Contemporary storytelling ~
~ a discussion of the function of stories in society

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Summary

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1. Introduction

Storytelling is considered the oldest form of entertainment. But it also makes for a very useful communication tool and storytelling is a term that has become highly popular in today’s modern society. The ways in which the term appears nowadays, has inspired me to take a closer look at what lies behind this discipline called storytelling, as well as how and when it came into being. It seems to be one of the “buzz words” these days, as the term often appears in connection with marketing activities and other forms of communication material made by companies and organisations. Therefore, it may appear that storytelling is a rather new term.

However, storytelling is far from new as a concept. It has been a part of the world for centuries, but it seems to have been given new life and has become a way to label some of the old and well-known communication activities that take place, not only in the public business world but also in personal everyday situations. Even though the world has changed significantly over the past centuries, somehow stories have always been part of society. Stories appear to be a continuous and constant part of life, which people of the modern world of today have in common with people who lived many centuries ago.

This thesis is concerned with storytelling in its basic form, meaning the sharing of oral or literary stories within different social contexts. However, when talking about sharing stories with one another, most people’s minds are probably led to storytelling for children. Telling stories to children in the form of a bedtime story serves a certain purpose relating to the bond shared between parent and child. Telling stories in school in connection with teaching serves a different purpose, namely that of teaching children valuable lessons, teaching them right from wrong, and encouraging them to live by the moral of the story. This touches upon the communicative purpose of this particular literary genre, which I will return to later on.

Moreover, what we may not consider is the great impact storytelling has had, and continues to have, on our society. Storytelling is part of the daily lives of people in many different contexts, which do not necessarily concern the form of storytelling that is associated with children. Whether one watches movies, such as “Pretty Woman”\(^1\), look at certain magazine

\(^1\) American movie from 1990 based on the Cinderella-theme, starring actors Julia Roberts and Richard Gere.
advertisements or share personal experiences with someone, the common denominator is the story that is told. Stories play a part in the lives of people from childhood through adulthood. These stories become part of who a person is and are strongly embedded in that person’s identity.

1.1 Problem

The main purpose of this thesis is to illustrate the function of storytelling in society today with basis in the oral tradition of the ancient days. The objective is to discuss some possible reasons why the old discipline of storytelling remains prevalent in society today and to examine the development of storytelling over time. I will examine how stories have become part of the business world as a marketing tool and how storytelling is used today.

1.2 Structure

In order to achieve my objectives, I will start with a chapter defining key terminology with a short introduction to the theoretical background on which I base my discussions. The chapter will include a clarification of the basic terminology, which will be applied throughout the thesis, to prevent confusion and misinterpretation of my findings.

The following chapter is concerned with the old traditional forms of storytelling and function of stories. Here, I go back in time to find the roots of the literary tales that today are considered classical fairy tales, in order to better understand the function of stories people’s lives and in society today. This brings me back to the Middle Ages and the oral wonder stories and continues further up through history to follow the development of these tales as the literary tales are created. I will touch upon the works of some of the significant collectors and authors of tales, who have greatly influenced the art of storytelling and the old classical fairy tales.

After this visit to the old days, I will turn to the modern world and the use and function of stories in society today. The chapter will focus on the various ways storytelling is used and especially the significance of the rather new interpretation of the term storytelling relating to the business world and the world of marketing. I will, though, also include a description of areas of society other than marketing where stories appear. I will incorporate an illustration of some of the ways
in which stories can be used, for instance in corporate communication, as well as some tools suggested for communicating by telling stories.

Finally, I will combine my findings in a chapter concerned with the differences and similarities that may be found between storytelling in the old days and today. Here, I draw on theories as outlined in chapter 2 concerning genre and discourse analysis as a basis for my comparison. Furthermore, I will illustrate the modern use of storytelling by means of a concrete example of marketing material in the form of a story. Then I should be able to suggest some possible reasons as to why storytelling is considered such a powerful communication tool and why it is useful to companies and organisations.

1.3 Source material
In researching for this thesis, I have come across much literature dealing with the subjects and themes that are related to the subjects of this study. Some, of course, I found more useful than others, but I realised that the discipline of storytelling is a subject much talked and written about. Here, I will comment on a few of the works that I have relied on the most while working on the thesis.

For theoretical background knowledge, I have made use of various writers on genre analysis and discourse analysis. These include James Paul Gee, Vijay K. Bhatia, James L. Kinneavy, and Norman Fairclough. I have drawn from different authors and different sections, to the extent I found necessary, so as to adapt their methods and theories to fit the purpose of the thesis. Additionally, I have found the works of Jack Zipes very useful in my working with fairy tales and the literary genre. Jack Zipes is professor of German at the University of Minnesota and has published several books on the subjects of fairy tales and folklore. His books have provided an insight into especially the work of the Brothers Grimm and their influence on the literary fairy tale.

For the chapter on modern storytelling, I have turned to several authors on corporate storytelling and related subjects in order to gain an understanding of the ways in which stories can be used today. Stephen Denning is program director of knowledge management with the World Bank where he has held many positions. He is the author of the book entitled *The Springboard – How*
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Storytelling Ignites Action in Knowledge-Era Organizations, among others. This book provides tools for creating stories in an organisation and explains how these stories can be used. Annette Simmons has written the book entitled The Story Factor, which also introduces several ways to use stories, especially for companies, and some types of stories she claims are important to know how to tell. Finally, I want to mention such literature as The Expressive Organization\(^2\), Storytelling in Organisations\(^3\), and Corporate Legends and Lore\(^4\) as useful and highly relevant books on the subject of corporate storytelling.

1.4 Delimitations

My discussion of storytelling will not include a fully comprehensive study of all literature genres within the time frame I am focusing on, as such an elaborate analysis would go beyond the scope of this thesis. I merely intend to deal with the storytelling tradition of the ancient days to the extent, which enables me to identify the main influences and developments in this tradition. This study may lead to common denominators that can be found in storytelling even today, as I suggest this is relevant to the understanding of the power of stories and storytelling today.

The time frame I deal with covers a period in time stretching from the Middle Ages up to today. In my research for this thesis, I found that it was during the early medieval period that the grounds for the oral and the literary fairy tale concerning narrative structure were laid.\(^5\) Hence, this is the earliest one can trace this literary genre and therefore creates a natural limit to the time frame of this study. Although the literary fairy tale did not exist as early as the 5\(^{th}\) century, the oral tales of the period would come to form the basis of the literary fairy tale genre, as I will demonstrate in a later chapter.

I will limit my work to concern storytelling and literature from the Western World. This I find the most relevant considering my focus on the literary development evolving over a long period of time. These geographic parts of the world, limited to Europe and North America, share similar historic literary traditions\(^6\), which may be kept in mind as I discuss storytelling in the ancient

\(^3\) Gabriel (2000)  
\(^4\) Neuhauser (1993)  
\(^5\) Zipes (2001)  
\(^6\) Zipes (2000)
days. I will not focus on specific countries or cultures in my thesis, as I concentrate on the function of stories and storytelling in society, not whichever cultural differences may apply.

Storytelling is a discipline, which generally applies to all cultures. As I will include in the following chapters, the passing of stories to others from generation to generation has always been a part of our lives as a means of communication. Furthermore, many of the traditional fairy tales published by some of the well-known authors within this literary genre, have gathered their stories as well as their inspiration from several parts of the world. This may have provided fairy tales with an intercultural quality, which enables them to travel well between countries and various cultures. Therefore, I argue that stories and the art of storytelling are more or less omnipresent. We all relate to stories, perhaps fairy tales in particular, as human beings regardless of race or cultural background.

For some reason we can all relate to a story well told. As I look into the art and discipline of storytelling and the function of stories through different time periods, I may be able to recognise some indications of possible reasons for the apparently immense power of storytelling. Attempting to establish the reason why storytelling is highly recommended as a marketing tool and why this is supposedly such a powerful communication tool requires a larger and more comprehensive study than a thesis such as this. However, my study may provide some indications as to why the art of storytelling has survived and illuminate some common denominators between the ancient and the modern use of stories, which may explain the prevalence and continuous power of stories.

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7 Zipes (2001)
2. Definitions in the field of storytelling, discourse, and genre

I find it necessary to clarify some of the terms used throughout the thesis and with the aim of eliminating any confusion regarding terminology. First and foremost, I use the word text about written texts only. Although some linguistics and analysts may consider the term text to cover written as well as spoken discourse, I will limit the definition to the written printed discourse. Next, I will introduce the working definition of the type of texts I work with in this thesis. I consider the term story suitable for the overall theme of storytelling, which I also use consistently throughout the thesis. Therefore, I will use the term stories about the texts, which may or may not qualify to be labelled e.g. tales, fairy tales, wonder tales or wonder stories in other regards. However, I will not exclude these terms altogether, just as I from time to time may use additional terms as I see fit. Stories will, though, be the overall term, which I will use referring to all the before mentioned types of texts. When necessary, I will apply the more specific terms; in other cases I will use the term story.

2.1 Storytelling

The definition of the term storytelling seems fairly simple to make, but there are at least two ways to regard storytelling. Storytelling may be defined as a person telling a story to an audience without the help of a written text and told exclusively from the person’s own memory. However, storytelling can also be used to describe the event of a person reading a story aloud from a book and thereby passing on the printed story to an audience. These definitions of storytelling are probably the most common and basic ways of looking at the discipline. Furthermore, as I intend to show in a later chapter, the term storytelling has within recent years taken on a new twist and it has come to cover the telling of stories about oneself and even one’s business, however, not necessarily orally to a listening audience. As the use of stories and storytelling has developed and changed over time, so has the definition of the discipline.

Before turning focus to discourse and genre, I will briefly introduce some additional terms, which apply to these communication situations. I will, however, not go into details with the following communication triangle that illustrates any given communication situation.

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8 Fairelough (1995), p. 4
Suffice it to say that the encoder can also be referred to as the sender and covers the participant, who encodes the message, that is delivers the message, essentially. The signal covers the text or the language, which carries the message. The reality is what the signal refers to and the decoder is the participant, who receives the message, hence can also be called receiver. These are some of the terms I will apply when talking about various communication situations throughout the thesis. Primarily, I may refer to the sender, the receiver, the text, and the message, which each relate to the participants just described.

2.2 Discourse

It is possible to find several definitions of discourse depending on which theories are consulted. One rather broad definition of discourse reads: *any utterance larger than the sentence*\(^{11}\). However, I do not find that this definition is captures the essence of discourse, as I see it. I will adopt the definition of discourse as described by Stahl\(^{12}\) as: *a kind of metanarrative that influences interpretation but is not part of the content of the story*. Meaning, I regard discourse as the situational context of a story, which may influence the reader’s or the listener’s reception of the story but is not part of the story itself. This can be further defined with reference to Gee\(^{13}\), who uses the term Discourse with a capital ‘D’, which involves more than the language itself, and discourse with a little ‘d’, which is concerned with language-in-use.

Furthermore, I will touch upon the aims of discourse as outlined by Kinneavy\(^{14}\), since I find this corresponds to the above definitions of discourse by Stahl and Gee. The aim of a discourse is

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\(^{10}\) Kinneavy (1971), p. 19
\(^{11}\) Ibid., p. 4
\(^{12}\) Stahl (1989), p. 49
\(^{13}\) Gee (1999)
\(^{14}\) Kinneavy (1971)
essential to determining e.g. the structure, meanings, and grammatical features that are part of that discourse. The determination of the aim, however, is to a certain extent determined by the situational context in which the text is employed. This means that the intention of the sender plays a part in defining the aim. The aim of the discourse is what controls the creation of that discourse and communication situation; hence the aim outlines which strategies to follow, how to deliver the intended message, through which media etc. However, a more significant factor regarding the determination of aim is the text and its content, structure etc. Therefore, I will now turn to these different aims of discourse to gain an understanding of which discourses require which types of texts and communication situations.

First of all, Kinneavy deals with three types of discourse depending on the language process and which part of the communication triangle is emphasised. All elements will always be part of the communication situation; however, the different types of discourse place emphasis on one of these elements rather than on the others. The three types of discourse are person discourse, product discourse, and reference discourse. Person discourse can stress either the encoder or the decoder according to the specific aim of the discourse. In a product discourse, the language or the text stresses the text itself. Focus is on the structure of the text rather than reference to reality or other aspects. Reference discourse is focused on the ability of the language to relate to reality.

To further clarify these three different discourses and their aims, I will refer to the figure of the aims of discourse by Kinneavy, which classifies the different uses of language according to the aims of the discourses. Here, the four different uses of language are connected to the elements of the communication triangle on which it focuses. Several examples of texts belonging to each of the groups are listed to illustrate which genres these uses of language are related to. In his figure, the expressive, the referential, the literary, and the persuasive use of language are each connected to the part of the communication process on which it focuses. Hence, in person discourse, emphasis can be placed on either the encoder or the decoder, giving expressive use of language or persuasive use of language, respectively. In reference discourse, focus is on the reality referred to in the communication situation, which results in referential use of language. In product discourse the language focuses on the signal, or the text itself, and this leads to a literary

\[15\text{ Ibid, p. 61 – See appendix 1}\]
use of language. In a later chapter, I will relate stories and storytelling to the constituents of this figure with the aim of identifying to which groups the type of stories I have dealt with belong.

2.3 Genre

One way of defining the genre that is dealt with is by describing the style, content, form, and function of a particular text.\footnote{Stahl (1989), p. 14} This definition of genre provides the user with a reasonably simple tool for establishing to which genre a given text belongs. With reference to Kinneavy, genre can be defined as types or modes of discourse\footnote{Kinneavy (1971), p. 36}, which I interpret to correspond to the examples given under each of the language uses in his figure of aims of discourse. However, there are other ways to define genre. Fairclough defines genre as: a \textit{socially ratified way of using language in connection with a particular type of social activity}\footnote{Fairclough (1995), p. 14}. Looking at genre and use of language this way incorporates the terms voice, which refers to the participants of the activity, style, which refers to how the relations between the participants are created, and mode, which refers to textualisation as well as relations between text and context\footnote{Ibid, p. 14}. These terms identify different parts of the genre and the discourse.

The above definitions of genre and its constituents correspond with the commonly used terms communicative purpose, structure, and rhetorical strategies, which can be used to determine the genre of a text. I connect the different terms in the way that the communicative purpose corresponds to the before mentioned uses of language, in that the purpose of a text can be expressive, referential, literary or persuasive. The communicative purpose naturally entails the use of a certain structure as well as certain rhetorical strategies in order to realise the overall objective of the text. This I find agrees with the definition of genre and the constituent elements thereof. After now having introduced the main theoretical background and the key terminology, which I will make use of throughout the thesis, I will proceed with an examination of the development of storytelling from the ancient days until today.
3. Storytelling from ancient days to modern society

Storytelling is something that everyone can relate to. It is something people have experienced and have taken part in, mostly so as children, when stories were told by parents, grandparents, teachers and others. Memories of certain stories and fairy tales seem to sustain throughout people’s lives and these stories are passed on and shared with others, children in particular. In this chapter I will focus on the period of time starting from the very early years of storytelling traced back in time to the early Middle Ages going up to the early 20th century. From this point in time, I will move into the modern days, as I continue with a look into the contemporary use of fairy tales and stories in general.

Storytelling is a phenomenon that has existed and persisted through centuries. Originally, the folk tales, stories, and legends that existed and were passed on verbally, circulated mainly among adults. The stories were not intended for an audience of children and this is one of the main differences between the stories of the past and the stories and fairy tales of today. In the contemporary society, storytelling is used in many different ways and for various purposes. However, telling a story and especially a fairy tale is probably most commonly associated with children being the audience. Fairy tales such as Cinderella, Snow White, and the Ugly Duckling are examples of tales that belong in the imaginative world of young children and they appear in different media and in different contexts.

This makes it even more interesting to follow the development of fairy tales over time. Some of the old fairy tales that are still popular today originate in ancient oral tales. These tales were collected and written down and they became the basis of the literary tales that were subsequently published. But only after these tales were adapted to different cultures and changes were made in the tales, did children become the primary target audience of the fairy tales. I will return to this in chapter 3 of the thesis.

3.1 From oral to literary tales

First, I will take a closer look into the development of the storytelling tradition that has taken place over time, during which the old oral tales formed the basis of and became incorporated into the literary tales. The roots of the literary fairy tale genre can be traced as far back as to the oral
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tales of the Middle Ages. At those times, the so-called wonder tales existed and were told in various different forms throughout Europe. The oral tales reflected the situation and the hopes of the peasants, who constituted a large part of the population in those days. The protagonist of the tale would undergo a miraculous transformation entailing a change in his social status and the tales would normally have a happy ending. This form of miraculous change was typical of the genre and distinguished the wonder tale from other types of oral tales, such as legends, fables or myths.20

In the very early days of storytelling, in the first centuries of the previous millennium, stories were very much a part of everyday life. They functioned as a means to communicate, as the written word had not yet been introduced and they would serve various purposes in the community. Storytelling was a form of entertainment and a way of sharing common values and cultural history. Storytelling was also a means to educate both children and adults, who might have been acting inappropriately according to the rules and laws of the community, by telling stories as a warning example to teach right from wrong. Even in those days, people recognised that telling stories is an effective method to employ in order to get an important message across to the listeners, as the moral of a story can be easily understood and remembered.21

The importance and value of storytelling in those days was evident and anyone could in fact qualify as a storyteller. However, eventually one of the men in the community would stand out as a storyteller and he would develop his skills and become a sort of professional storyteller, in that he would spend his entire life remembering and passing on stories from the past as a legacy to the following generations. This form of storytelling laid the grounds for many storytellers to come. Storytellers appeared in different countries following many of the same basic principles; they would often use music as an accompaniment as they sang or chanted their stories.22 Although they may have been called by different names in different countries their function was the same. They would travel around entertaining people with their tales, and their audiences were mainly people from the middle and higher classes in society.

20 Zipes (200)
21 Colwell (1980), p. 6
22 Ibid, p. 7-8
Apart from the professional travelling storytellers sharing their tales with people, storytelling was a very natural part of life in many different forms and variations also. Stories were used in everyday life within families, members of the community, in religious connections etc. However, after having flourished for centuries, the oral storytelling tradition began to fade with the introduction of the printing press in the 15th century.\(^3\) The professional storytellers, who used to travel from house to house, telling tales to the middle and upper class population, became somewhat superfluous. At this time, schools were being founded and the concept of education spread among the middle and upper classes. Therefore, this particular group of society now became able to read and the demand for professional storytellers declined. During the next few centuries, many tales were collected and written down and they began circulating among the reading public.

As more and more tales were written down, the stories were adapted to suit the reading public, such as the aristocracy and middle classes. The wonder tale known from the old ages and the medieval times would form the basis of the literary fairy tale. The literary fairy tale as a genre developed its own characterisations, motifs etc. but the voice of the peasants remained a part of the tales. Even though the peasants themselves did not take part in bringing the wonder tales into the literary world, the contents of the tales as they had originated and were told among the ordinary people remained somewhat intact. There would still be an element of the peasants’ original sense of hope and longing for a better life and a higher social status. The protagonist’s change or transformation is indeed one of the trademarks of this particular literary genre. It is a trait that was brought into the literary genre from the wonder tales and has always been a part of the structure of these tales. As the oral wonder tale, the literary fairy tale is also characterised in part by the element of wondrous change or transformation of the protagonist.\(^4\)

The oral tradition lived on, however, mostly among the ordinary uneducated people, such as the peasants. Storytelling remained a part of everyday life, as particularly the older people in those families would pass on the tales to the following generations, hereby enabling the old tales to survive and continue to circulate by word of mouth. By the 19th century, the oral storytelling tradition had practically lost its position in society and lived on only among the lower positioned

\(^3\) Colwell (1980)  
\(^4\) Zipes (2000)
people and in rural areas, where written literature had not yet been widely introduced. The telling of tales still had a function as a gathering element, though, in the small towns and rural areas.\textsuperscript{25}

There may be several reasons as to why the oral storytelling tradition seemed to more or less disappear. One of the more obvious explanations may be the industrialisation and the great changes that followed in the family structure and daily lives of people. As people began working outside the home for long hours of the day, what little spare time people had was spent with family and neighbours engaging in activities other than telling stories during the long dark evenings. That change and development in society may in fact have contributed to the decline of the original oral storytelling tradition.

There were, however, several factors that played a part in this development of the storytelling tradition. One of those factors relates to the establishment of the national languages originating in the vernacular languages used in Europe at the time. With the invention of the printing press and the education and growth of the reading public, people became more interested in various literary genres, such as short narratives, and were reading simply for pleasure and enjoyment. This is where the literary tales seem to begin taking over from the oral tales and the tradition of entertaining with storytelling. Many of these changes took place gradually over a few centuries, from approximately 1450 to 1700. Not until the end of this period, in the late 1600s, did the literary fairy tale establish itself as a genre, which was accepted by the educated classes of society.\textsuperscript{26}

### 3.2 The work of the Brothers Grimm

A few centuries ago, people such as the brothers Grimm, Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm, were working with the literary stories and fairy tales that we know today and for which they have become so famous. It is argued that the brothers Grimm have played a significant role in the fairy tale tradition, and therefore I will focus my attention on their work and how they have contributed to the prevalence of the written fairy tales, also called the literary tales. The purpose for the Brothers Grimm was to research old German literature in order to find the truth about the German cultural heritage. They wished to write about the connection between old folk tales and

\textsuperscript{25} Colwell (1980)
\textsuperscript{26} Zipes (2000)
cultivated literature and to preserve the original literature in its natural forms, thereby focusing on the importance of the oral tradition.\textsuperscript{27}

In the beginning of the 19\textsuperscript{th} century, Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm began gathering tales later to be published. One of the common misconceptions about the way that the Brothers Grimm collected their tales is, that they would wander about in the countryside in Germany and by visiting the peasants and listening to the old tales that were told in the rural areas, they would collect their material and since write down their stories. That is not the case, however. The Brothers Grimm gathered their tales from old books and they also collected oral tales with help from friends and acquaintances. They were able to collect the oral tales mainly by inviting storytellers into their home and having the storytellers tell the tales, which were then written down. In the beginning of the 1800s, when oral storytelling was still a popular and common discipline, the professional storytellers were typically young well-educated women from the middle class or from the aristocracy\textsuperscript{28}.

As mentioned earlier, the Brothers Grimm wanted to preserve the oral tradition in the sense, that in their literature, they wanted to stay as close to the original version of the tales as possible, and at the same time create a type of literature that would appeal to the reading public. Their collection of tales, published in the early 1800s, was not originally intended for children. Only after having altered their fairy tales during the 1800s and made them more moral and instructional in order to suit the requirements of the adults, which was an ongoing discussion of the 19\textsuperscript{th} century, were they considered appropriate for children\textsuperscript{29}. In the following section, I will return to the issue of publishing fairy tales for children.

3.3 Fairy tales for children

A very important factor in the prevalence of fairy tales is the introduction of fairy tales for children. As mentioned, written fairy tales were not originally intended for children, but were more to be seen as literary versions of the oral tales that circulated among adults in the old days. The literary tales were addressed more directly at the educated part of society and the oral tales seemed to keep a place with the lower classes of society. Not until much later on in time, after

\textsuperscript{27} Zipes (2002)
\textsuperscript{28} Ibid
\textsuperscript{29} Zipes (1997)
the literary fairy tale had become institutionalised as a genre, were fairy tales introduced to audiences of children.

In the late 18th century, several European publishers began publishing books for children. This brought on a new dimension for the fairy tale as a genre, concerning the role of the tales in relation to the socialisation of children through literary material. It was essential to use material, which was appropriate for the age and the mentality of children and which would install the right set of morals with the children. Therefore, a great deal of time was spent by parents, teachers, and religious leaders talking about the role that the fantastic and miraculous tales would play for children and whether the tales would be harmful in any way to those young minds.30

One of the significant events in the history of storytelling in relation to tales for children is the publishing of Le Magasin des enfants in 1743, written by Mme Leprince de Beaumont.31 This book of children’s tales included the well-known Beauty and the Beast and other moralistic tales. The tales she wrote were written explicitly for children, which was a rather new concept in France at the time. Her writing was directed at children in the sense that she kept the language and the story simple allowing the moral messages to come across to the listener very clearly. For example, the version of Beauty and the Beast, which she published, was a shorter and much simpler version of an existing tale by another author.

Mme Leprince de Beaumont’s collections of tales served the purpose of teaching children morals and ethics and this French writer’s tales introduced fairy tales as a tool for teaching children. This particular type or genre of literature contained some of the basic Christian values that became characteristic of children’s literature in the 19th century. The work of Mme Leprince de Beaumont was revolutionary in the way that the tales were written for children and were very obviously directed at children both in language, style, and content. Existing literary fairy tales had been written mainly for an adult aristocratic audience and this way she contributed to the development of the fairy tale genre and its audience. Her idea of using fairy tales as a way of teaching children in schools and in homes, paved the way for new possibilities of storytelling and the fairy tale tradition as such.

30 Zipes (2000)
31 Ibid
Mme Leprince de Beaumont had worked as a governess and drew on that experience as she used a frame story, in which a governess would tell tales to children in order to prove a point and teach them morals and ethics. This model would set the standard for other governesses and later on mothers, grandmothers, and nannies, as storytelling became part of upper class homes as a means to teach children. Gradually during the 17th, 18th, and 19th centuries, storytelling developed within the bourgeois and aristocratic homes and governesses, nannies, tutors and others would tell stories for children in separate rooms designated for this purpose called nurseries.

Since the 18th century, literary tales had become a genre intended primarily to fulfil instructional purposes in connection with the education and socialisation of children. However, as previously touched upon, there was a sense of censorship regarding children’s literature. At that point in time, the classical fairy tales that we know and still tell our children today were not considered appropriate and healthy for children and for the development of children’s minds. The stories that were told to children instead were of other genres and were more realistic and sentimental stories. Up until the 1820s, the fairy tales that were written and published for children were carefully monitored.

The Brothers Grimm, who have played a large role in the popularisation of fairy tales as a genre, were also instrumental in bringing fairy tales to the children. As mentioned, fairy tales had come to play an important role regarding the socialisation of children. Consequently, in their tales the Brothers Grimm supported this tendency and adapted their tales to suit the requirements of the authorities controlling children’s literature. They would revise their tales and remove all the elements that were not suitable for very young listeners, so that the tales became more appropriate for children. They even published a collection of tales called Small Edition, which contained tales for children that all lived up to the moral standards of the Protestant society and patriarchal notions values and beliefs, which prevailed at the time. These tales were accepted by society as suitable children’s literature and became very popular.

The Brothers Grimm were very conscious about targeting two different audiences with their tales, namely both adults and children. While the Small Edition was addressed to children, they

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32 Zipes (2000)
also published a collection of tales called the *Large Edition*, which was written for a broader audience including scholars. Characteristic of both collections of tales was that the tales were all adapted to suit the requirements of society. The Western world, in which the Grimms’ tales, as well as the works of other writers, had become widely known and appreciated, supported the motifs of heroic young men who courageously went out into the world, making use of the magic powers, with which he had been endowed, in order to become a wealthy successful person. Hence, these tales supported the values and beliefs of society concerning power structure and the existing gender roles. These reflections of society would since remain a consistent element of the literary fairy tales and a factor in the socialisation of children.\(^\text{33}\)

### 3.4 Children’s literature

In order to better make the connection between storytelling, fairy tales, and children, I will briefly go through the different periods, which have had an influence on the literature that is directed at children, and therefore also influenced the relationship between children and the fairy tale genre. My point of departure is an overview of children’s literature, as seen in the context of literary history, covering five different time periods from romanticism to postmodernism\(^\text{34}\), which will provide a basic understanding of the type of literature that was produced for children during these literary periods.

As mentioned, the following section is intended only as a brief look into the different literary periods and not as a comprehensive overview of the literary movements in general, as this is not the purpose of the thesis. However, I find this section relevant to the understanding of the connection found between children and storytelling, which I touch upon as a part of the examination of storytelling of the past. The function of fairy tales concerning education and socialisation of children is important to consider, as the historic development of children’s literature has influenced the position of fairy tales for children in today’s society.

#### 3.4.1 Romanticism

The literature derived from this period in time reflects the changes that took place in society concerning the socialisation of children. During this period, there was a shift in the type of literature, which children were introduced to. It was a fairly new concept that had emerged when

\[^{33}\text{Zipes (2000)}\]
\[^{34}\text{Thacker and Webb (2002)}\]
literature, which appealed to the fantasy and imagination of children, was created. Earlier, it was generally believed that the only type of literature that was appropriate for children was moralistic stories intended to teach and instruct the audiences of children.

Not only were fairy tales and similar stories written especially for children introduced, adults were also attracted to the sense of imagination this type of literature encouraged, as adults were attempting to reconnect with their own childhood and imaginative spirit. The texts that were created at that time often offered the characteristics of narrative literature, inviting the listener to become involved and interpret the meaning of the story, as well as the moralistic and instructional undertones, which were prevalent in literature at the time.

3.4.2 Nineteenth-century literature
One of the underlying themes in literature produced in the 19th century is the innocence of children, which was coveted by adults in the Victorian period. The literature was concerned with society's conception of childhood and the alleged closeness children had with the spiritual world. The adult fiction literature often featured characters of children who served the purpose of opposing the corrupted world of the adult. This type of literature was more prevalent at the time than actual children’s literature addressed at audiences of children.

The development of literature during the 19th century also included a turn towards creating children’s literature, which spoke directly to the ability of children to use their imagination and fantasy. This type of text was characterised as writerly. Writerly texts invite the reader to become involved in creating meaning of the story by letting the reader take an active role in filling in details and gaps of information. The counterpart of the writerly stories is readerly, which in essence means that they are written to be read and to be told. The second type of text will typically instruct and dictate more than is the case with the first type.

3.4.3 The fin de siècle
This particular period represents a time of transition from the 19th century literature to the literature, which was produced in the following period of modernism. The literature of the fin de siècle expressed the conflicts and confusion that had been underway during the 19th century and

35 Thacker and Webb (2002), p. 43
36 Ibid, p. 43
which laid the grounds for the experimental literature characteristic of the modern period. The attraction of adults to childhood, which was characteristic of the previous literary period, was no longer the theme of the texts produced at this time. Rather the literature from the end of the 19th century expresses a sense of pessimism and uncertainty regarding the future as well as the past. At the time, children’s literature was considered popular culture and different from high culture.

3.4.4 Modernism
This period in time from the beginning of the 1900s offered many changes in society. This was reflected in the literature, which brought about an increase in children’s books and the notion that children should be offered a positive and optimistic look towards the future. However, this was difficult to achieve due to the circumstances in the world at that time, as the societal changes had a natural impact on the authors of children’s literature.

To people at the time, this new modern world represented everything that was far from innocent and child-like, which earlier had intrigued the adult readers. In searching for a way of responding to the new world, people were led back to the innocence and imagination of childhood. A new tone and style of writing emerged, which was seen in both adult and children’s literature. Characteristic of children’s literature from the early 1900s, was the tone of voice in the narrations, the language directed at the audience of children, and generally the way that the stories were told, which still applies to children’s literature today.

3.4.5 Postmodernism
The literature that has been produced during the past few decades and today reflects an urge to challenge the boundaries concerning texts and their readers. Children’s literature has always been directed at two readers, the child and the adult. In children’s books there will often be comments and sophisticated remarks intended for the secondary reader, namely the adult. The readers of postmodern children’s literature are often invited to take part in the creation of the story in that the reader must fill in gaps in the narrative in order to interpret his or own personal version of the story. In postmodern literature, the boundaries between author and reader become blurred or are perhaps even moved. There is an increase in the power, which is given to the reader of texts from this period, and children are not perceived as innocent and receptive readers.
as earlier, since the postmodern tendencies in society have brought on changes in family structure, culture, and technological development that all affect the children of the time period.

This brief visit to the different literary periods of the last few centuries provides some background knowledge to keep in mind when discussing stories and storytelling in relation to audiences of children. As I have talked about earlier, fairy tales were not originally directed at children. Over time this changed, however, as fairy tales and other types of stories were written with the intention that children would listen to the stories told, or even read them themselves, and absorb the moralistic lessons as intended by the authors. For a period of time, fairy tales were used as a tool for educating children and the structure and content of fairy tales reflected that. As the outline of the different literary periods helps to illustrate, children's literature has developed considerably and the moralistic, didactic tone and structure of fairy tales seems to have been somewhat abandoned when it comes to the creation of literature for children.

Fairy tales have, nevertheless, survived through all the changes during the different literary periods and have managed to captivate audiences, both the young and the adult, although literature may have evolved and developed into many different directions and styles as well. It seems that fairy tales have always and will always be part of our lives in one way or another. The audiences may vary and so do the themes and the style of the tales.

3.5 Walt Disney

As a closing section of this chapter on stories and fairy tales in ancient days through the modern and postmodern periods, the name and institution of Walt Disney must inevitably be considered. As it is, most people will probably think of Walt Disney when talking about fairy tales. The animated films that have become successful globally have clearly had a great influence on how the old classical tales touches people today, whether the tales are originally by the Brothers Grimm, Hans Christian Andersen, or others. The literary fairy tale did not make its way into children’s literature until a few centuries after tales had begun circulating in the written form. It would take time for the fairy tales to become accepted as a part of children's entertainment, education, and socialisation.

37 Zipes (1994)
However, in the beginning of the 20th century, fairy tales had become the primary literary genre for young middle-class children. By the introduction of fairy tales through other media than the printed books, such as radio and TV, the fairy tales captured not only children as audiences, but also the entire family. Walt Disney has an ability to create not only American versions of fairy tales but universally applicable tales that, through the magic of the films, books etc, have become the main propagator of the classical fairy tales today. Therefore, Walt Disney is partly responsible for the prevalence of fairy tales in society today.

In the following chapter, I will concentrate further on the appearance of fairy tales and other stories today and I will especially focus on the new position of storytelling and function of stories as a marketing tool.

38 Zipes (1997)
4. Storytelling in contemporary society

In the modern society, the term storytelling has taken on a slightly different meaning than what was usually connected to the word. Stories have worked their way into the business world and have become part of marketing and advertising everywhere. Stories are a constant part of life, and always have been, but perhaps now in a different way and in several other areas than what seemed to be the case many years ago in the ancient world, as described in the previous chapter.

One of the more noticeable appearances of storytelling today is found in the world of marketing. Companies, large and small, make use of storytelling as a marketing tool in an attempt to successfully reach their target groups. Stories are used in advertising, company brochures, and other types of market communication. This is the area in which the “buzz word” storytelling has been appearing more and more over the recent years. Several books have been published on how to use storytelling as a branding and marketing tool and experts claim that storytelling is the most powerful and important communication tool for companies nowadays.

Storytelling is considered a very powerful instrument to use as a way of communicating. In this chapter I will comment on the type of stories that are told nowadays as well as some theories discussing what makes storytelling so effective. I will talk about the purposes of using storytelling and why this discipline has become so popular. Storytelling is useful for many different purposes of communication. However, in this chapter I will mainly focus on the areas, which I find vary slightly from other commonly used forms of storytelling, namely the use of stories in business related areas.

Nevertheless, I will briefly turn to other areas where stories continuously persist in an attempt to show how the ancient art of storytelling is prevalent in our society even today. This relates to what I consider the most common conception of stories and storytelling. Storytelling is still connected to the act of telling bedtime stories to children, for instance. Telling stories continues to serve as a form of entertainment, which is probably the most obvious form of storytelling we experience every day. Stories are omnipresent in people’s lives and either consciously or unconsciously stories are told and listened to every day.
Stories appear in many shapes and forms, such as animated Walt Disney films, fantasy novels written for children as well as adults, short illustrated narratives for the youngest etc. Stories are narrated to children at home, in schools, and at the library, just as children themselves can read stories, literary fairy tales, and other related forms of literature. In these types of situations, stories are used as a form of entertainment and in many cases also as a way of teaching the listeners. As I have already touched upon, stories have always been used as a way of teaching others right from wrong and as a way of sharing values and beliefs with other people from one’s family, community, and culture.

This corresponds well with the use of storytelling that we see in the business world today. What lies at the core of corporate storytelling is the ability to communicate the central values of the company in a way, which is convincing, believable, and effective. These company values form the foundation of the corporate culture, which the company wishes to communicate to the stakeholders. It is important that these values are shared with people internally within the company, so that all employees understand and respect the same set of corporate values and guidelines. It is equally important to be able to communicate well with external audiences and make them aware of the values that are embedded in the company.

4.1 Storytelling as part of corporate communication

Communicating with the external audiences is partly done through marketing and advertising. Today, storytelling is one of the so-called “buzz words” and a fairly new concept in marketing and advertising, which has developed and grown over the years. As competition increases for companies and the world becomes smaller, it is essential for any company to be able to stand out and differentiate itself from the competitors. Therefore, it is important for companies to be able to communicate their core values to their target audiences. Incorporating the core values of the company into the communication with all stakeholders through storytelling will enhance the chance of differentiating one company from another.

As stakeholders demand information about and accountability of the choices companies make, it is necessary to employ a communication strategy, which will satisfy the target audience. Storytelling makes for an excellent communication tool, as stories have a quality that makes

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people remember the information they were told through the story and makes them believe it also. It is argued, e.g. by Neuhauser\textsuperscript{40} that the reason why stories make us remember and believe the information, we have been given, is that a listening to a story activates all parts of the brain. This means that the rational and logical part of the brain as well as the emotional and visual part is activated when one listens to a story. Hereby the information will be stored better in one’s memory.

This is exactly where the cold hard facts cannot compete with stories. People are more likely to believe the stories they are told rather than dry figures and statistical facts just as these are forgotten much faster. Also, people tend to retell stories again and again, which is not usually the case with facts and figures.\textsuperscript{41} Therefore, if a company wants to communicate with its stakeholders about its ability to deliver on time, for instance, people will more easily relate to a story about an incident, where the company had proven that it was able to get things done and live up to the promised delivery time. Rather than simply claiming to be concerned with this issue and making promises to the stakeholders, it would have a much greater effect to show the listeners that there is action behind the words and tell a story, which will confirm the company’s abilities.

Stories do seem to present a useful tool for persuading others. This I find is connected to the notion that people prefer being able to make their own decisions and not have others, especially companies and people in advertising and marketing, dictate which products to buy and which behaviours to adopt. People now seem to prefer the soft approach and companies have found the use of storytelling, to communicate with and persuade their audiences, very useful. By luring consumers into their arms by telling stories about itself, the company can encourage people to make their own decisions about the company and its products or services. This is an appealing quality of a story. The listener follows the protagonist through his troubles and interprets the meaning of the story based on his or her own knowledge and situation. Then the listener is able to make his or her own decisions about how to act. This gives people a sense of not allowing others to make their decisions for them.

\textsuperscript{40} Neuhauser (1993)  
\textsuperscript{41} Ibid
Companies have discovered the advantages of telling stories as a way of communicating with audiences, whether they are investors, employees, customers or other stakeholders. There may be several reasons why storytelling has become so popular and prevalent as a communication tool. I find that one of the qualities attributed to the use of stories is the fact that people tend to respond to stories immediately and following a story is fairly easy. It does not require much of an effort by the listener.\textsuperscript{42}

There is something very natural about stories, and especially listening to stories being told, that we can all enjoy. The way stories are structured, at least in many cases, the listener is invited to participate in the storytelling action by following the story and being able to fill in the missing details.\textsuperscript{43} If the story a company chooses to tell the stakeholders is kept fairly simple and open for interpretation, it is more likely to create the wanted effect with the listeners. Namely, that the listeners will relate to the story and in a sense become part of it. Thereby allowing them to make their own decisions about the company and the message it is conveying.

The way audiences adapt the story to their own situation is the real benefit of storytelling. This corresponds to the notion that people want to be able to make up their own minds and not have a company force ideas and opinions on them. By telling a story, a company can more subtly communicate the intended message to the listeners without being too aggressive. Today, consumers make their decisions about companies and products based on the emotional value they represent. Therefore, people are not looking for more facts and more information, as chances are that they are already well informed about the company and its products. Using storytelling as a communication tool will enable the listener to put the facts and figures into perspective.\textsuperscript{44}

There seems to be a great use for stories as a way to build trust and connect with other people.\textsuperscript{45} As a company aiming to influence potential or present customers, gaining the trust of the target group is essential. Nowadays, as companies experience intense competition and the world as a market place has become increasingly smaller, the need to stand out and differentiate a company

\textsuperscript{42} Denning (2001)
\textsuperscript{43} Allan et al (2002)
\textsuperscript{44} Simmons (2002)
\textsuperscript{45} Ibid
from the competitors has never been more important. It is hardly a groundbreaking way of thinking or a revolutionary idea that a company markets itself based on the values and beliefs central to the company. The company may present the historical background, the essence, and the central values of the company to the public in order to entice the target group. The days in which a company only needed to show a picture of the product and add a statement, which claimed that this product was the one to buy, are clearly over. Nowadays, several products, which fulfil the same purposes at nearly the same costs, are available. Therefore, consumers need additional value to be convinced that one particular product will meet their needs and persuade them to choose one particular product over another. This is where storytelling can make a difference.

4.2 Storytelling as a tool for branding

The term branding is a rather young term and also one of the “buzz words” in marketing, both product branding and corporate branding. In many ways, storytelling and branding have become two closely connected terms, in that storytelling can be a very useful tool in a branding campaign, as a way of communicating your brand to your audiences. However, I do not consider the two terms to always correlate. As I intend to show, there are many different uses for stories in other forms of corporate communication that do not involve a branding campaign. But, I acknowledge the connection between the two terms and in the following I will examine this area further.

I will not go further into branding as a marketing discipline, as this is not the focus of the thesis, but I will concentrate on the use of stories in that connection. A Danish book on the subject is titled: ‘Storytelling – branding i praksis’[^46], which translates to ‘Storytelling – branding in practice’[^46]. Now, that seems to me a very narrow definition of the term storytelling. It also connotes that storytelling has no other use and no other purpose than as a tool used in order to realise a branding process.

As mentioned, I find that this definition of storytelling ignores the versatility of the discipline. As I intend to illustrate, storytelling is a discipline, which is useful in many areas of society and in various aspects of our lives and it can indeed be used as a powerful tool in marketing and public

relations as well. However, I do find that many of the ideas and practical examples in the book are useful and relevant to the discussion of storytelling in the modern society. The book presents a sort of guide to using stories as a branding tool and to benefiting from storytelling in a company. I have chosen to include a discussion of the suggestions made in this book, as I find it relevant to the understanding of why storytelling is so widely used in companies and organisations.

The first chapter of the book, “Branding gennem storytelling” (in English “Branding through storytelling” [my translation])\(^{47}\) starts with a reference to the hunting community of the old days, where the hunters would tell stories about their day and where the eldest members of the tribes would tell tales and myths, which gathered around listeners, old as well as young. In those days, stories were used as a way of sharing the values and norms of the tribe, which I have already touched upon in an earlier chapter.

The authors of this book draw a direct parallel between the companies of today and the tribes of the ancient hunting communities. They point out that the stories, which are told in companies today reflect the norms and values of the company and people involved, very much as described about the tribal communities in the ancient days. I do acknowledge that there are similarities in the way stories are used and in the contents of those stories. However, I find that some stories companies tell today have a slightly different purpose than that of the hunters’ stories.

The focus regarding the sale of products today has shifted. In essence, companies are selling a story\(^{48}\), an experience, which is connected to the product and to the manufacturing company. Thus, focus has been taken from the product and placed on the company behind it. This is one of the reasons why so many companies today have chosen to invest a lot of money and a lot of time into a so-called branding campaign. Here, stories are a very helpful tool, in that the formulation of a company’s values and visions in the shape of a story can help the target audience relate to what they are told and might be able to identify with some of the values, which the specific company wishes to express.\(^{49}\)

\(^{47}\) Fog et al (2003), p. 14
\(^{48}\) Jensen (1999)
As I have already stated, I do not intend to go further into branding as a marketing strategy. Rather, I will focus on the function of stories and storytelling in this connection. In order to better understand the function of storytelling, I will now turn to a closer and more concrete look at the different elements that make up storytelling.

In their book, Fog et al suggest that storytelling consists of four elements. When looking at stories, whether it is new modern day stories or the old fairy tales, they all contain these four basic elements, which are the elements that in essence make up a good story. They may be emphasised differently according to the purpose of the story and the situation in which it is told. The four elements are the message, the conflict, the cast, and the story. The advice for companies wanting to use storytelling as a marketing tool is to ensure that all elements are included. This will help to guarantee that the story fulfils the communicative purpose and the storytelling activities become successful.

4.2.1 The message

The first basic element of storytelling is the central message of the story. Perhaps the most important part of telling a story to the target audience is being able to establish which message is intended to be communicated to the audience. It is also important to focus on only one message in the story. It may be tempting to try to include several messages in a story and take the opportunity to tell the target audience about all the positive traits of the company or the products. However, in doing so the messages may not appear clearly to the listeners and the audience is left with a blurred image of the company not being able to identify its true intentions.

4.2.2 The conflict

Secondly, the conflict element of the story is also very important. Without a real conflict in the story, there is nothing to capture the audience and make the story interesting and worth listening to. When the conflict of the story is solved, the way in which it is being solved will prove the message of the story to be true. Thereby letting the audience see how the company lives up to the identity that it wishes to portray. Included in the book is a simple barometer of conflict, where different scenarios of conflict are listed. On the lower half of the barometer, stories with apparently no conflict are represented. All is tranquil and nothing can interrupt the peaceful

51 Ibid, p. 36
scenery for the characters of these types of stories. This means that there will be no surprises for the readers or listeners of the stories and it will be hard to keep their attention.

However, on the upper half of the barometer we find stories, which contain significant obstacles and require that the characters make an effort in order to overcome the trials and tribulations. Naturally, there are several levels of conflict to be found in stories ranking from the very low to the very high end of the scale. It is suggested that the stories told in a company should contain a level of conflict found on the upper half of the barometer. Although a corporate story may not be very dramatic, it is the conflict, which enables the plot of the story to develop. Without a conflict, there would be no story to tell.

4.2.3 The cast

The third element of storytelling is the cast and the characters of the story. In order to tell a story, one needs to have a cast of characters, who each play a certain role in relation to other characters and to the conflict and action of the story. In any classical fairy tale, there is a protagonist, who functions as the hero of the story. Other than the hero, a typical story features opponents and obstacles, which the hero will attempt to fight and overcome in order to reach the goals, he has set out to achieve. Additional characters of the story are, for example, the helper or friend of the protagonist. The helper will usually assist the hero in overcoming the obstacles that come their way.

Therefore, according to the book, it is possible to follow a so-called fairytale model\textsuperscript{52} to guide a company through storytelling. The model includes the cast members described before, such as the hero of the story, his helper and his opponent, but also two additional participants, namely the giver and the receiver of the goal, which our protagonist is hoping to reach. The book uses an example to illustrate the different parts of the model. The goal is the presented as the central element; in this example the goal is for the hero to get the princess and half of the kingdom. The protagonist is the hero, who attains the goal and therefore the receiver and Prince Charming in the model. The giver in this example is the king, of course. He is the one, who rewards the hero in the end. This happens after the protagonist has gone through all the troubles on his way, fighting evil in the shape of a dangerous dragon or perhaps a troll.

\textsuperscript{52} Fog et al (2003), p. 38. See model appendix 3
The intention with this model is to help companies, who want to use stories as a communication tool, to check if the story contains all the elements of a characteristic classical fairy tale. The book hereby suggests that the company develops stories, which resemble the traditional fairy tales in contents and structure. Even if the idea is not to create a genuine fairy tale, a good and captivating story will ideally contain the elements described before. The cast illustrated in the model will help carry the message and create the conflict, which is necessary in order to entice the audience and ultimately be successful in communicating through storytelling.

4.2.4 The story

The fourth and last of the basic elements of storytelling is the story itself. After having decided on the message to convey, the conflict, which makes the story interesting and worthwhile listening to for the audience, and the characters, who bring life to the story, the story itself must be composed. It is important that the story has a continuous forward going flow, which supports the conflicts arising as well as the underlying message.

Therefore, the story has to be well structured. All stories have an introduction in which the protagonist and the goal he sets out to achieve are presented to the listener. As the story continues, the conflict arises and the protagonist is met with difficulties that he has to fight through in order to reach his goal. The hero is faced with his opponent and the conflict escalates, as the story moves on towards the high point and the climax where the conflict is solved, or perhaps remains unsolved. As the story comes to an end, the protagonist is rewarded and achieves his goal or, in some stories, there is no happy ending and no real resolution. All stories follow the same basic structure of introduction, middle, and ending.

Naturally, there will be great differences between the way short anecdotes or jokes are constructed and the way a novel or a movie script is constructed, even though they all belong to the category called story. However, in this connection, as I discuss the use of stories as a way of communicating in a company, the structure of the fairy tale genre seems to supply a good basic model for developing corporate stories. In chapter 5, I will illustrate this based on a concrete piece of marketing material copying the fairy tale structure. Following the previous presentation of the basic elements of storytelling, I will proceed with an presentation of the types of stories that are useful to be able to tell as a company.
4.3 Six important stories

In this section, I will go over different types of stories that are useful to be able to tell as a company. As Annette Simmons talks about in the book “The Story Factor”\(^\text{53}\), telling stories is a very important tool in corporate communication. In the business environment, one needs to be able to influence and persuade people, whether the motive is making people change their current behaviour or convincing them to buy a product or do business with the company. A powerful tool to influence people is storytelling. Although it is an old tool, it is still effective today, in that storytelling facilitates connecting to the audience or target group.

There are several methods of influencing your target group depending on which strategy is employed. Storytelling qualifies as a rather subtle strategy by which the target audience is influenced through the stories the company tells. An important factor in attempting to influence someone is that the trust of the audience is established before delivering the message. If the audience has no trust in the company, they do not trust the message that it wishes to communicate to them and the message has little or no effect. People very much want to decide things for themselves. Therefore, storytelling is considered a powerful communication tool, as the audience is able to make up their own mind as they listen to the story.

Annette Simmons claims that there are six stories, which are important to know how to tell. The six stories are\(^\text{54}\):

1. “Who I Am” Stories
2. “Why I Am Here” Stories
3. “The Vision” Stories
4. “Teaching” Stories
5. “Values -in-Action” Stories
6. “I Know What You Are Thinking” Stories

The first category of stories, the “Who I Am” stories, covers stories that let the audience see who the company is as it tells a story, which people can connect to on a personal level. It is a way of making the audience see the real company. The second category, the “Why I Am Here” stories,
consists of stories that let people know what is in it for the company. It is important to be honest and tell the audience why the company exists and what it gets out of it. Even if the company has a very selfish reason for doing what it does in order to reach the goals, it is better to tell than to keep the target group guessing.

The third type of story is a “Vision” story. This is a category of stories that shows people what the vision of a company is in a clear way that the audience will easily understand. This will enable them to see your vision also. The fourth type of story that one needs to know how to tell, is “Teaching” stories. This type of story can be useful when a company wants to deliver a message that is extremely important for the receivers to understand. A “Teaching” story can help communicating with the target audience in a way, which enables them not only to understand the message and what they are encouraged to do, but also why. The message is more effective, when the receivers can understand the reason behind it.

The fifth category contains of “Values in Action” stories, which means that the company tells a story, which shows examples of its values in action, that is teaching a value by example. The company values become more meaningful to others when stories are involved in helping people to understand and connect to them on a personal level. The sixth and final category of stories is “I Know What You Are Thinking” stories. It can be very helpful to tell stories to the target audience, which shows that the teller knows what the audience is thinking about the teller and what he or she is trying to tell them. By pinpointing their objections from the beginning, the teller can reveal his or her intentions and thereby earn the respect of the audience.

I have chosen to touch upon these six categories of stories, as I find that they cover some important types of stories that are useful to tell, especially in the business environment. The six types mentioned here all represent different aspects of corporate communications and apply to different communication needs depending on the specific situation.

Using stories to influence one’s audience in one way or another, will often prove to be more effective than simply stating facts and figures in order to convince people of your point of view. Simmons talks about ‘sleeping wisdom’ 55, which stories can help awaken. Her theory is, that in

55 Simmons (2002), p. 50
order to persuade your target audience into changing their behaviour, one should avoid simply offering more facts to people. This is not what is needed for them to make decisions about what is right and what is wrong or to decide how they feel about what is proposed for them to do, change, purchase etc. This theory is supported by Denning\(^56\) who states that following a story is an almost automatic act for the listener, who can relate the story to new contexts based on his or her own knowledge. Essentially, the listener will be able to use the story to make his or her own decisions about your ideas.

This to me means that people make decisions based on emotions. When a story is told, listeners immediately try to identify with one or more of the characters of the story, or at least have the ability to empathise with the characters, which is a result of the way that stories touch the listeners and speak to their emotional side. This is exactly where stories differ from facts. I doubt that many listeners to a strictly factual presentation of a given subject will go away with the same sort of experience as they would had the presentation been seasoned with stories and anecdotes. This type of seasoning helps the audience gain perspective of the subject in question. As these types of stories are important to tell in an organisation, the following section will deal more specifically with the use of stories for organisational change.

### 4.4 Storytelling for organisational change

In the present section, I will focus my attention on the use of storytelling for organisational change, based on the book by Denning entitled *The Springboard*\(^57\), which is concerned with using stories for knowledge management and the changing of organisations. As he says in the book, a springboard story is: *a story that enables a leap in understanding by the audience so as to grasp how an organization or community or complex system may change.*\(^58\) The idea of telling a so-called springboard story is that the story enables the listeners to generate ideas suited for their own individual contexts and situations. The story one tells should provide the opportunity for the listener to evaluate the ideas, which have been presented through the story. By giving the audience a chance to relate to one’s message and ideas, it is possible to encourage them to create their own stories. Hence the name springboard story, as one’s story creates a springboard for the listeners’ thoughts and new stories.

\(^{56}\) Denning (2001)  
\(^{57}\) Ibid  
\(^{58}\) Ibid, p. xviii
Stephen Denning highlights three elements that are important to consider in relation to creating a successful springboard story. One of these elements is comprehensibility, which suggests that the story one tells must clearly express the central idea that is the overall message. It must ensure that the listener can follow the suggestions the sender, namely the company, makes because the real objective of telling a story to the target audience is to encourage them to create their own story based in their own thoughts and ideas. Therefore, the actual content of the springboard story is not as important as the idea behind it. The main focus should be put on communicating the idea to the audience and not on the storyline itself.

Another important element in creating a springboard story is strangeness. The story one tells needs to be able to surprise the listener in the sense that the story must reveal something, which is unexpected by the listener. As the listener becomes involved in the storytelling process and begins further developing the story in his or her own mind, it is important that the story is not too predictable but provides something surprising, in order to keep the listener captured.

Also the term connectedness is worth considering. A story must be able to touch the audience in a way that makes them connect to the protagonist and accept the ideas that are proposed through the story. The protagonist has to be someone, who the listeners can easily relate to. The key is to facilitate the connection between the audience and the message of the story. Keeping these three elements in mind, one may be able to create a springboard story, causing the audience not only to listen to and understand the explicit story one is telling, but also to generate their own internal stories with basis in the story they have listened to about similar situations, which may occur in their own lives.

And this is where the real effect of your story is realised. The intent of such a story is not merely to communicate information to the audience, that is transmit facts to them, the intent is rather to encourage individual interpretations and uses in different contexts. A story is what the listeners make of it and the explicit story line that the storyteller puts together is not what he intends to convey to the audience. The active partaking of the listeners is the key to successful storytelling.

59 Denning (2001), p. 128
60 Ibid, p. 126
61 Ibid, p. 124
4.5 In conclusion

After having found different uses for storytelling in corporate settings, I find at least one common feature of the various forms. The underlying motive for using stories as a communication tool is the ability to persuade the audience. To a certain degree at least, the element of persuasion seems to be the common denominator, whether the situational context is a branding campaign directed at external audiences, a teaching situation or maybe even in social marketing. They all share the common goal of persuading the listeners.

The objective may be different depending on the overall purpose of the communication situation, whether the intent is to sell products, to inspire employees, or to suggest organisational change. However, the one thing they all share is the goal to persuade the listeners to adopt the teller's idea as their own and then act accordingly. The six types of stories that are presented cover six important areas, in which stories may be useful. I see them, though, as examples of stories that can be used as different situations occur in a company. Naturally, being prepared and having already thought about which stories one would tell within the categories before the occurrence of the situation, in which they are needed, is only helpful.

Telling stories to communicate successfully with different audiences does not ensure that the listeners will automatically accept one’s ideas. As stories are interpreted individually, people may draw other conclusions than the intended when reading or listening to the story. Therefore, it is important to pay close attention to the way in which the message is presented through the story and whether it may possibly be misinterpreted by the audience. I want to stress this, as I do not find that the literature I have used for this thesis focuses enough on this possible problem and I do not want to suggest that storytelling always ensures that messages and ideas are perceived by others just as one had intended.
5. The function of storytelling then and now

After having gone back in time to see what part storytelling played in society many years ago and having examined some of the ways in which stories are used in our modern society, I will now turn to a comparison of these uses in an attempt to demonstrate which similarities and differences exist between the old storytelling tradition and modern storytelling as well as the function of stories in society. On the basis of this comparison, I will comment on how the art of storytelling has survived and discuss some possible reasons for the prevalence and power of storytelling.

In order to be able to compare stories and their uses, I will apply various theories on genre and discourse analysis, which will enable me to analyse the context concerning stories and the telling of stories. In addition to using the previous chapters as background, I will use a specific piece of marketing material as an example of corporate storytelling and discuss the connection to the fairy tale, on which it is based. I do not intend, however, to make a thorough analysis of the particular piece of marketing material and the grounds on which it has been produced, as this would fall outside the frame of this discussion. I merely wish to show, by means of a concrete example, how storytelling can be used by companies today and which connection there may be between just that and the old traditional fairy tales.

5.1 The role of the storyteller

In the previous chapters I have not focused much of my attention on the role of the storyteller. I will, though, turn to this aspect now as it is highly relevant to the discussion of the use of stories in all connections, whether it is with children, among friends and co-workers or in corporate communication. Storytelling as such is made up of three elements, namely the story, the storyteller, and the audience. Harmony and balance between these three constituents are key to engaging in storytelling successfully. Naturally, the story cannot be brought to life if it were not for the storyteller. The impact of in fact telling a story and not simply reading a story aloud is important to consider. Telling a story and not relying on a written story as a manuscript will help to create a connection between the storyteller and the audience. In fact, Schultz et al argue that

\[62 \text{ Colwell (1980)}\]
the written story itself is not as important as the very act of storytelling. Naturally, both reading aloud and telling a story are valid forms of communication but there are great differences between the two.

5 The interaction that takes place between the storyteller and the listener is important to the outcome of the entire situation, as the listener is essential in bringing forward the real meaning of the story. The verbal telling of a story is bound to create a greater effect with the listener than the written discourse will, because a story has the ability to involve the listener, who consequently joins the teller, which is when the connection between the two appears. Stories are essentially what the listeners make of them and through the partaking of the audience in the storytelling is the essence of the story revealed. Verbal storytelling will allow the storyteller to stress the aspects that will appeal the most to the listeners, thereby create a more convincing and effective story. This is supported by Gabriel, who claims that the quality of a story is found in the way it is told, more so than in the actual plot of the story.

10 A reason why oral storytelling can create a greater effect with the audience than the mere reading of a story is the possibility to use voices, gestures, and other forms of adding life and personality to the story and the characters. This relates primarily to storytelling events involving children but may be just as relevant in other scenarios and facilitates the building of a relationship between the teller and the listener. As Gee mentions in his talk about Discourse, meaning the contents of a communication situation other than the language-in-use, there are many important elements, which must be considered in order to communicate successfully through stories. Body language, gestures, ways of acting, tools and remedies etc. are all part of what make up the Discourse together with the language-in-use, called the discourse.

20 To relate this directly to the old tradition of storytelling, I am reminded of the professional storytellers of the ancient days who travelled from village to village, telling stories and putting together performances. One can only imagine the performances of these travelling storytellers, whose stories were accompanied by music and chanting. This is a clear example of a discourse

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64 Ibid
65 Gabriel (2000)
66 Gee (1999)
event, which incorporates elements other than the language itself in order to captivate the
audience and thereby communicate successfully and convincingly. When communicating with
someone the language itself, meaning the actual words, constitute less than 15 per cent of what
your listeners receive. The majority of what is communicated to the audience is made up of
body language, posture, tone of voice etc. Therefore, it is important to keep in mind these factors
as one tells a story so as to communicate more effectively.

5.2 Fairy tales
In this section I want to consider fairy tales separately from stories as such, because I find that
fairy tales appear to have a certain quality, which make them omnipresent. One of the reasons for
the continuous appeal of fairy tales is the universal and timeless themes of, for instance, good
versus evil and the realisation of one’s hopes and dreams. This is characteristic of the fairy tale
structure, which seem to be applied to people’s personal lives; hence one easily relates to the
stories, which speak to the emotional side. The reader or listener of a fairy tale enters into the
story and in a sense creates the story together with the storyteller or writer. This is a quality,
which enables the listener to develop the story in his or her mind relating it to contexts of his or
her own life situation. An additional quality of the fairy tale is the timelessness that the tales
generally express. Often, a fairy tale is opened with the words: ‘Once upon a time…”, which
indeed suggest that the tale one is about to hear could take place at any given time. Sometimes
the indication of the location is described just as vaguely or not at all. This enables the fairy tale
to function as a contemporary tale regardless of which period in time the reader or listener
presently live in or where he or she is situated.

As Zipes states, fairy tales offer a structure, which enables the reader to follow and remember
them more easily than other types of stories. Also, the plot of many fairy tales offer hope and
prospect for the readers, who may be able to transfer the experiences of the protagonist to their
own lives. Zipes lists 5 key elements of the common plot line in particularly the Grimms’ fairy
tales. These include the protagonist setting out to explore the world in search for a better life.
He meets someone who is in need of help, which the protagonist then provides, sometimes in
exchange for gifts, and he also meets someone who threatens him and poses a threat to his future

67 Simmons (2002)
68 Zipes (2002)
69 Ibid, p. 62
success and happiness. The protagonist typically handles his challenges with help from the creature he had assisted earlier or by using whichever gifts he may have obtained. Finally, he is rewarded by gaining wealth or by being united with someone else.

This fairy tale structure is easily adapted to the audience’s everyday lives, as people want to believe that anyone is capable of reaching whichever goals he or she has set out to achieve, regardless of the challenges that may arise along the way. The tales embody the type of hopes and dreams people have for their lives and themselves. The structure and the themes of the fairy tales can be considered virtually timeless, and even though the story line and content of fairy tales as a genre may have changed and developed over time, the basic themes continue to apply and their structure is encouraging and inviting for the reader or listener to follow. Zipes claims that people even structure their own lives to be like fairy tales and from childhood hope to grow up to live the life of a prince or princess. Fairy tales have become so deeply rooted in people’s culture that their lives seem to imitate the tales.

But, do lives imitate fairy tales or do fairy tales imitate life? That is a question, which may be raised when looking into the function of stories in society. It is possible that people set up their lives to copy the fairy tales that they grow up with, wanting to live the carefree life with that one and only Prince Charming after having overcome all the troubles that arise. On the other hand, there is also the possibility that fairy tales in fact imitate life, in the sense that the tales may not initially have been created as a reflection of life as it appeared at the time the tales were written but over time, the fairy tales may have been adapted to suit the wants and needs of the audiences.

### 5.3 Children and fairy tales

One of the areas in which not only stories but in particular fairy tales appear relates to children. Fairy tales continue to reach children of all ages, I am tempted to say. The old traditional fairy tales still speak to adults, since the fairy tales have become a part of people’s cultural heritage. It is interesting, however, that the classical fairy tales we all know and enjoy today, were not initially written for children. As mentioned in chapter 3, one the reasons why the literary fairy tale became institutionalised as a genre, was the introduction of fairy tales for children. Fairy tales were used for teaching purposes and the tales collected by Mme Leprince de Beaumont set
the standard for future stories, as the structure and the contents of morals and ethics became characteristic of the instructional fairy tale genre.

This correlates with the idea that storytelling provides a much better tool for teaching and instructing others than dictating rules and stating facts ever will. This is true not only with children but with all other audiences, since stories facilitate the reception of information. It is a way to make the audience remember what has been told. Moreover, stories stimulate the imagination and fantasy, especially of children. This is as true now as it has always been. Therefore, the use of stories in relation to children has not changed significantly in the sense that storytelling in this regard still serves the overall purpose of not only teaching and instructing children but also entertaining, which should not be overlooked.

Today, entertaining stories for children are often found in the world of Disney. As previously touched upon, the name Walt Disney has been synonymous with the genre of fairy tales ever since the beginning of the past century. As mentioned, most people, young or adult, think of Walt Disney first in connection with fairy tales. Ever since the animated films of fairy tales that had been interpreted and adapted to appeal to a broad audience were introduced, Disney seems to have set the standard for the distribution of fairy tales to children. The films have gained more ground than the printed versions of the tales, supposedly since children are more easily exposed to films than books.\textsuperscript{70}

Even though children may still enjoy the reading aloud of fairy tales and other stories by a parent or another adult, their primary source of the fairy tale genre remains the films. However, the versions of the classical tales children know today are different from the original versions of e.g. the Brothers Grimm. According to Zipes, children are presented with the classical fairy tale models of Perrault, the Grimms, and Andersen or the contemporary equivalent in a Disney film that reinforces the patriarchal and consumer tendencies of the culture industry.\textsuperscript{71} Zipes suggests, that Disney's versions of the fairy tales as presented in his films reflect a certain culture and societal structure, against which children are encouraged to measure their own lives. From this I understand that children are looking to the fairy tales as a model for their own lives and expect to live their lives accordingly. Children thereby remain within the set framework of the Disney

\textsuperscript{70} Zipes (1994)
\textsuperscript{71} Ibid, p. 10-11
institution rather than being encouraged to fantasise, develop their hopes and dreams for the future, and set their own standards for life regardless of what is portrayed in the films.

5.4 “De Smukke Svaner”

As mentioned, I will use a specific story as an illustration of a possible way of using not only stories, but also the fairy tale structure to create corporate communication material. Keeping in mind the description of and suggestions for the use of stories in companies, I will look discuss the chosen material using a theoretical background of genre and discourse analysis. I will not be spending much time talking about the language itself, though, nor analysing the language down to word level. I do, however, find it necessary to give a short presentation of the selected material and thus describe the language that is used, the structure, communicative purpose etc., which is characteristic of the genre.

I have chosen to incorporate a discussion of a piece of marketing material based on the fairy tale entitled “The Ugly Duckling” by H.C. Andersen, which represents both the old storytelling tradition and the new and modern version of storytelling. Here, I intend to demonstrate by means of the particular example how fairy tales can be used as inspiration and model for the marketing material of a company. Thereby reflecting on the previous chapters as regards differences and similarities of various forms of storytelling. My reason for choosing to use material from this particular company is entirely based on the material itself, since the piece of communication material seems to me a fine example of how an old and well-known fairy tale can function as an inspiration for a similar tale created in a corporate context. It is not my intention to examine the company behind the material, as my focal point remains the written text and discourse in relation to the subject of storytelling.

The piece of communication material I have found is a booklet from the Danish company “Svane Køkkenet”, which translates to “The Swan Kitchen” [my translation]. The company was established in 1992 as a purely Danish company that emphasises its Danish history and background. The booklet is entitled “De Smukke Svaner”, that translates to “The Beautiful Swans” [my translation] and illustrates the company’s use of the fairy tale tradition in its communication, since it is written and structured as a fairy tale. On the front cover of the booklet

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72 See appendix 4
Contemporary storytelling
a discussion of the function of stories in society

is even printed the name of the author, H.C. Elling, which is clearly a pseudonym and a play on words based on the author H.C. Andersen’s name. The word Elling is pronounced just as the Danish word for duckling and adds a comic undertone to the booklet. Furthermore, the story is illustrated with drawings throughout the booklet.

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The text is written in an old fashioned manner as the language is stylistically old and all nouns are written with a capital first letter. This immediately gives the reader connotations to the classical fairy tales and therefore also to the tale of “The Ugly Duckling”. As it is stated on the folded back cover, the story of “De Smukke Svaner” is written as the sequel to the story of “The Ugly Duckling”, which the company explains to be a symbol of what it had to go through at the time of the establishment in 1992. The writers compare the company to a beautiful fledgling swan and the story from 2001 expresses what has since happened to the swans of the company.

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The type of text that is dealt with here is a fairy tale. First and foremost it is a story and I identify the communicative purposes of this story as being to entertain and to inform the reader about the development of the company and what it has become. I do not find that the story serves any additional communicative purposes, despite the nature of the sender. As previously mentioned, the stories that companies tell often serve the purpose of persuading the audience. However, in this particular case it does not seem to be the intent of the company to advertise as such, at least not to the extent where it becomes clear and evident in the text. I will return to a discussion of the discourse of this text later in the chapter.

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One of the characteristics of the fairy tale genre is its ability to involve the receiver in the story. As fairy tales speak to the emotional side and enables the listener or reader to empathise with the cast members, the fairy tale is able to make an impact. As mentioned previously, the active partaking of the listener is key to bringing forth the moral of the story. This is a reason why telling a story to someone rather than simply reading it is likely to cause a greater effect in terms of touching the audience and making them reach and understand the intended message of the story. In the example of “De Smukke Svaner”, writing the story as a fairy tale invites the reader to share it by telling it to children, for instance. Fairy tales are often read aloud to children, just as children may in fact read them themselves. However, when the tale of “De Smukke Svaner” is told to an audience, the story can be brought to life and the characters be given voices,
expressions etc, which is part of the storytelling discourse. Therefore, in the example of the corporate fairy tale, I find that it is likely to encourage partaking of the audience in the telling of the story.

To relate this booklet to what I presented in chapter 4 concerning the basic elements, which together constitute a good story, I will consider the suggestions made regarding the elements, which ought to be incorporated into a corporate story and relate these to the story from ‘S vane Køkkenet’. As stated in the previous chapter, the four basic elements, the message, the conflict, the cast, and the story, are all elements, which together constitute a good story. However, these are also areas that must be considered by the creators of the story, meaning their thought process may not be evident to the reader. I can only gather that all elements have been considered at the time of the creation of the story, since the product is a story, which appears to have incorporated all elements and I can relate to the story as a reader.

From what is noticeable to me as a reader, the message that the company wishes to convey has surely been considered. Printed at the back on the folded cover is the moral of the story. It says: *Just as in the fairy tale by H.C. Andersen there is a good/important moral: We must cooperate, make an effort, and use each other’s strengths.* [my translation]. This is a way to explicitly state to the reader which the message the company wishes to communicate to the readers. It does not give the reader the opportunity to mistake the intended message of the story to be any different than what is stated at the end of the booklet. Naturally, not all readers will read the short text on the folded cover and perhaps not until after having read the entire story. But even so, I find the explicitly written moral of the story to at least indicate that the creators of the story have carefully considered what they wish to communicate to the reader. Whether this wish is actually fulfilled depends on how the creators have managed to incorporate the message into the story and how it is perceived by the reader.

The second element of a good story, according to Fog et al, is the conflict. As mentioned earlier, there should always be a rather high level of conflict in the story a company tells in order to captivate the audience and keep them interested. An important factor regarding the notion of conflict in stories is that creating balance in the story is key. The story should neither seem to

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calm nor too chaotic. Either extreme will entail that the story will not be able to create the wanted effect. In the example of “De Smukke Svaner”, I regard the level of conflict to be rather low. The conflict, I am able to identify in the story, concerns the ability of the swans to tolerate each other despite their differences and defy the cold weather in order to gather food in the winter. The conflict is solved by all swans cooperating to the benefit of them all. This is, however, not a significant conflict, which can capture the reader and keep him or her in suspense awaiting the climax and resolution of the story. I find that the conflict level in the story is similar to that of tales such as “The Ugly Duckling”, which may not represent a high or intense conflict level, but it serves the purpose of portraying the protagonist or protagonists as the hero.

Next the cast of the story is considered. Typically, a story is constructed around the central cast member, called the protagonist, who plays a central part in the story. The protagonist is also usually the hero of the story who resolves the conflict either alone or with help from others. Here, the central cast members are the swans. These may also be referred to as the protagonists. Other cast members are the ducks in the duck run and the humans canoeing on the lake. The swans play the role as heroes of the story and by helping each other to reach their goal of finding food in the winter, they prove the moral of the story, which is to cooperate, make an effort, and use each other’s strengths.

The fourth element is the story itself. A story can be divided into a beginning, a middle, and an end. These three parts are necessarily included, especially in the fairy tale genre and in this example, the story develops from the beginning where the scene is set on page 1 describing the lake with the beautiful swans and the clouds in the sky where the swans were enjoying the beautiful summer day. After this, we meet some of the other cast members in the duck run and humans also as the story builds until the conflict is introduced. Here, the swans begin bickering and attacking each other for being different. As the cold winter sets in, the swans realize that they have to work together in order to gather some food now that the humans are not feeding them as much. The swans each have qualities different from the others and they agree that they should help each other in order to obtain their common goal. In the end, as the conflict has been resolved, the moral is delivered explicitly when winter has turned to spring and the humans are once again feeding the swans at the lake. Here, the human father explains to his young son that
there really is only one type of swans. Even though they all look alike, they all have different strengths and that is why they can help each other to find food.

After looking at each of the basic constituents of a story in relation to this particular example, I find that all of the above mentioned elements are evidently incorporated into the story of “De Smukke Svaner”, creating the basis for a successful piece of communication material. Even though all of the four elements may not have been weighed equally in the story, the structure has clearly been considered and resembles that of a traditional fairy tale. It is a very obvious and straightforward use of the fairy tale genre in corporate communication and it indicates that the discourses in which we find fairy tales has changed.

5.5 Discourse of fairy tales

This idea I will take a step further and, with basis in discourse analysis as outlined in chapter 2, comment on the discourse of stories, especially fairy tales and the example of “De Smukke Svaner”. With reference to the figure displaying the communication triangle in relation to the four different uses of language, I find that stories in general belong to the category of product discourse with a literary use of language. As mentioned, in product discourse the text refers to itself, in a sense, and focus is on the structure rather than any reference to reality or elements of persuasion. This means, for instance, that there is no intention of the sender, also called encoder, to persuade the reader and the sender does not involve his or her own personality or expressions.

Therefore, in the case of fairy tales as a genre, focus is on the story itself and on the language that is used, the structure etc. To introduce the element of communicative purpose in relation to fairy tales, I define the main primary purpose as entertaining the listener. Granted, other communicative purposes may apply depending on the specific tale and the specific communication situation. However, in an attempt to define a general common purpose of the typical classical fairy tale, I would identify that purpose as being to entertain the audience. This is how I group fairy tales and other types of stories in one genre, connected by that overall communicative purpose. I find that entertainment is always an element of storytelling, just as additional purposes may exist specific to each story. In many cases delivering a message or moral to the listener is part of a story and perhaps especially of fairy tales. As mentioned in an

74 See appendix 1
earlier chapter, from the institutionalisation of fairy tales as a genre, the didactic and instructional undertone has been characteristic of the tales.

Returning to the example of ‘De Smukke Svaner’, I have already classified the story as a kind of fairy tale, judged by the apparent fairy tale structure as well as the content, language etc; hence, I find it given to consider the discourse of the text a product discourse. Even though this particular story is a product of corporate communication and is easily seen as a piece of marketing material, I do not identify any persuasive elements in this discourse. The fairy tale appears to have been written with the sole intent to tell the story of what has happened with the company since the time it was established. Any person who decides to read this story may choose to treat it as any other fairy tale and appreciate the entertainment value and the comic undertone. It may be utilised in a situational context of a parent reading to a child, who will enjoy the story itself and perhaps even uncover the underlying moral of cooperating, making an effort, and using each other’s strengths. The fact that the story originated in a company, whose intention was to tell a symbolic story of the company’s development, cannot necessarily dictate the way in which the communication situation involving the story takes place and the meanings derived from the story may not always correspond to those intended by the sender.

One of the great qualities of stories is the built-in invitation of the reader to participate in the storytelling situation and interpret his or her own meaning of the story. This quality enables stories to be part of different situational contexts and discourses, depending on the circumstances, which may influence the receiver’s individual interpretation of the text. This, of course, adds a sense of flexibility to this type of text, which may both be an advantage and a disadvantage. I find that this flexibility, as I call it, may be beneficial to the sender since the text may have the ability to communicate at different levels. However, the disadvantage is, that the sender will not be able to control the receiver’s interpretation and the reception of the message is not guaranteed.

I find it highly relevant to consider this problem if stories are used for marketing purposes, for instance. As I have already touched upon storytelling, can be a very useful communication tool as a part of a company’s marketing efforts in advertising etc. The uncertainty factor that lies with the receiver must be considered, though, as the company is creating its stories. It must ensure
that the intended message does in fact reach the receiver and that this message cannot be
misinterpreted. The ability of the receiver to use his or her own experiences and background
knowledge to interpret the meaning of the story, can possibly create results that the sender had
not intended and would not have predicted. Therefore, one must consider this carefully before
engaging in storytelling especially as part of corporate communication, where a misinterpreted
message may lead to misconceptions about the company.

5.6 Discourse of stories in marketing
The use of stories in marketing related activities leads me to consider an alternative type of
discourse for stories. As stated earlier, I find stories in general to belong to the literary genre and
the so-called product discourse. However, this rather new function of stories and the ‘buzz
word’ storytelling in connection with companies and organisations makes me consider whether
some types of stories have a different communicative purpose and a different aim. The category,
with which one would normally associate various forms of marketing communication, is the
persuasive use of language. The texts in this category share the overall purpose of persuading the
reader or receiver of the text. Emphasis is placed on the decoder, which gives a person discourse,
in which the text is created to evoke a certain response and action, consequently, from the
receiver.

One may argue that this new function of the old discipline of storytelling creates a shift in the
genre, and thereby the discourse and use of language, moving these types of stories towards the
persuasive use. Here, I would like to introduce the concept of intertextuality, which is defined by
Gee as: the ways in which different sorts of texts and styles of language intermingle to create
meaning.\(^{75}\) It is possible to see the story or classical fairy tale as intermingling with marketing
texts creating a new dimension to the discourses. The language, structure, communicative
purpose etc. characteristic of a certain type of genre has been combined with the types of texts
that aim to persuade the audience, such as advertisements, political speeches etc. A possible
reason for combining these different genres and adapting them to specific needs may be found in
a desire to be entertained as receivers and as consumers. People have developed an attitude of
requiring more from companies with respect to making choices about products, companies,

\(^{75}\) Gee (1999), p. 41
agendas, behaviour etc. People not only want to be convinced that they should adopt the ideas and propositions of the sender, they want something more; they want a story also.

5.7 Differences and Similarities

Generally speaking, I find that there are many similarities to be found between the old function of storytelling and the new and modern way of using stories, as seen from the previous chapters. First of all, I will discuss some of the similarities and common denominators, which I find exist when comparing the past and the present uses of stories. Storytelling is an important and very effective communication tool. This is perhaps the most clear and common trait that can be identified. It is a powerful tool of communication and, it seems, an equally powerful tool of persuasion. In the earliest forms of storytelling, members of a tribe or community would gather around the fire to share tales about the history of the tribe as well as their culture, values, and beliefs. These stories were meant not only for entertainment but also as a way of passing on the traditions and cultural heritage to the younger members of the tribe.

Comparing this way of sharing stories of common values and cultural background to the modern day society, I find that they resemble each other. Whether telling anecdotes or short stories as a way of teaching younger members of the communities or using stories within the corporate culture as a way of sharing history, core values and beliefs of a company, the same method of communication is employed as in the case of the tribe members of the ancient days. The element of persuasion in connection with storytelling can also be identified as a common denominator in the discussion of similarities and differences. As I have already touched upon in connection with my examination of the contemporary use of stories, e.g. in relation to corporate communications, using stories as a method of persuading the audiences is common today. In marketing and advertising, storytelling is a powerful tool to use as a way of persuading customers of the quality of one’s products, of one’s company etc. It provides an effective way of making the listeners follow the storyteller’s side of the story and makes it easier for them to adopt the ideas put forth by the company.

Similar to the ancient days, storytelling continues to apply as a way of teaching others. Stories make for a very useful way of teaching people right from wrong and a story well told can serve
as a warning to someone who may be engaging in inappropriate behaviour. An example of this is a parent talking to the child about the dangers of playing in the street. A story about a child, who did in fact play in the street despite warnings from parents and ended up getting hurt, can assist the parent in delivering the message and help the child to realise the dangers involved in this type of behaviour; hence, the child is able to relate to the child in the story and interpret the story within the context of its own situation.

The story has the ability to speak to the feelings and emotions of the listener, thereby allowing the listener to relate to the message in a way that is not possible, if the message had simply been presented as a rule and a fact. However, there is a difference between simply giving an example and telling a story. The emotional content that is added to a story is a factor, which creates the difference between an example and a story. The listener is not encouraged to connect as closely to a hypothetical example, for instance, as to a story in which it is possible to identify with the characters. This way of using stories as a communication tool seems to exist today as widely as it did many years ago.

The issue of teaching others through storytelling can be further related to storytelling in organisations. In chapter 4, I referred to Simmons, who proposes six types of stories one should know how to tell. As I mentioned, these stories apply mainly to organisational storytelling, but I do not reject the idea that they may apply to contexts of people’s personal lives as well. One of the stories, she talks about, is the “Teaching” story. This type of story is useful in situations where it is extremely important to get a message through to the listeners and the “Teaching” story provides a tool for explaining the reason behind a certain message, which will increase the effect with the listener. As I discussed before, teaching others by means of a story is useful now as it was many years ago and I find that the common trait in this type of story, whether the situation involves a parent teaching a child a lesson or a company trying to influence its stakeholders, is the ability to make the listener see one’s side of the story and understand one’s reasoning.

Another type of story, which Simmons discusses, is the “Values in Action” story. This refers to the advantage of being able to show one’s values by example and tell a story in which these

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76 Colwell (1980)
77 Simmons (2002)
values are put into a situational context and consequently become more realistic and easier to grasp for the listeners. This use of stories is similar to that of the “Teaching” stories and I consider both types of stories to prevail in the modern day society as they presumably did in the ancient days. In any culture, even organisational cultures, it is important to be able to share the values and beliefs of the culture, as these are part of the foundation on which the culture is developed. This applies in the case of organisational cultures and in addition, companies will benefit from communicating with external stakeholders in a way that expresses the core values, since these are fundamental in differentiating the company from others.

The above discussion of discourse reveals a change in the use of stories as a communication tool. This change in discourses introduces a new aspect to storytelling and a way of communicating through stories that is different from the traditional storytelling, reflecting the versatility of the discipline. As seen from this section, several similarities in the use of stories then and now can be identified. The main difference seen from my study is the introduction of storytelling as a marketing tool. To close this chapter, I will include my reflections on the question of what makes storytelling survive as a discipline. A possible reason for the continuous prevalence of storytelling, is the before mentioned versatility. As long as people can find new areas to incorporate stories and new ways to use storytelling, the art and discipline is likely to survive.

Another possible reason, which I identify, is the quality of stories to allow the receiver to develop his or her own interpretation and meaning of the story. I find that, especially in connection with storytelling within the field of marketing, this is a great advantage. The fact the consumers and stakeholders of a company are enabled to judge for themselves and that people are not dictated which ideas and behaviours to adopt, suits the modern day consumer very well. Stories in the general term seem to always remain a part of our lives and I predict that the art of storytelling will never disappear.
6. Conclusion

In order to be able to better understand the function of stories in society today, I decided to look into the history of the discipline of storytelling. The examination of storytelling went as far back as to the Middle Ages to locate the roots of the stories and literary tales that prevail today. As I was able to establish, stories from the medieval times do not particularly resemble the literary tales that are told today. The ancient oral tales did, however, contain some elements that were later incorporated into the literary tales, which have since developed and transformed over centuries. In the ancient days, stories circulated verbally among people by word of mouth. At this time, all communication was verbal, as the written word had not yet been introduced. Therefore, stories functioned as an important tool for communicating with each other within the communities, passing on the history and cultural heritage of the tribe.

I found that the professional storytellers, who travelled from village to village and told their tales to others, had a significant responsibility regarding the prevalence of tales at the time. The introduction of the printing press in the 15th century marked a period in time, during which a decline in the demand of professional storytellers took place. As tales were written down and began circulating among the reading public, the oral wonder tales lost their position in society and instead became the basis of the literary fairy tales. I found that this was an important point in time, which resulted in both a decline of the oral tradition and the birth of a new literary genre.

Several authors and collectors of tales have had a major influence on the development of the literary fairy tale; the Brothers Grimm were instrumental in bringing fairy tales to the audiences of children in adapting their tales to the requirements of society regarding children’s literature. Also Mme Leprince de Beaumont played an important role in this matter, as her revolutionary tales for children paved the way for future tales and authors to come. Before she published her collection of tales written explicitly for children, fairy tales had more or less been reserved for the adult audience. Her tales introduced the notion of educating and socialising children through storytelling, which became significant for centuries to come.

This development within the storytelling tradition founded the position of stories in society today. As the literary fairy tale became institutionalised as a genre, it also became an accepted
part of the literary world. The fact that fairy tales were introduced for educating and socialising purposes in connection with children may have been an important step, which led to the prevalence of fairy tales today. As children represented a new group of audience for the tales, a new function of stories and storytelling was identified. This, I consider an important development of the literary fairy tale genre.

From my examination of the function of stories in the contemporary society, I find that the connection between children and fairy tales remains intact. Since the connection was established several centuries ago, when fairy tales became accepted as literature for children, the genre has continued to appeal to children. Today, the main influence of children’s experiences with the classical fairy tales is Walt Disney. To a great extent, the animated films are responsible for the prevalence of fairy tales directed at audiences of children today.

In relation to the use of stories as a means of teaching and instructing others, I find that the old traditional way of teaching children right from wrong through telling stories still applies today. The quality of stories that allows the listener to relate emotionally to the story told has not changed significantly from the ancient days until today. Essentially, it is the act of telling the story and the teller and listener interacting to create meaning of the story, which entails the acceptance of the message by the listener. The ability of the listener to relate the story to his or her own situational context is key to the success of stories intended for teaching purposes, which indicates a similarity between the use of storytelling then and now.

The storyteller plays a significant role in the success of a story. There must be a balance between the three constituents of storytelling, which are the story, the teller, and the audience. In this connection, oral storytelling usually creates a greater effect than written stories do, as the interaction between the teller and the listener of the storytelling event can take place. Both reading a story aloud and telling a story free from any manuscript are valid forms of communication, but there are differences between the two. When telling a story without a written manuscript, the elements of the discourse other than the language or the text itself, such as body language, voices etc, can come into play. This, I conclude, is an essential part of storytelling. The use of stories in companies for marketing purposes developed as a result of the increasing demand from stakeholders to get more information about a company and the choices it makes.
Storytelling makes for a powerful tool of communication and of persuasion, which indicates a possible reason for the survival of stories in society. Also, storytelling allows for the listener to interpret his or her own meaning of the story and to create new stories in other situational contexts of his or her life. I consider the expansion of the discipline of storytelling into the world of marketing an indication of the versatility of stories, which in the future may result in the use of storytelling in other areas also.

By means of an example from the company ‘Svane Køkkenet’, I have been able to illustrate how stories can be used as a part of the marketing communication of a company. The example, which is a booklet entitled ‘De Smukke Svaner’ is written as a fairy tale meant to resemble the classical fairy tale “The Ugly Duckling” by H.C. Andersen. Based on my theoretical background, I was able to examine whether this piece of marketing material reflected a consideration of the basic elements, which are necessary in order to create the desired effect with the receivers. Referring to the four elements of the story a company may choose to tell, I find that all elements have been incorporated into ‘De Smukke Svaner’.

A consideration of the discourses, in which stories partake, told me that fairy tales and stories in general belong to the product discourse, placing emphasis on the product or the text itself with a literary use of language. However, I must conclude that there has been a shift in the discourses to which stories belong, as they have become part of the marketing world recently. Here, I argue that the language use is persuasive rather than literary; hence the stories are part of a person discourse. This represents a change in the function of stories and a difference in relation to the traditional use of stories and storytelling.

My comments on the possible reasons for the survival of storytelling include reflections on the before mentioned changes in the discourses of stories. Indeed the versatility of stories and of storytelling indicates the possibility of the discipline to diversify into new functions and discourses in the future. As long as people are able to continue to find new areas in which storytelling may be useful, the discipline is able to develop and grow according to society.
Summary

This thesis is concerned with storytelling in the past and in the present days. Storytelling is considered the oldest form of entertainment but it also makes for a powerful communication tool. Although it is one of today’s ‘buzz words’ in the field of marketing, the art of storytelling has been a part of people’s lives since before the introduction of the written word, when oral storytelling was the primary means of communication. Today, storytelling takes place in many different social contexts and serves different purposes accordingly. However, the new appearance of the term storytelling inspired me to look into the history of the discipline as well as the ways in which it is employed today.

Therefore, the main purpose of the thesis is to illustrate the function of storytelling in society today. I go back to the early Middle Ages in order to find the roots of today’s classical fairy tales and examine the development of storytelling covering different periods in time up to the modern days. This provides the background on which I discuss the use of stories in the contemporary society, in corporate communication as well as other areas. As an example of corporate storytelling, I discuss a specific piece of marketing material. Moreover, I comment on the differences and similarities found between the old storytelling tradition and the function of stories today.

The examination of storytelling in the ancient days shows how the oral tales were gradually incorporated into the literary fairy tales, after which the literary genre more or less replaced the oral tradition. Several collectors and authors of tales have played a significant role in the institutionalisation of fairy tales as a genre, e.g. the Brothers Grimm, H.C. Andersen, and Mme Leprince de Beaumont. Initially, fairy tales were not intended for children, as they were not considered appropriate children’s literature. Over time, however, fairy tales were adapted to the requirements of society and the tales were used for the education and socialisation of children. Subsequently, the fairy tale genre has come to appeal to both children and adults. The classical fairy tales remain close to the original, although the influence of an institution such as Walt Disney has had a significant impact not only on the popularity of fairy tales but also on the content, which has been slightly altered.
In the modern day society, storytelling is used for several purposes within corporate communication. Stories are useful as a branding tool, as a means to incorporate the core values of a company into its marketing material and facilitate differentiating the company from competitors. The fairy tale genre is suggested as a model for a company’s storytelling.

Furthermore, storytelling is a powerful tool of persuasion, which is one of the main motives for the use of storytelling in corporate communication. The ability of stories, especially fairy tales, to invite the listener to actively partake in the creation and interpretation of the story is useful not only in corporate communication, but in other situational contexts also.

The role of the storyteller, as well as other parts of the discourse other than the language itself, is important in order to achieve the intended effect of a story. The interaction between the teller and the listener is essential to the outcome of the storytelling activity and people tend to respond to stories almost automatically. Stories possess a quality, which makes information more believable and easier to remember than do mere facts and rules or guidelines. Moreover, oral storytelling seems to be more effective than the written story or a situation of reading aloud, for instance.

Based on several sources, suggestions are made as to which stories companies should be able to tell and the best ways to create and make use of stories within organisations. The common characteristic in these different uses is the interaction between the teller and the listener of the story, indicating that storytelling involves the listener in the creating of meaning of the story. The notion of stories functioning as a so-called springboard for the creation of stories within the situational context of the listener is also introduced.

A section comments on the function of fairy tales in society today regarding traits, which make them applicable even today, and the ways in which fairy tales appeal to children are discussed. A new way of using storytelling in corporate communication is illustrated by the example of a booklet, which is written as a fairy tale, proposing to be the sequel of a classical well-known fairy tale. The discourses of fairy tales and of stories in marketing are considered and finally some differences and similarities identified in storytelling of the past as well as today are discussed.
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