

Mayo Heritage

Newsletter

Vol. IV Issue 10

5th March 2023



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We profile the late

Tony Locke

Writer and storyteller

Feature article

The Storytelling Tradition

BOOK OF THE WEEK

IRISH GHOST TALES

by Tony Locke

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Book of the week

IRISH GHOST TALES

by Tony Locke

Buy online

Cover images: Storytelling at the fireside
(the Moore Institute Celtic Festival 2017)





The Storytelling Tradition

Ireland has a great appreciation of a good story and the use of lyrical language. As a result, it has one of the richest folklore traditions in the world and has produced famous storytellers such as Peig Sayers, Eamon Kelly, Anna Nic an Luain, Éamon a Búrc and locally Tony Locke.

The *seanchaí* (meaning bearer of old lore) were once the primary storytellers in Ireland. They were preceded by the bard, who was central to the preservation of knowledge from early times until the seventeenth century. Bards were powerful and highly respected figures.

Their stories and poetry recalled the myths and heroes of ancient Ireland, recorded genealogy, and safeguarded local history during a time when information was passed on through word of mouth.

During the early medieval era, the Christian monks began to transcribe many of the myths. Whilst this modified and led to Christian influence on Irish mythology, it further ensured its preservation. The oral tradition of the bard co-existed alongside the written tradition of the monks for many centuries.

However, in the 1600s when Gaelic culture suffered widespread destruction under English rule, the role of the bard was diminished. Fortunately, the stories survived. The *seanchaí* continued to carry the art form and the old tales forward.

The legends tended to be told on a more informal basis and were usually told by women.

The folk stories, hero tales and myths have customarily been the domain of men. All these tales, generally told around firesides at night, formed the backbone of entertainment and imagination in Ireland. Many of the tales have their roots in Early Irish literature. The four major categories (called cycles) are:

The Mythological Cycle are the oldest stories. Their focus is on the pagan gods of Ireland known as the Tuatha Dé Danann. The most well-known of these stories is "The Children of Lir".

The Ulster Cycle brought us the stories of Cú Chulainn and the Red Branch Knights. These are believed to date back to the 1st century and feature Queen Maeve of Connacht.

The Fenian Cycle recounts the stories of Fionn and the Fianna. They incorporate some of the renowned stories such as "The Salmon of Knowledge" and "Tír na nÓg".

The Cycle of the Kings (or historical cycle) recorded tales of legendary kings of Ireland such as Brian Boru.

The current storytellers who uphold the folklore and oratory style of the *seanchaí* remain an important link in Irish cultural heritage. They play a central role through their skill of poetic oral literature and continue to bring these old stories to life for modern-day listeners.

References:
askaboutireland.ie
irishcentral.com
irishexaminer.com
allgoodtales.com



TONY LOCKE *Remembered*

Tony Locke was a writer, storyteller and collector of folktales, traditions and pieces from our past which would otherwise be lost. His stories were based upon Irish folklore, myth, legend and superstition. He also wrote original stories and adapted existing stories to suit the demographic of the audience.

Tony specialised in traditional Irish tales told by the old *seanchaí*, while sat in front of a turf fire, memories perhaps from his early days in Westport. Stories that would awaken your imagination, scare you, charm you, make you laugh or make you cry. Stories about animals, birds, dragons, fairies, witches, ghosts and mermaids.

Through the medium of storytelling and puppetry he encouraged an interest in cultural heritage and a love for literature.

With the words 'Once upon a time' he invited you to travel with him through the mist of time back to an Ireland that was fast disappearing.

Tony sadly passed away on July 13th 2020 aged 65. May he rest in peace.

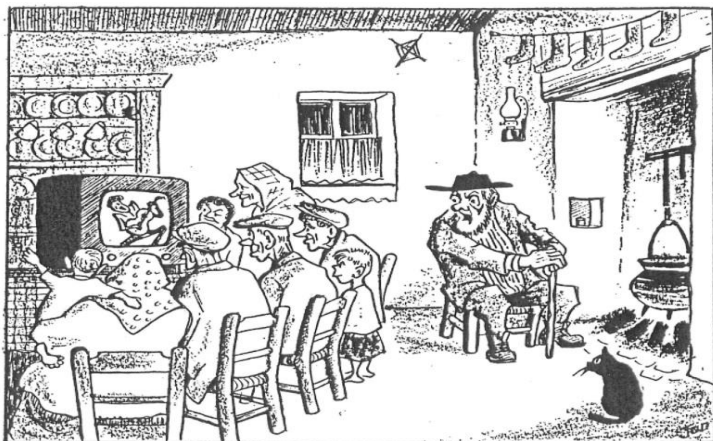
Sources:
Irishstorytellers.weebly.com

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"'Dí fear ann fadó agus fadó a bí—will ye listen to me?"

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