

NARRATION IN THE TOURIST ENVIRONMENT – CURRENT FORM OF STORYTELLING

Eliana-Alina POPEȚI

Abstract: *This study raises the issue of oral storytelling and the modern possibilities of enacting this phenomenon. Exploiting such narrations that would satisfy the tourists' curiosities concerning a certain place, object, monument, etc., involves a series of different elements, from marketing to narrative implications.*

In this paper I propose to layout the detailed answer to the question: Can the narration in the tourist environment correspond to an authentic oral storytelling phenomenon in the present? In order to elaborate a viable answer to this question I shall use a narration intended for tourists that I recorded at the Veterani cave, Mehedinți County.

At the same time, in the practical part of the paper, I shall compare and contrast the oral storytelling in the tourist environment to the traditional storytelling, by taking into consideration similarities and differences of these two forms of orality. Analyzing the narrative framework in a tourist place and its evaluation as a form of the present storytelling is an experiment that should prove the re-inventing of traditional storytelling in an innovative form enfolded on the subject of places, legends and historical information with narrative features.

Keywords: *storytelling, narration, cultural tourism, guide, storyteller.*

INTRODUCTION

The present paper is part of the results of a wider research focused on oral storytelling and the present day narrative repertoire in the Banat region. Due to this study's topic, things cannot be approached from a regional point of view, and the frame used as case study serves more as a universal example.

From a field research done in the Romanian Banat between 2014-2015, resulted that people are prone to transmit the researcher different narration genres and that, most of the times, the repertoire of talented performers is compared to their own life story. This is often linked to the story about their birth place. Under such circumstances, a genre like the fairy tale seems to lose ground, but we cannot talk about an extinct genre since the talented narrators can also tell fairy tales when the researcher requires it.

A discourse about the current image of oral storytelling will definitely take into consideration several important bibliographic sources that converge towards the general observation regarding the diminution of traditional oral

storytelling and transform it according to the changes brought by the advancement of technology, the sociocultural changes, etc.: „Stories have changed with the advancement of technology and alternative, diverse forms of communication, and some genres, such as fairy tales, are disappearing from active narrative practice or are being transformed, while new ones are also appearing. Along with traditional texts, texts that are read (in schoolbooks, newspapers, and magazines) are also transmitted orally in the towns and the villages. Television programs are recounted, usually the content of soap operas or serials that have fairy-tale elements; «terrible, authentic experiences» are narrated.” (Marks 1999: 205)

The changes brought by the various social and technological factors do not determine only narrative situations different from the traditional ones, these meaning precisely the storytelling conditioned by certain beliefs in certain Romanian places: "Entirely obscure seems the origin of the interdiction to tell stories during the day, especially from the concise immensity of the emeritus collector from Bucovina: «To whom tells stories God forgives their sins, if they don't tell them by day, but only by night, for their shirt shall tear up (obviously when bad omens walk around)»" (Bîrlea 1981:42) Even though these narrative situations shaped in accordance with exact norms are rarely mentioned in literature, they are relevant for the present storytelling. The lack of attention from researchers for these beliefs shows that oral storytelling is constantly under various changes concerning the right context, scope and text to be told.

Beyond the narrative situations reminded by Ljiljana Marks, the present oral storytelling activates in various contexts, some of which more intensely researched, like the ones where urban legends are performed, while others haven't imposed themselves yet under the form of scientific genres. Storytelling, as it is named in literature, has become a concept about which Siegfried Neumann states that:

”The concept of storytelling is usually combined with the idea of legends, fairy tales, stories of heroes and saints, and comic tales – that is, with a small number of so-called classic categories of prose created by the people. It is commonly accepted that such stories have all along stood at the center of orally transmitted stories of the «people» (the «folk»). This is certainly based on an oversimplified viewpoint. This is so because life among the lower levels of society has at all times been determined primarily by work and the concerns about daily needs. As a result, conversation and telling are likely to have dealt with everyday topics. But until the recent past, hardly anything of these everyday «tellings» was written down. On the other hand, numerous subjects for legends, comic tales, and fairy tales have been transmitted from older literature, which is based in part on oral sources and which, through research, can be ascribed to folk tellings of specific social levels. For nineteenth-century Germany this would apply to large portions of the rural population who were

mostly without opportunity for education and had practically no means of communication other than verbal exchange.” (Neumann 1999:234)

Regarding storytelling in the tourist environment and the respective type of narration, the narrative genre of this environment does not have a statute in the taxonomies for storytelling created by researchers. They notice either the disappearance of the fairy tale or the trend in new oral narrations born under the influence of social, technological and cultural changes, etc. As regards communication in the tourist environment, those preoccupied by this field pass from noticing the fall of travel literature to analyzing communication and the narrative component in the tourist guidebooks and websites. In the countries with great tourist potential, the guidebooks are presented as new texts: In *Pragmatica della comunicazione turistica (Pragmatics of the tourist communication)* (Antelmi, Held, Santulli: 2007), the three authors discuss a new genre of written text meant for people who like tourist guidebooks. The text is found on hardback guidebooks as well as online. The latter is already subject to several present studies, especially now that the advancement of technology is permissive. (Antelmi, Held, Santulli 2007)

Most studies centered on the texts in the tourist guidebooks regard the written form of such narrations and discuss these products as texts involving several factors, including the narrative one. However, these studies do not regard tourist guiding. While the written tourist text also involves economic and linguistic-textual elements (Antelmi 2010: 36-37), the guide's speech during visiting an attraction is subject to the same rules, but it can also provide a new form of storytelling.

One of the observations noted while on the field regarding storytelling and narrations centered on a place, was that in the areas with potential, and not only, the members of a community narrate texts that are limited to the history of a nearby tourist attraction, especially if it is also famous. In the analysis below, I shall follow the connection between storytelling in the tourist environment, a process tutored by the guide employed for this purpose, and the potential of this phenomenon to be analyzed as a form of storytelling in the present.

Case study: Veterani cave, Mehedinți County

Renzo Mocini states about the tourist places and the role played by the stories told about them: "Places are made of narrations that talk about them. The valorization of places, like of all elements that make up the tourist package, is made with methods typical of narrations." [our translation - EAP] (Mocini 2007-2009:24)¹ Therefore, any tourist guidance supposes, at a narrative level,

¹ "I luoghi sono costituiti dalle narrazioni che ne parlano. La valorizzazione dei luoghi, come di tutti gli altri elementi che rientrano nella composizione del pacchetto di viaggio, si realizza con modalità tipiche delle narrazioni."

a storyteller, an audience and a text whose plot comprises several types of information according to the tourist attraction and its legend potential.

In 2014, I was at Veterani cave in Mehedinți County and actively observed and recorded the presentation of the cave made by the guide employed for this purpose. The transcription of the text renders the approximately half an hour visit, time in which one can guess the two instances related to the tourist guidance: a group of visitors and a tour guide prepared to present a text about the respective tourist attraction. Even though within the interaction guide-tourists there are factors emerging from tourist marketing rules, I shall tackle things from a philosophical point of view, that of the storyteller, and I shall bring the characteristic elements under an analytical endeavor.

For the guide's discourse at the Veterani cave, I shall initially use the term *text*, which I render below:

„First I'll greet you and welcome you to the Veterani Cave. My name is I. and I will be your guide today in this cave that is currently under the administration of the Iron Gates National Park.

Geographically, it is caved in the left bank of the Danube, in the limestone mountain wall Ciucărul Mare. It is a hill because the altitude up to the plateau is quite low, around 320m. I can tell you that it was the first cave or grotto to be mapped in Europe, and was temporarily inhabited by humans even from ancient times, that is about 3500 years ago when it was mainly used for sheltering humans and animals. Later on, our ancestors, the Dacians, considered it a sanctuary for the god Zamolxes and brought numerous offerings. And I want to show you that on this stone plateau near us they used to sacrifice animals or, well, it was the altar where animals were sacrificed in honor of the god. This place was not chosen by chance, but because in the morning after sunrise, the sun rays come in through the natural window, they get a circular shape after the round shape of the window and fall exactly in mid plateau, making it the brightest spot in this cave. The phenomenon, unfortunately for you, can only be seen on a photo I posted on the information boards at the entrance. That's because it happens in the morning after sunrise, between eight or so, half past eight and half past nine; about an hour, an hour or so, of course, everything depends on the position of the sun and - you understand that the sky must be clear.

Later on, that is at the beginning of the 18th century, the most interesting period in the life of this cave follows: I talk about the imperialist period. Back then, the Danube represented the border between the two great empires of the time. On the left, on the current Serbian bank, the Ottoman Empire had already reached, always with intentions of expansion and conquest of territories, and here was the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Austrians thought that along the border, which is along the Danube, they would find some strategic places and try in some way or another to stop the Turkish invasion across the Danube.

They found this cave and thought that this place needed consolidation of some kind. Actually, they built a military fortification composed of three levels. The first two were built just outside the grotto, from stone built from the foundation, and the third level was considered this natural cave. Now, let's take it step by step ... and talk about each one in turn...

The first level was positioned 30 meters in front of the cave entrance. And 30 meters below, it is completely flooded. Because the Iron Gates dam was built in the years '72- '74 and the waters rose by approximately thirty meters than they were before. So, at level one, they had arranged a small forge necessary for processing the iron in weapons and had stables for horses, of course. And the horses, needed to transport weapons, were used to transport food supplies regularly – so that you understand how they got here with horses, weapons, equipment and everything they needed. The main road that beforehand was used to cross the Danube Gorge was somewhere down, between water and rock, so ashore. All considered, as I've told you earlier, the waters were thirty meters lower. ... Good!

Level two is now present only by the remains of the defensive wall that you have seen when you entered, at the end of the wooden walkway that you've climbed. But then, not knowing what it's about, we'll see it better on our way out.

The third one, as I've said, is this natural cave ... And here, I'll present all the points of interest of this grotto, whether they were built by soldiers or were natural, but the soldiers used them for certain things. And we'll try to look over that wall... You can tell it was built by humans. Behind that wall there was a room for General Friedrich Veterani, the Austrian general who gave the cave its name. He was in charge of all three levels of fortification I've told you about earlier, about 200 Austro-Hungarian soldiers. Allegedly, in case of force majeure, that is when they were overwhelmed by the number of Turks who constantly attacked them over the Danube, they could request reinforcements. For the Imperial forces were stationed in all major cities from here, starting in Orșova, Caransebeș and everywhere in Ardeal or Transylvania. So they could ask for reinforcements up to seven hundred soldiers. But on average, there were two hundred soldiers here, and in case of force majeure, they would ask for the reinforcements I've told you about earlier.

Now ... we'll go somewhere on the plateau and see the other points of interest. Follow me, please! Here we come to another facility they built. As you know, every animal or human being on earth must be provided with drinking water. Without water, there's no life! Given that the river water is not potable for humans unless passed under treatment processes, with wastewater treatment plants and so on, they had to dig into the limestone rock over 20 meters then, until they came to a layer of groundwater or drinking water. Now, unfortunately, over time the springs were blocked because stones and rocks came down. At this

time, it is no deeper than 5 meters, and the water you see is no longer drinkable because now it comes only from rainwater infiltration. In very dry summers, I can tell you that it dries up completely, that is you can see the rocks on the bottom. I've said at the beginning of the presentation that it is also about some natural places that soldiers used here, places they didn't build. It's about these three holes that are called potholes in geology, technically speaking. Soldiers used them as pantries for storing food or food required for daily living.

Why did they decide this? Because in the past, these potholes communicated to the top through some of these very narrow channels through which man could not get in. But through them there was permanent ventilation air here. They were the coolest places in this cave. Now, as you can see, the limestone rock is one of the softest. Because of the water leakage it flows effectively like this, it deposits on the inner walls of the cave, as you can see there. Well, this has led to the complete clogging or obstructing of the old channels that once reached outside, and also because of this, these potholes greatly decreased in size. They were larger, more dug up in the rock, and enough food for those staying here could be stored there. I'll ask you to move to the right and I'll try to lighten the path so you can see that there still is a small piece of the former channel that once reached up to the plateau. Of course, I told you that these places are natural, so not built by soldiers, not dug up by them or...

We'll try to continue the route, and please pay attention, a small step from the ground ... We came on vacation and do not want unpleasant incidents to occur.

Slowly we come to another facility that they built. It's about this gutter built in stone. It mainly had two major uses for those who built it. First, I said that at level one, there were the horses and the stables. One of the main uses of the gutter was that of bringing the horses from level one till here on level three, and they simply watered the horses with the water from the well. The second use was for hygiene, bodily or anything related to washing and cleaning - military equipment, for example. They cleaned it and washed it in this gutter made of stone.

A few words about the natural window there. I can tell you that it served as observance and defense point because they had placed a cannon in the window. They fought back whenever they were attacked by the Turks over the Danube. And I want to show you how ingenious they could be: how did they get up there with the cannon or any other weaponry? Somewhere at the top, there is a natural bridge or natural walkway, as you want to call it, that helped them take the weaponry to the window. Unfortunately, here, as you can see, water infiltration was more abundant, the limestone deposited on the inner walls of the cave until it completely covered the left end of this natural bridge.

I want to tell you they were stationed here until 1830 when they were forced to leave the fortress, but without being conquered by the Turks or the

losers, but because the Turks had conquered Budapest, one of the capitals of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, they had somehow crossed the border between Serbia and Hungary. Since the capital was conquered, they were ordered to leave this military fortification. In other words, this was the history of the cave, I thank you for listening to me, and I hope I have provided you with interesting information. As you know, there are all sorts of caves and grottos in the world. There are certain topics that are interesting for everyone. This is interesting from a historical point of view and because of what happened here."

Before analyzing the narrative above, I must mention that it translates into a context of active storytelling for the research of this phenomenon in the present. Milena Berandi states that outside the family and school environment, like theatres are for children, the cinemas and libraries where narrative-artistic actions take place, there is a rediscovery of fairy tales and stories. (Berandi 2010) Such observation allows the comment that, although not on the same wavelength with the narrative-artistic actions, the tourist space allows an act of live storytelling.

Going back to the text from Veterani cave, one may notice that in the first sentence of the cave presentation, the guide launches his identity mark. „My name is I.” imposes familiarity between the group of tourists and the instance that is going to take up the role of informant regarding the history of the cave.

Textually, the guide’s discourse comprises several fragments that could be information about the Veterani cave, but the entire discourse is actually built unitarily, which determines its approach as a unique text. Therefore, the first two parts merge almost intangibly with realistic information about the geographical location of the place, after which the text plummets in the Dacian stage of the cave. The sacrifices, the altar and the window through which light reaches inside, alienates the text from the objective reality in which it has been enframed by the geographical details the text has debuted with.

Since the Dacian stage of the cave is consumed, we turn to another historical period in a succession of small narrations that, at some moment, give the impression they function as independent texts. The connectors coagulating the historical stages of the Veterani cave can correspond to a kind of middle formulae taken from the structure of the classical fairy tale, elements that influence the manner in which the tourist presentation becomes more narrative: „Now, let’s take it step by step...and talk about each one in turn...”, „Now...We’ll go somewhere on the plateau and see the other interest points. Follow me, please!”

As the narrative context develops, the guide who would correspond to a traditional storyteller, starts introducing his own comments in the text: „As you know, every animal or human being on earth must be provided with drinking water. Without water, there’s no life!” What is noticed in this text

sequence confirms the observation of Cristina Lavinio who highlights that in a research-mediated narration that „pleasure of the text” characteristic of fairy tales is lost. (Lavinio 1993: 6) Seen as the form of an authentic narrative system, the tourist narration, as the guide’s manner of telling the story shows, preserves the good-humor of the narrative act. This „pleasure of the text” distinguishes the tourist narration from the narrative context elicited by a researcher, for example. In the absence of such a release factor, the text from the Veterani cave flows in an organized, simultaneous and natural form, unlike texts narrated in order to be catalogued by a collector.

The imperialist period of the cave allows the content of the narration to become tenser: weapons, brave and resourceful soldiers. Whereas the narration keeps within the realistic limits of the period above mentioned, it seems to be a place where those seeking shelter would have benefited from all the facilities concerning the food, water, hygiene and rest necessary. Soliciting the text potential to a certain degree, the arrangement of the cave by the Austro-Hungarian soldiers amounts to an eventual idealized space, necessary for the deployment of certain acts of bravery. Even though, the narration keeps within the boundaries of a realistic history told concisely.

In a brief analysis of the story’s status in the case of the guidance text from the Veterani cave, one can notice that the guide uses the verb *to tell a story* after every historical stage of the cave: „And let’s tell a story about each one in turn...” „But on average, there were two hundred soldiers here, and in case of force majeure, they would ask for the reinforcements I’ve told you about earlier.”

Obviously, the oral narration in the case of a tourist visit is always accompanied by its visual part. Illustrating what the guide talks about maintains the narrative act and the listeners’ interest. In this particular situation, we can ask whether the narrative practice from the Veterani cave, shown here to illustrate the hypothesis enunciated at the beginning of this article, can be considered part of the modern stories that overlap almost antagonistically over the traditional narrations: „A tale will be modern if there is a radical change as regards its sense and it can occur in shaping new types (in a similarity to ‘old’ AaTh type numbers) or atypical tales. If tales are retold with a different sense (regardless of the fact that the original was written or oral, folk or literary product), including even the totally contrasting tales (‘anti-tales’), or putting an ‘old’ story into ‘new clothes’, the same phenomenon occurs. Shifts in genres (from tale to joke, anecdote or else), shifts in social settings (from village to city, from adults to schoolchildren), shifts in communication system (from oral tradition to newspaper, broadcast, film, television etc.), shifts in world view (from magic to realistic, from religious to secular, from aesthetic to didactic *vice versa*) or similar changes are well known from around the whole world. Even without data, we can envisage a global theory of ‘modern storytelling’ based on the premises I have made above.” (Vilmos 1990:30-31)

The narration from the Veterani cave responds to the motivations according to which the society is under a wave of changes that also affects the way people tell stories. If the lack of time, the transformation of relations, the changes in the environment and so many others lead to an alteration in the meaning of a story, the tourist environment is propitious to a different type of storytelling. The purpose of this type of narration is adequate to the listener who lives in the rhythm described by Vilmos Voigh. On the other hand, the narration performed by the tour guide is not perceived as „atypical” unless placed near the taxonomies of the narrative genres set up by folklorists. I shall not elaborate on this idea as it is not part of the present study. What is „atypical” is the traditional context to be told in contemporary form. Not only does the guide, the performer who keeps the visitors gathered around him, actively tell stories, but this is actually his profession. This detail may point to the fact that in traditional narrative practices the story must be paid for: „Then I left them drinking and partying and came to you and told it all. Pay for it.” (Bîrlea 1981:142) Discussing things with the respective differences, the relation between the traditional and the contemporary storytelling, in this case the active storytelling in the tourist environment consists of the fact that the latter is re-configured in modern lines but with the features of traditional storytelling. First of all, it is about imitating the main roles that are requisite to any authentic narrative act: the storyteller and the audience, with whom informative texts are tied together, and whose result is a unitary narrative scheme. Its development through orality re-adjusts a timely form of storytelling and allows the re-enactment of this phenomenon in present time.

Even though the majority of studies on texts from tourist guidebooks regard the written form of these narrations, certain things are also applicable to the oral interaction between the tour guide and the tourists. For example, Donatella Antelmi speaks about a „scenography” and a „discursive ethos” specific to texts from the tourist environment. (Antelmi 2010:36-37) Evidently, oral tourist guiding is organized and controlled by specialists, but it simulates and even takes scenography down to the level of a narrative act often performed with the easiness characteristic of original storytelling.

Not only does the tour guide narrate a text through which a live act of storytelling is projected, but the narration from the Veterani cave used as a case study could stay beside another one performed by a specialized storyteller with the respective differences I shall highlight later on. In some cases, talented storytellers tie the narration about their village together with the action of their life story. An eloquent example is that of Mărioara Sârbu from Uzdin who makes a dynamic fluctuation between her life experience and the story about a lost part of Uzdin: „We lived in Cartiz, a part of Uzdin that was separated from the main Uzdin through a valley, and at every street there was a dam, a bridge. When the water came, that pole was full of water and they crossed it from

Cartiz, if they wanted, in the middle of the village. And I stayed there, in Cartiz, until I was six. And then my parents had to move because the water rose so high that it separated the walls of the house. I know I wasn't so fat, so big, I got caught between the wall and the bakestone of the room, so my father said we were not going to stay there to die, cause a wall falls or something, but he felt sorry for he was the first to leave Cartiz, and others and others followed him, and that part of the village was destroyed, there's only one legend about it.” (Hedeşan 2015:21) If we compare a text of the tour guide with one of a storyteller representative of a community like Mărioara Sârbu is, we can notice the main difference between the narration performed by the tour guide and the traditional storyteller, and the lack of the subjective dimension from the text of the tour guide from Veterani. This difference also makes the modern character of the tourist story. It assumes the essential elements of the traditional storytelling, so that it afterwards puts distance through its informative, controlled and time-limited character.

As we have already noticed in this study, the written tourist guidebook represents an aspect of contemporary texts. Some researchers have taken interest in them and noticed the role of these texts functioning on entirely other principles than oral tour guiding: „At the same time with the proliferation of organized tours and establishment of tour agencies, tourist guidebooks appear on the market. The travel story leaves literature and moves to the functional text, which shows a double change of perspective: the journey is not described or told for those who have already been there, but it is illustrated because he could go there, so that the projection of the future is accompanied by the renunciation to the autobiographical perspective, tightly connected to the remembrance theme and the expression on a didactic tone in the book that takes the reader by the hand and leads him to discovering a new world.” [our translation – EAP] ²

The oral tourist narration, if a text like the one from the Veterani cave can be given this collocation, has a set of goals much more limited than the written tourist narration. Once present at a certain tourist attraction, the group was won over and the visit consumed. Thus, the act of guiding is projected onto a communication situation in which the text does not meet the travel literature and does not have an exclusively didactic character.

2, „Parallelamente al diffondersi di tour organizzati e alla nascita delle agenzie, nascono le guide turistiche. Il racconto del viaggio esce dal dominio della letteratura e si trasferisce in quello del testo meramente funzionale; ciò comporta un duplice cambiamento di prospettiva: il viaggio non è descritto o narrato per quello che è stato, ma è illustrato perché possa essere fatto, sicché alla proiezione nel futuro si accompagna un abbandono della prospettiva autobiografica, fortemente legata al tema del ricordo, e l'affermarsi di un tono didascalico, e persino didattico, nella pubblicazione che prende per mano il lettore e lo conduce agevolmente attraverso un mondo da scoprire.” Donella Antelmi, Gudrun Held, Francesca Santulli, *Pragmatica della comunicazione turistica*, Roma, Editori Riuniti, 2007, p. 85.

Although the analysis of the case study on the visit at the Veterani cave deals with a natural space, the oral tour guiding remakes the coordinates of traditional storytelling in any space, be it museum, art gallery, church or any tourist attraction. The differences between a narrative act in a tourist place and an informant from the local community are the fact that tour guiding is getting closer to the simulation of a traditional narrative act and that it stands as a phenomenon of active storytelling in present form.

CONCLUSIONS

The conclusions arising from this study have as a first observation the fact that at least for the present oral storytelling the tourist environment is a fertile field to investigate. Moreover, informative narrative texts involve a series of elements taken from the traditional storytelling and arranged in a formula that should fit the modern society. The narrative repertoires existent within the oral tour guiding suppose several research perspectives, and as regards oral storytelling, the tourist environment provides its continuity and re-invention in a modern form of storytelling, which is not exclusively meant for children.

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NOTES ON THE AUTHOR

ELIANA POPETI graduated the Letters Faculty in Timișoara, Romanian-Italian specialization in 2008. In 2013 she received the title of Doctor in Philology at the West University Timisoara with the PhD Thesis *The Fairy Tale and its conveyance. Diachronical insight*. Currently, she is a post-doctoral researcher at the West University Timisoara. Ever since 2012 she has participated as a researcher in various projects financed by the EU, such as *Creative Cooperation in Cultural Heritage* and *Living Heritage - an unlimited resource for tourism development*.