéneos los niños, nunca que estén tirados en el suelo, nunca,

⁵ Violeta Monreal, interview, March 2005. The interviews took place in Spanish. They have been transcribed with conventional orthography so that they can be easily read. The few symbols that have been used draw from conventions found in Conversation Analysis and are as follows: (...): edited segment, usually false starts, hesitations, etc.; ((): commentary; and -: interruption or continuous turn without a pause.

nunca, nunca (...) que estén colocados en una silla, que estén cómodos, que no sean muchos, que si son de siete años pues que tengan siete-ocho años pero que no haya uno de tres y un niño de ocho porque lo que se dice a los niños de tres no es lo mismo que lo que se dice a los de ocho (...) Por mediación de las editoriales a veces controlo eso mucho porque es un aula en el que a lo mejor eso se canaliza y se controla la edad de los críos.

In contrast, Rafael Ordóñez, who narrates mainly outside schools for adults and children and has a playful orientation toward storytelling, has a much more open vision for how the audience should be organized. He even finds performing for an age-heterogeneous audience attractive:⁶

I try to “play” with parents, put in something for the children and something for the parents so (...) that it will be a show for all ages, sometimes I achieve this and sometimes I don’t.

INT: So you don’t mind too much if there are children of all ages and or things like that?

Well no, the ideal is uniformity, but it is also a bit boring. When I go to a school and they put me in a class for “seven-year-olds,” all the kids are seven years old, that is ideal because you more or less know their reaction, their level. But when you go to a bookstore, a library, a party, there are three-year-olds and twelve-year-olds (...) and that [situation] demands that you try harder to make it enjoyable for everyone. So let’s say that from the point of view of effort, I prefer the same age but I like it when it’s varied because it’s more fun.

Yo intento hacerles guiños a los padres, meterle alguna cosa a los niños y alguna cosa que al padre que esté (...) que el espectáculo sea para todas las edades que a veces lo consigo y a veces no.

ENT: ¿así que tampoco te importa mucho que haya niños de todas las edades y ese tipo de cosas?

No hombre, lo ideal es la uniformidad pero también es un poco aburrido, cuando voy a un colegio y me meten en una clase “niños de siete años” todos los niños de siete años, eso es ideal porque sabes más o menos su reacción, sabes en que nivel están pero cuando vas a una librería, una biblioteca, una fiesta, hay niños de tres años y niños de doce (...) y ahí sí que exige más intentar que les guste a todos, es más difícil, o sea que digamos que desde el punto de vista económico de esfuerzo prefiero la misma edad pero me gusta que sea variado porque es más divertido.

Children’s Background and Upbringing as an Audience

Another set of ideas that seems to be related to contact with formal education centers around how storytellers construct expectations about proper behavior on the part of their audiences. In this case there are two elements that make this connection especially complex and rich. First, these expectations, and especially criticisms about how they are not met, are made most explicit when discussing storytelling in libraries. Libraries represent the most institutionally formalized context in this study, and storytelling work in such a context is often part of socio-educational policies and projects (about “cultural and literacy promotion”) that are shared with the formal educational system. Second, the logical organization of narrators’ criticisms shares

⁶ Rafael Ordóñez, interview, May 2005.

many features with well-identified discourses among professionals in the Spanish educational system in which strong explanatory attributions are made about families and parents (Franzé 2008)—while the effect of other potential variables such as the setting (e.g., school, library) or professionals' actions (e.g., by teachers, storytellers) is not articulated. In some cases, this connection may have its origin in the storyteller's background and training, but this is not always the case.

Pepe Pérez has a degree in teaching and has been involved for many years in literacy promotion programs and teachers' continuing education, and discusses at length his experience with different audiences. One part of his assessment has to do with regional differences and his ability to connect and engage with children from different cities in Spain or even different neighborhoods in large cities such as Madrid or Seville. However, another part of his discourse has to do with how children should behave in particular settings, such as libraries:⁷

When a session goes well the audience was good and you were good. If it goes very very very well it's because the audience was exceptional and you were good (...) and when it goes poorly it's that you were horrible and the audience had some problems and we all make excuses (...) that if they were eating "cheetos." Today ((in a library session)) I saw a kid eat "cheetos."

INT: I saw it because I was in front, but I thought it was something the mother did so that the kid did not start making a fuss (...)

Obviously if you go to the theater you can't eat "cheetos." We had a storytellers' meeting in Cádiz and someone pinpointed this very well. He/she gave a very graphic example that shows it well, if you go to a football match and someone jumps onto the field, the whole match is stopped (...) So, it should be something like that. You are telling a story and suddenly a child crosses the stage, or this or that. Or a kid comes and starts to touch something that you have prepared, theoretically you should stop (...) The problem is that it's a delicate issue, it's very difficult to tell a father or a mother "your kid is a pain" (...) I have a twelve-year-old son and he has come with me to storytelling events; I have taken him to storytelling events, I have taken him to museums. And if I see that he is doing something then I tell him (...) ((talking about the morning session in the library)) I had two or three who never stopped buzzing around my feet, and I have reduced mobility. I can step on one of them with my shoe, I can hurt him, I can fall (...) That kid's parent, where is he? If you see that he is there, then call him. I think we have to teach the kids to listen, I think we are not taught to listen.

Cuando sale una sesión bien es que el público ha sido bueno y tú has estado bien. Si sale muy muy bien es que el público ha sido excepcional y tú has estado bien (...) y cuando sale mal es que tú has estado horrible y el público ha habido algunos problemas y todos ponemos excusas (...) que si han comido gusanitos. Yo hoy ((una sesión en una biblioteca)) he visto a un niño comer gusanitos.

ENT: Yo lo he visto porque estaba al frente pero yo lo tomé como una actitud de la madre para que el niño no empezara a incordiar (...)

⁷ Pepe Pérez, interview, January 2005.

Está claro que si tú vas al teatro no se puede comer gusanitos. Hicimos un encuentro en Cádiz de narradores y alguien puso el dedo en la llaga, algo importante. Dijo un ejemplo muy gráfico que se ve bien. Tú vas a un partido de fútbol y si se mete un espontáneo se para todo el partido de fútbol (...) Entonces debería ser algo así, estás contando y de repente se cruza un niño o esto o lo otro o se mete un niño y se pone a tocarte algo de lo que tú tienes, en teoría habría que pararlo (...) Lo que pasa es que es muy delicado, es tan delicado decirle a un padre o a una madre “su hijo es un incordio” (...) Yo tengo un hijo de doce años y conmigo ha venido a contadas; lo he llevado a contadas, lo he llevado a museos. Entonces si veo que está haciendo algo pues se lo digo (...) ((hablando de la sesión de la mañana)) Yo es que tenía a dos o tres que no paraban de andurrear a mis pies y mi movilidad es bastante reducida, que pisar a alguno con mi zapato, que le hago daño, me puedo caer (...) El padre de ese niño ¿dónde está? Si estás viendo que está ahí pues lo llamas. Yo creo que hay que educar a escuchar, creo que no estamos educados a escuchar.

Alicia Merino’s trajectory stems from the performing arts, but she shares these same views about how families and children are making use of libraries currently:⁸

Lately this is happening in libraries, they are being used as play centers. The mummies go to give their kids their snacks and they start to talk, a total commotion. I remember a couple of years ago I went crazy (...) You notice that you start developing resources to maintain the attention of so many people during an hour, and you can see what kind of resources we have, a person (...) You are a person talking [telling a story] and I realized that I was throwing confetti, dancing, and playing a drum in a library. So I stop and think “what am I doing?” and you realize that you are just forcing the situation, somehow disrespecting it and devaluing what telling a story is, it’s a story and that’s all (...) Often the conditions are not favorable (...) it’s not librarians’ fault, they often go crazy. But since the parents are taxpayers and it is free, they just leave the kid there, and they start to talk, to come in and out. Somehow we are not transmitting to children the quality, the importance, the nature of what storytelling could be.

En las bibliotecas últimamente está pasando eso, que lo toman como ludotecas, entonces van a ir las mamás para dar de merendar al niño y se ponen a charlar, que es un guirigay total. Yo recuerdo que hace dos años, o una cosa así, me volví loca (...) Vas viendo que desarrollas recursos para mantener una hora a tanta gente, y ya ves tú los recursos que tenemos, es una persona (...) eres una persona hablando y yo me di cuenta que estaba tirando confeti, bailando y tocando el tambor en una biblioteca. Y ya me paro y “¿esto qué es?” y te das cuenta de que estás forzando la situación pero de alguna manera perdiéndole el respeto y desvirtuando lo que es contar un cuento, un cuento y ya está (...) Muchas veces no se dan las condiciones adecuadas (...) no es cuestión de las bibliotecarias que muchas veces se vuelven locas ellas, pero como los papás son contribuyentes y eso es gratis pues te dejan ahí al chaval y se ponen a charlar, a entrar a salir. De alguna manera no se traslada al niño ni la calidad, ni la importancia, ni la naturaleza de lo que puede ser.

⁸ Alicia Merino, interview, February 2005

These descriptions of how children and families behave in libraries may also relate to broader debates currently taking place about the changing meanings and practices associated with libraries (Cassany 2006). However, they also seem to be part of a general conception regarding how literature should be appropriated and how parents should transmit it to their children. Pepe Pérez and Alicia Merino, working in libraries and public educational programs, want to promote this vision and would like to see more parents embracing it. In contrast, Esther, as a bookstore owner, attempts to directly target families who as customers share her “sensibilities” and provides a portrait of children and their families (“clients”) for whom purchasing books is part of a cultural lifestyle:⁹

I think this kind of “thing” ((her bookstore and her programs)) attracts people who already have a certain sensibility. Our clients are people who want their children to love books, to get into books; they appreciate the initiative, so they take care of us. We have many clients who take care of us (...) They are the ones who make their children [attend the event], when they see an activity, maybe they bring friends who have children, and they are the ones who explain the library inside the bookstore thing (...) They have a certain respect [for stories and storytelling], and I think it’s because of the type of client that we attract.

Yo creo que este tipo de historia ((su librería y sus programas)) atrae a gente con una sensibilidad ya determinada. Nuestros clientes son gente que quieren que sus hijos amen al libro, que tengan una afición al libro y agradecen la iniciativa, con lo cual te cuidan. Tenemos muchos clientes que nos cuidan (...) Son ellos los que hacen que el niño, cuando ven una dinámica, a lo mejor traen a unos amigos con un niño y son ellos los que explican muchas veces lo de la biblioteca dentro de las librería (...) Hay un respeto y yo creo que es por el tipo de cliente que atraemos.

In other words, these extracts suggest that storytellers lean towards a “cultivated” view of the audience, similar to the one defended by some of the literary theorists and dramatists discussed in the introduction. Children are expected to show certain behavioral dispositions and sensibilities during storytelling events, and these dispositions are culturally transmitted through the family. However, this view is not found among puppeteers. As José Fontana explains, puppeteers believe that appreciating and participating in a puppet performance draws on very primary human capacities and motivations that younger children can display but that are present throughout one’s life:¹⁰

There are even parents who say “Even I enjoyed it” (...) And really that is also a myth, in the sense that everyone likes puppets because they move things that are very primary. For me puppets come into contact with something that is very primitive in human beings, which is magical thinking and we do not lose that. Adults think they have lost it, but really they have just deposited it in other things.

⁹ Esther, interview, March 2005.

¹⁰ José Fontana, interview, March 2005.

Hay padres que incluso me dicen “me ha gustado hasta a mí” (...) y en realidad eso también responde a un mito, en el sentido de que los títeres les gusta a todos porque mueven cosas que son muy primarias. Los títeres para mí entran en contacto con algo muy primitivo del ser humano que es el pensamiento mágico y eso no lo perdemos, el adulto cree que lo ha perdido pero en realidad lo deposita en otras cosas.

Ideal Storytelling Climate and Relationship with the Audience

Most storytellers consider the ideal conditions for storytelling as a practical problem. Most narrators perform in a variety of settings that can be very different in their physical and social arrangements. These elements are largely beyond their control, so they consider it a part of their professional skills to have resources to adapt to a variety of storytelling conditions. Also, several storytellers mention working with a characterized narrator (Casla et al. 2008)—e.g., a storytelling witch, a fairy—as one key resource to focus children’s attention and create a defined storytelling space. Yet when they are pushed to elaborate on an ideal setting, there are some differences among narrators. In this case the combination of professional experience and training in drama/performing arts leads to favoring performances in a more formal and theatrical key, while a more amateur and less professionalized background favors a view of storytelling as an intimate narrative event. Mercedes Carrión, who has the most extensive professional experience and elaborate training in performing arts among the participants, shows this preference for auditorium-like performances, although when talking about the literacy promotion program she runs in a library, the relationship with the children is described in different terms:¹¹

If I think about it from the viewpoint of my personal satisfaction (...) I always liked show business, I love to act, I love to be on stage, I like auditoriums very much; but let’s say that this is from a very self-centered point of view ((laughter)) my diva part ((laughter)) (...) In stage-like spaces you can do things that often you can’t do in smaller spaces.

Si lo pienso desde un punto de vista muy para mi satisfacción personal (...) que a mi siempre me gustó el mundo del espectáculo, me encanta actuar, me encanta estar en escenario, a mi me gustan mucho los auditorios, pero digamos sería desde un punto de vista muy egocéntrico ((risas)) mi parte de diva ((risas)) (...) en los espacios de escenario puedes hacer cosas que muchas veces no puedes hacer en espacios más pequeños.

In contrast, Clara, who also has training in acting but is in a much earlier stage of her career, considers intimacy and warmth as ideal conditions for storytelling:¹²

¹¹ Mercedes Carrión, interview, April 2005.

¹² Clara, interview, April 2005.

For a storyteller it is always much simpler, much more natural, [to be in] an intimate space, because stories are something intimate. It's (...) more poetic, more romantic, something, I don't know, something more intimate (...) The storyteller does not need to raise his/her voice, and then the only thing you need is a fire in the middle (...) and we have the perfect storytelling.

Para un cuentacuentos siempre es muchísimo más sencillo, muchísimo más natural el ámbito recogido, porque el cuento es algo íntimo, entonces es (...) más poético, más romántico pues, no sé, algo más recogido (...) que el cuentacuentos no necesita levantar muchísimo la voz y ya pues lo único que falta es la hoguera en medio (...) y ya tenemos la contada perfecta.

The Value of Participation from the Audience

Regarding participation, there seem to be some consistent themes among storytellers. They all value participation and seek to create performances where children can respond and provide feedback to the storyteller during the narrative event. However, participation needs to be managed so it takes place within certain parameters. Too little participation, which is different from “silent attention” (cf. Martin 1996), is interpreted as disengagement and results in lifeless narrative events. Too much participation, especially from particularly disruptive children, can sabotage a performance and obstruct the unfolding of a story. Again, the professional kit of an experienced storyteller includes resources to manage children's participation and especially to restrain the more exuberant children. Mónica Garrido, who often works in large library auditoriums, mentions some of the strategies that have to be deployed to constrain participation:¹³

INT: And can the children participate too much?

Yes! “My daddy has a dog . . .” “One day I went . . .” and that's good because that means that you made contact with them, they listen to you and they want to be heard (...) You are telling them interesting things and they tell you things that are interesting, for them of course. But what do you care [if the child tells you] “I woke up in the morning and I had breakfast” (...) They can participate too much (...) When, for instance, you ask “and what animals were there?” Well “a dog, a wolf, this, that . . .” Very strange animals are mentioned just as long as you can say one, then well you have to [say] “Ok, enough, enough, enough,” you have to stop because if not, you can't continue the story.

ENT: ¿Y los niños pueden llegar a participar demasiado?

¡Sí! “Pues mi papá tiene un perro . . .” “Pues yo fui un día . . .” y está muy bien porque eso es que has contactado con ellos igual que ellos te escuchan a ti ellos quieren ser escuchados (...) tú les estás contando cosas interesantes y ellos te cuentan cosas que son interesantes, para ellos claro, pero a ti qué más te da “me levanté por la mañana y había desayunado . . .” (...) pueden participar demasiado (...) cuando tú preguntas pues “¿y qué animales había?” pues “un perro, un lobo, un no sé qué, un no sé cual . . .” acaban saliendo animales muy raros que con tal de decir que tú,

¹³ Mónica Garrido, interview, March 2005.

entonces pues tú tienes que “bueno ya, ya, ya,” tienes que parar porque si no, [no] puedes seguir contando el cuento.

Finally, there is a key difference between how participation bears on performances by oral narrators and puppeteers. While for the former group participation is something that is valued and fostered within certain limits, it remains an optional element in their performances. With the exception of particular situations where participation is central (e.g., bringing a child from the audience to the stage to collaborate in the telling of a story), a storytelling event could go on without any input from the audience. Lack of participation or audience reaction would make for a poor and unsuccessful performance, especially for storytellers who have a less theatrical orientation and like to improvise, but this non-responsiveness would not compromise the structure of the story. In contrast, audience participation is built into the structure of puppet shows, since response from the children is part of the story script and the narrative could not continue (or would do so in a very unnatural way) if this response were absent—in fact, puppeteers sometimes continue their plays as if these responses had taken place even when they have not (Casla et al. 2008). As Daniel and Sheila explain:¹⁴

INT: When you design the play do you think about moments so that the children participate and?-

S: -Yes, of course (...) yes, because for children it comes naturally to participate, it's what they want-

D: -When you work a lot with puppets you know, more or less, how puppets work (...) Someone who is not a puppeteer can't make a play for puppets because he/she would take away that sense of the absurd that puppets have (...) There are many authors that I have read that are pretty to read, Valle Inclán has plays for puppets, but how can you do this with puppets? It would be something, a terrible bore!

ENT: ¿Cuando pensáis la obra pensáis momentos para que los niños respondan y?-

S: -Sí, claro (...) sí porque los chicos les nace naturalmente participar, es lo que quieren-

D: -Es que ya cuando trabajas mucho con los títeres sabes, más o menos, como va el tema de los títeres (...) Alguien que no es titiritero no puede hacer una obra para títeres porque le quitaría el sentido ese del disparate que tiene el títere (...) Hay muchos autores que yo he leído que parecen más bonitos para leer, Valle Inclán tiene obras para títeres, pero esto, ¿cómo se puede hacer en títeres? sería una cosa, ¡un tostón horrible!

In summary, the storytellers we interviewed hold a variety of beliefs and informal theories about the children they entertain. Yet, this range of discourse does not appear to be randomly organized. Unsurprisingly, the narrator's professional background and the types of habitually performed narrative materials and settings help configure his or her beliefs and theories. We have traced contact with the formal educational system, either through initial training or continued storytelling experience, as one source of influence, while other aspects of storytellers' ideologies seem to be related to the contexts in which they work or their training in

¹⁴ Daniel and Sheila, interview, May 2005.

other backgrounds. In the conclusion we examine these findings in relation to some of the theoretical problems that opened the paper.

Conclusion

The first conclusion to be drawn is that, in light of the richness of the materials we have presented, it seems clear that empirically investigating storytellers' ideologies is a worthwhile effort and responds to the research agenda set out by Finnegan (1992). Narrators have articulated beliefs, informal theories, or ideologies (terms that we have used more or less interchangeably throughout the paper) about different aspects of their work that they easily verbalize in semi-structured interviews. Participants did not seem to improvise their answers on the spot nor did they consider the questions we posed irrelevant for their work. Rather, they seemed to manifest a number of strongly felt beliefs about their work and often illustrated their statements with specific instances of storytelling. Drawing on French sociologist Ágnes Heller (1994), these beliefs are part of storytellers' practical daily knowledge, which they use to organize and interpret their professional work. The participants' practical daily knowledge is constructed through formal learning experiences and their personal histories, which take place within particular sociohistorical conditions. There are aspects of each of these layers in the interview fragments we have provided and in the organization of the analytical categories with which we worked.

Consequently, we believe that there is a place for research that specifically examines storytellers' discourses and ideologies about performance separately from their performance work. This does not mean that parallel studies of performances cannot be conducted—we have also examined aspects of these participants' performances (Casla et al. 2008; Poveda et al. 2008) or eventually triangulated to answer other research questions. As stated, the research questions we posed in this paper focus on the ideological constructions of the audience and attempt to trace different social fields that may play a role in their formation. Further, the results suggest that in the case of storytellers working with children it may be particularly important to explore their ideologies because they may have distinctive effects on the organization of storytelling events. It is plausible to think that these narrators have some control over the *design* (Kress and van Leeuwen 2001) of the storytelling sessions in which they participate (such as the requests Violeta Monreal makes through publishers when organizing her storytelling events). Since storytellers' input will be based on their own needs, preferences, and beliefs, it seems that ideologies about their audiences can, at the very least, play a role in the initial conditions and organization of the storytelling event, and these conditions will partly define the type of literary experiences children may have during that event.

In relation to the findings, the paper specifically set out to examine the role of formal education (defined very broadly along several of its apparatuses) as a source of influence on narrators' ideologies. This influence was most visible in relation to how age-homogeneity in the audience was valued and more indirectly in how children's dispositions during formal storytelling events are construed. Other aspects of storytellers' ideologies, such as how audience participation or ideal settings are defined, seemed to connect to other spheres of their experience. In short, there are some convergences between dominant ideologies in formal education and in

those of storytellers who work with children, but there also divergences. All the narrators were chosen for this study because, as part of their work, they perform for children; but not all are in contact with the educational system or have a background in teaching. Under these conditions other ideologies not articulated by formal schooling can develop. This variance is what allows storytelling, especially outside schools, to emerge as a particular socialization context for children not reducible to other domains (such as “the family” or “schooling”).

The data also shows remarkable convergences between storytellers’ beliefs and well-articulated positions in literary criticism—most notably in relation to the characteristics of a “cultivated” audience. Narrators develop their work within particular literary traditions, which they actively espouse and promote, and in their informal theorizing they reproduce problems and questions similar to those posed in academic literary theory. This may not be a terribly surprising discovery given how these fields have been converging in recent decades. It is likely that these storytellers have come into contact with some version of literary theorizing through their “formal” training (in the workshops, seminars, courses, and so forth that all participants have attended at some point), so it is reasonable to think that they have incorporated literary-theoretical notions into their thinking. Yet it should be noticed that, in contrast to other accounts of storytellers’ trajectories, none of the participants has a background in the humanities (e.g., linguistics, languages, literary studies, folklore).

Finally, there are some methodological observations to be made for this and future studies. As explained in the method section, the sample of participants is small and was selected with a very particular focus, so the findings should be read with caution until they can be confirmed with a more extensive study. Yet, despite our arguments above in favor of a specific treatment for ideological constructions, further research should gather different types of information. Ideologies are not only visible in decontextualized verbalizations during a formal interview; they are also displayed in performances, their preparation, and their after-effects. Future studies should attempt to triangulate these different sources of data within a more global ethnography of contemporary storytellers who perform for children.

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