Table of contents

Preface ................................................................................................................................. 2
Introduction ........................................................................................................................... 3
Chapter One: The Storytelling Tradition in Ireland and New Mexico ......................... 10
Chapter Two: Storytelling in Ireland ................................................................................ 19
Chapter Three: Storytelling in New Mexico ................................................................... 29
Conclusion ........................................................................................................................ 40
Works Cited ....................................................................................................................... 44
Two Worlds, Two Similar Traditions

Preface

For the past half year, I have been lucky enough to be able to pursue two of my main interests in the field of English literature: Anglo-Irish and Mexican-American literature. During my year abroad at the University of Liverpool, I developed a great interest for Ireland, its culture and its literature. It is with good reason that I took four courses at the Institute for Irish studies, which have only confirmed me in my appreciation and interest for this country and its culture.

My enthusiasm for Chicano literature was generated by a Masters course I took last year: before taking this course, I knew little about New Mexico’s rich culture and its literature. Yet, it held a great attraction for me, particularly because of its diverse nature. Naturally, a combination of these two interests would form the ideal subject for my dissertation.

Thanks to Dr. Irene Visser, I could indeed turn my hobby into work and pursue my interests in Irish and Chicano literature. After being introduced to the two novels, Ireland and Serafina’s Stories, I felt sure that I did not want to consider any other topics; I wanted to write my dissertation about these two novels and the two cultures in which they are embedded. Dr. Visser, thank you for guiding me in this direction, for your time and all your useful and meaningful remarks. Lastly, I would also like to thank my father, for his comments and letting me work off steam, which was highly necessary now and then.
“Every worthwhile story begins with the immortal words, ‘Once upon a time’...”
- Frank Delaney

Introduction

Two strikingly distinctive cultures on two different continents that both have the a similar age-old tradition: that is the case with Irish and Mexican-American culture, which both, until this present day, have a flourishing storytelling tradition. This dissertation will place Frank Delaney’s *Ireland A Novel* and Rudolfo Anaya’s *Serafina’s Stories* in the tradition of storytelling in Ireland and New-Mexico. These are two cultures in which, from the beginning of time, oral tradition in literature has played a very significant role. Through stories, the Irish and Mexican-Americans have been able to pass on histories, knowledge and moral wisdom from generation to generation, ensuring that their cultural heritage would not be lost. In both cultures, stories have, for instance, contributed to the glorification of important moments and characters in history. Also, stories have helped explain spiritual – or other unexplainable – occurrences in order to make listeners understand and articulate life in many different facets. Furthermore, stories have provided the Irish and Mexican-Americans with a way to communicate, have brought entertainment and have functioned as a manner of instruction; not only in time of war and need, but also in practical daily activities, such as work or housekeeping.
Many Irish and Mexican-American oral narratives have withstood the test of time and are still told today. According to Barbara Sommer, the art of storytelling is even going through a renaissance after having faced an uncertain future because of advances in technology (1). As a consequence of the increasing popularity of storytelling in the past few decades, storytelling societies have been founded throughout the world, which show a trend in the storytelling revival that continues to grow and flourish (Sommer 1).

In their long and flourishing storytelling traditions, the Irish and Mexican-Americans share the fact that their culture has developed under the influence of colonisation. Since both cultures have their own legends, myths and saints, political circumstances have therefore always been major issues in Irish and Mexican-American oral literature. Declan Kiberd underscores this in The Oxford History of Ireland, stating that “words have always been the last weapon of the disarmed... a compensating inner world of fantasy is a feature of the psychology of most colonised and even post-colonial people” (233).

Ireland’s history has been dominated by English colonisation. This caused the Irish, from the sixteenth century onwards, to be increasingly anglicised, which has deeply affected their culture. Despite continuous resistance against the English, it was only at the end of the nineteenth century that there was any hope of change in the Irish political situation. This period marked the beginning of the Irish Cultural Revival, also known as the Gaelic revival, in which Ireland’s Gaelic culture was revived and adapted to the modern world, which constituted a cultural revolution (Foster, John W. 12). The Gaelic revival and the Easter rebellion in 1916 heralded Ireland’s independence; after years of political struggle, the Irish Free State was founded in 1921. Yet, long after Ireland’s political independence, Irish literature still addresses political concerns: “nationalism and national identity, constrained economic and artistic opportunities, and the influence of religion on family roles...” (Foster, John W. 224).

Like the Irish, Mexican-Americans have also had a turbulent history. Due to colonisation by the Spanish and later the Americans, the Pueblo Indians — the
indigenous inhabitants of the area of New Mexico - were forced to accept foreign rule, which explains the abundance of mainly Spanish influences found in Mexican-American culture today. Due to the variety of influences from different cultures – Native American, Spanish and Anglo-American – Mexican-American culture has a “rich literary oral and written tradition... that reflects the vitality and tenacity of the Spanish-speaking population of the Southwest” (Tatum 12). Literature, and particularly oral literature in the form of storytelling, proved to be a way for Mexican-Americans to express their identity and, more importantly, to keep their culture alive despite dominating outside influences.

Considering New Mexico’s past, it is not surprising that people’s resistance to colonisers, just as in Ireland, has been a very important issue in Mexican-American literature. This has not lost its significance over time: as a minority group, Mexican-Americans still struggle for their rightful position in American society and try to keep their culture and heritage intact. Particularly in the 1950s, Mexican-Americans started to organise themselves in activist groups and gradually adopted the name Chicano, developing a distinctive consciousness as the second largest minority group in the USA (Palmowski). This protest mentality and the urge to distinguish themselves from other minorities in the USA has been clearly reflected in Mexican-American - also termed Chicano - literature since that time.

Frank Delaney and Rudolfo Anaya are two writers who have contributed to the revival of the art of storytelling by composing novels which are based on, and flow from, the Irish and Mexican-American storytelling tradition respectively. The reason for exploring the Irish and Mexican-American storytelling tradition and its functions by means of Delaney’s Ireland and Anaya’s Serafina’s Stories is that both novels not only represent the two very distinctive cultures, but also their storytelling traditions, which have fundamental similarities.

Frank Delaney was born in Tipperary, Ireland in 1942. He was a broadcaster who, after a short but successful banking career, became a BBC reporter for the regional BBC division of Northern Ireland. During his work for the BBC, Delaney started writing
both fictional and non-fictional works. He has written a number of prize-winning books in which he explores Ireland’s history: from the origins and prehistory of the Celts to a guide to James Joyce’s *Ulysses*. *Ireland* (2004) also results from Delaney’s fascination with the past: in this novel he interweaves ancient Irish myths and folktales into a storyline, exploring the events and people that shaped Ireland’s past.

*Ireland* reflects Ireland’s literary preoccupation with its own history by reviving and retelling ancient oral Irish history. According to Delaney, it does not matter whether ancient fables and myths are always historically correct; he feels that it is more important that oral narratives about Ireland’s history “convey beneath the surface this strong deep voice saying, ‘this is what the people were like, this is what the feelings were like, the blood and the bone and the poetry” (Page, Benedicte 2). Delaney emphasised his urge to portray the “real” Ireland in his speech for the New York State Writers Institute, stating that his intention while writing *Ireland* – as well as his other historical fictions – was to recreate a history of Ireland in the twentieth century (“An Enterprise”). Delaney also underscores that “the spirit of our past is more important than the [historical] facts”, which he clearly emphasises in his novel *Ireland* by combining fact with both fiction and imagination to pass on Ireland’s historical and cultural legacy (“An Enterprise”). Critics have praised Frank Delaney for bringing Irish history back to life, which is also the reason why *Ireland* can be considered very important not only for contemporary Irish literature, but also in the context of the Irish storytelling tradition.

*Ireland* can be considered a bildungsroman; Ronan, the protagonist, draws valuable lessons from every story he hears, helping him to develop and prepare for adulthood. In Delaney’s novel, the stories are told by a storyteller, called a *seanchaithe*, who travels around the Irish countryside to entertain and instruct people with his stories, particularly the protagonist Ronan. Through this character, the reader is drawn into Irish history each time Ronan comes across one of the storyteller’s tales.

In addition to *Ireland*, Frank Delaney’s other works are also of great significance to Irish literature and the Irish storytelling tradition. In many of his works, he illuminates
important historical events, people and traditions, creating an understanding of Ireland’s history (Purgavie). Bill Sheehan underscores this in his review of Ireland in the Washington Post, stating that Delaney is able to convey to contemporary readers that stories still matter and that they give shape and meaning to our otherwise fractured personal - and national – histories (3). Through his writing, Delaney reinforces the Irish’ fascination with their heritage, including the storytelling tradition (Doherty).

Rudolfo Anaya is a much celebrated and award-winning Mexican-American – or Chicano - author and former distinguished professor of English at the University of New Mexico, in his hometown Albuquerque. Anaya was born in New Mexico in 1937, a state in the southwest of the USA. This is the region where his ancestors lived, where he spent his childhood and still lives nowadays. According to William Clark, New Mexico’s unique centuries-old Hispanic culture - partly Spanish, partly Native-American - has laid the foundation for all of Anaya’s works (1). Moreover, Anaya’s novels are said to be “embedded in myth and bound by common cultural themes such as the deterioration of traditional Hispanic ways of life, social injustice and oppression, disillusionment and loss of faith” (“Rudolfo A. Anaya” 2). Anaya’s Serafina’s Stories serves as an example of a novel dealing with several of these themes: through the eyes of Serafina, the reader learns about the oppression by the Spanish and their influence on Pueblo Indian culture.

In this historical novel from 2004 the protagonist, Serafina, is imprisoned for rebelling against the Spanish colonisers. By using her talent for storytelling, she is able to free her fellow prisoners; one prisoner for every story she tells to the Spanish Governor who holds her captive. These stories, twelve myths which originated from Europe, have been adapted by Pueblo Indian culture. According to Charles Tatum, it is this combination of Spanish and Pueblo Indian cultural influences that forms a representation of “the magical-mythical New-Mexican world which has become Anaya’s trademark” (120).

Anaya is a versatile writer; besides a great number of novels, he has also written non-fiction work, poetry, essays and short stories. His works have substantially contributed to the development of Chicano literature, which only became part of the
international literary community in the 1970’s (Lomelí 86). Similar to Frank Delaney’s works, the major issues in Anaya’s novels are New Mexico’s troubled history, Mexican-American cultural identity and values, and the importance of passing on and preserving the Mexican-American cultural legacy. Consequently, in his novels, Anaya addresses matters that mirror the experiences of Chicanos throughout the Southwest (Clark 2).

Both *Ireland* and *Serafina’s Stories* are frame narratives, allowing the interplay of a number of different stories within the framework, thus achieving a similar narrative impact. *Ireland* contains twenty-seven shorter stories; ancient Irish folktales and legends told in a modern way, based on Irish fables, and combined with Delaney’s imagination and historical facts (Page 1). This structure and form of narration is similar to *Serafina’s Stories*, in which twelve stories from the Mexican-American storytelling tradition are also placed in a frame story. Through the frame story, the reader learns about Mexican-American history and culture, because Serafina - the storyteller in the novel - and the Governor, who listens to her stories, discuss the turbulent political situation in New Mexico in the seventeenth century, the time in which the novel is set. These frame narratives bind the stories together, helping to uphold the storytelling tradition by allowing a wide variety of stories to be grouped together, which, in the oral tradition, would also have been important for a storyteller’s individual repertoir (Haase 373). The importance of the frame narrative in both *Ireland* and *Serafina’s Stories* becomes clear when examining the main characters. Ronan, Serafina and the Governor have fully developed personalities, which progress and change as the storytelling continues (Haase 374). In both novels, then, the reader is informed about Irish and Mexican-American history and culture predominantly through stories, but also through the particular use of narrative and the main characters in these narratives.

In my dissertation, I hope to shed light on the various functions of storytelling in the Anglo-Irish and Mexican-American tradition by exploring *Ireland* and *Serafina’s Stories* on the presence of the historical, religious and cultural function. I will also discuss the text-internal functions of the two novels, because *Ireland*, as a Bildungsroman, and *Serafina’s Stories*, as a historical novel, both have a distinctive
frame narrative, which adds to the storytelling in the novel. Thus, through their tales and exceptional frame stories, Delaney and Anaya offer the contemporary reader a modern interpretation of the storytelling tradition, which, in my opinion, is worth looking into and offers much to be explored.

The following chapter discusses storytelling in Irish and Mexican-American culture and its literature, in which oral narratives have been a vital element. The second and third chapter analyse three different functions of storytelling, namely the historical, religious and cultural function, in both Delaney’s *Ireland* and Anaya’s *Serafina’s Stories*. Delaney’s and Anaya’s novel will illustrate that, to a certain extent, in Irish and Mexican-American culture, the storytelling tradition and its functions occupy a similar position. Thus, I hope, this dissertation will provide insight into the importance of the storytelling tradition and its functions in Ireland and New Mexico and, in particular, how these two important novels contribute to the preservation of this tradition.
“If you don’t know the trees
you may be lost in the forest,
but if you don’t know the stories
you may be lost in life”.
- Siberian Elder

Chapter One: The Storytelling Tradition in Ireland and New Mexico

Storytelling has been of great importance in Irish and Mexican-American culture. Yet, according to Reimund Kvideland, it is generally believed that the “[oral] narrative tradition has become extinct in modern Western society” (qtd. in Röhrich & Wienker 16). However, Kvideland, who bases his claim on recent American research, refutes this assertion, stating that the opposite appears to be true. Apparently, people still tell stories nowadays, even if these stories more often serve the purpose to entertain than to fulfill a necessary function (qtd. in Röhrich & Wienker 16). Despite the fact that some functions of storytelling have slightly changed, the main purposes of storytelling have remained. Amy Shuman confirms this in her article “Oral History”: she feels that stories were and are still told to memorise a country’s ordinary and momentous social events and to pass on wisdom through generations (qtd. in Röhrich & Wienker 130).

Storytelling in the Irish and Mexican-American context, then, maybe understood in the broader history of storytelling. Walter J. Ong, a well-known scholar, has done a substantial amount of research on the subject of orality, ranging
Two Worlds, Two Similar Traditions

from the development from orality to literacy to the concept of rhetoric in orality. In his book *The Orality of Language: The Technologizing of the Word*, Ong discusses the development of orality in a world that is technologising rapidly. Ong believes that we, as contemporary readers, are so literate that we can no longer comprehend “an oral universe of communication or thought”, which partly explains why people nowadays consider the oral tradition to have become extinct (2). Since people can no longer conceive the notion of an oral society, it becomes even harder to imagine a significant role for storytelling in contemporary societies. However, as Ong states, “language is...so overwhelmingly oral that orality should be considered a primary system, which can exist and mostly has existed without writing, yet, writing could never exist without orality (7-8). The art of storytelling is an old craft that predates writing; moreover, it is an ancient craft that has been “cultivated in every rank of society... for at least three or four thousand years” (Thompson 3). Independent of continent or civilization, oral narratives everywhere fulfill many practical functions and purposes throughout the world, for the same basic social and individual needs persist (Thompson 5). In times when there were no books, televisions or computers, people used stories for entertainment, but also to pass on knowledge, histories and important morals. Since people did not write down their accounts and histories, their experiences and gathered wisdom were shaped into stories that were retold then and they are still – although perhaps less often - told now.

During the past few decades, extensive research has been done on major issues in the field of storytelling and orality. Much of the research involves bibliographies: publications which compile large amounts of folktales that have withstood the test of time. Scholars who have edited such biographies are, for instance, the Irish researcher Sean Ó Súilleabháin and J. Manuel Espinoza in the Mexican-American tradition. Both have illuminated several elements of the storytelling tradition by compiling and categorising folktales. Additionally, also a linguistic perspective on storytelling has been provided: for instance, research has been done on the structure of a story, its pattern and its rhetoric. Thus, people have become aware of the fact that oral art forms are actually quite similar to written texts (Ong 5-10). Ong illuminates this in his book *Orality*
Two Worlds, Two Similar Traditions

and Literacy, eliminating several misunderstandings about orality - such as its continuously important function throughout time - and emphasising its importance in history.

Despite the current prevalence of writing over orality, Ong states that “in many cultures and subcultures...much of the mind-set of primary orality [still has been preserved]” (Ong 11). Irish and Mexican-American culture illustrate this, as a significant amount of their oral narratives have indeed survived over the years. Ancient myths, legends and folktales that were passed on from generation to generation are still told nowadays and reflect the oral mind-set present in Irish and Mexican-American culture. Many stories have been committed to paper. As Stith Thompson states in his book The Folk tale: “stories have [...] been taken from the lips of unlettered tale-tellers and have entered the great literary collections”; which confirms the important position of oral folktales and legends in Irish and Mexican-American culture (5). Consequently, the stories that constituted a country’s oral culture are now inextricably bound up with its written literature. Paul Beekman Taylor underscores the importance of oral narratives in contemporary literature, stating that “recalling old myths is not a nostalgic turn towards the past... but a re-creating out of the past into the future” (148). Ireland and Serafina’s Stories, then, are important as written works that use orality for historical and cultural purposes.

The storytelling tradition in Ireland

Already in the Celtic period, which began in the third century BC, storytellers, who are called seanchaithe in Irish, travelled around the country to deliver stories (Leeming, Celtic Mythology; Lloyd and O’Brien 160). Initially, the seanchaithe told their tales to the kings and nobles at court, but later on predominantly in people’s houses by the fireside on cold winter evenings (Ó Súilleabháin, Storytelling 10). These stories, besides entertaining, served the purpose of telling the history of Ireland, remember and glorify
Ireland’s past, explain spiritual or supernatural occurrences and to pass on cultural values and traditions.

Ireland’s rich culture has sprung from the “cultivated Gael”: the early Celtic inhabitants of Ireland and the west of Scotland (Delargy 178). In his article *The Gaelic Story-Teller*, Delargy claims that the Gaels have provided modern-day Ireland with the largest body of collected folk-tales in the west of Europe, which are still found throughout the country today (205). An important reason for the Gaels’ dominant influence is that Irish culture, like other Celtic societies, “flourished early, from the megalithic passage graves, dolmens and standing stones, to the sagas of the heroic age and later of Patrick and the early Christian saints” (John 182). Rich Irish culture has also resulted in a long history of orality. This is illustrated in his book *A Handbook of Irish Folklore*, where Ó Súilleabháin supports Kuno Meyer’s notion that Irish oral literature is the earliest voice from the dawn of Western European civilisation (qtd. in Ó Súilleabháin iii).

The Celts, then, have laid the foundation for Irish culture and mythology as we know it nowadays. With the arrival of Christianity around 400 AD, monks committed to their Christian point of view made certain Christian adaptations to the pagan stories that were introduced by the Celts, which explains the convergence of Christian and Celtic elements in several stories (Leeming, *Irish Mythology*). Examples of these adapted stories are the various myths about Saint Patrick, in which druidic rites are often combined with Christian values or rituals, which is also illustrated in “The Legend of Saint Patrick”, a story told in *Ireland* (Leeming, *Patrick*). For instance, a Gaelic feature which remains quite dominant in Irish mythology is nature and its elements: every hill, river or lake seems to have had its spirit, which was then explained in the form of a story (MacLean 167-68).

From the twelfth century AD onwards, Ireland was continuously invaded by the English, yet they were not able to colonise Ireland until King Henry VII started plantation
projects in the late fifteenth century.\(^2\) Despite the initial unsuccessful attempts by the English to colonise Ireland, the Irish and their culture were influenced by British rule during the time of invasions: Protestantism was forced upon the Irish and by means of plantation schemes, the English tried to end the power of the clans, in order to maintain in control of the Irish population (“Ireland”). Throughout centuries of English colonization, the Irish language, which is originally a form of Celtic and is closely connected with Ireland’s oral tradition, has provided the Irish with a way to not only preserve their storytelling tradition, but also their culture, faith and patriotism (Foster, Robert F. 99). Douglas Hyde, the first president of the Irish Free State, referred to the importance of the Irish language in one of his speeches: “[W]here the language dies, these folk memories will scarcely survive a generation” (qtd. in Markey 35). England’s colonisation threatened the Irish, their language and, consequently, also “brought about a [partly] destruction of the oral literature enshrined in [the Irish language]” (Delargy 178).

However, at the end of the nineteenth century, the English threat to Irish culture had developed a concern for Irish folklore (Ó Súilleabháin, Folktales xiii). A literary revival stimulated a renewed interest in the Irish language and its literature, including the storytelling tradition. People had become aware of the fact that due to Anglicisation, Irish culture might eventually waste away. The revival created an image of a pastoral, mythic, unmodernised Ireland: an idea with which the ancient Irish myths harmonised perfectly (Welch 1). Benedicte Page alludes to this in her article on Ireland, stating that partly due to the revival, the figure of the itinerant storyteller—making his way from home to home, finding bed and board if he succeeded in entertaining the household with his tales— is still a feature of living memory (1). However, according to Frank Delaney, Ireland’s last itinerant storytellers are all gone now (qtd. in Thomas 1). The storytellers Delaney remembers from his youth, representing Ireland’s rich history and storytelling tradition form the basis for the stories told in the novel (Delaney, Frank Delaney). In Ireland, Delaney reflects on the role of storytelling in contemporary Ireland,

\(^2\) Plantations were one of the Tudor options to ‘reform’ Ireland. These plantations imposed a new set of English landlords on the native, Irish population (Morgan).
which is still a vital cultural tradition that preserves Ireland’s history and, according to Delaney, “conveys what it feels like to be Irish” (Page, Benedicte 4). Even though storytellers no longer travel the lands as they used to, the existence of several storyteller societies and the preservation of a large body of folktales prove that the storytelling tradition itself has remained.

**The storytelling tradition in New Mexico**

Irish and Mexican-American oral culture are both influenced by a wide variety of elements from different peoples and cultures. This is clearly reflected in their literatures. The Mexican-American storytelling tradition is a so-called meltingpot of cultural elements, caused by centuries of domination of the south-western region of the USA by other people. The arrival of Columbus in America is said to mark the beginning of Mexican-American folklore, because from then on, the Pueblo Indians – as the indigenous inhabitants of North-America are called - became influenced by European cultures which would dominate their culture until today (West 27).

New Mexico, now the forty-seventh state of America, was conquered by the Spanish in 1521 and remained under Spanish rule until the annexation of New Mexico to the USA in 1848 (“Mexico”). Particularly the Spanish experienced strong resistance during their settlement in the Mexican borderland; the Pueblo Indians frequently revolted against Spanish rule, which was known to be harsh, divisive and exploitative (“Mexico”). Both the Spanish and the English colonisers have left deep marks in Mexican-American culture. As John West points out in his book *Mexican-American Folklore*: “Mexican-Americans of today are richly nourished by the folkways of three cultures: Indian, Spanish, and Mexican” (1). Nowadays, Spanish influences predominate in Mexican-American culture, because America only started to explore the Spanish Southwest in the nineteenth century, when the Native-Americans had already intermingled and interacted with the Spanish for two centuries (West 27).
Storytelling has always played a major role in Mexican-American society: in the pre-Hispanic culture of the southwest of America it was the shaman, an indigenous storyteller possessing magical or supernatural powers, who preserved traditional repertoires from the different cultures (Riascos 1). In addition to that, shamans are the only ones who can engage with the manitous, the spirits of the ancestors. In Pueblo Indian communities, the manitous are consulted for every important decision that has to be made and are therefore present in the majority of stories in the Mexican-American storytelling tradition, which is illustrated by the stories told in Serafina’s Stories (Meyer et al. 1).

When the Spanish arrived and colonised large parts of Mexico and the south-west of America, they also brought their own storytellers. These storytellers possessed courtly manners and style to amuse kings and vassals and dealt with different topics from the more spiritual shamans (Riascos 1). Spanish storytellers came from an entirely different oral background than the shamans and were greatly influenced by the Arabs who had dominated Spain from the seventh until the mid-twelfth century AD (“Spain”). Particularly during the first successive waves of colonisers, the Spanish storytellers, called cuentistas, brought a vast number of European folktales into circulation amongst the Pueblo Indians (Riascos 1; Thompson 286). Oral narratives continue to fulfill an important role in Mexican-American society. Particularly in rural areas where TV and radio have not yet disjointed the communities' natural cohesion, stories are told to preserve cultural traditions and identities, but also in a more general sense, to communicate morals and values (Riascos 1-2).

Rudolfo Anaya is one of several Mexican-American writers who has translated the mythologies that abound in his culture from “a traditional oral context into the literary economy of the United States...exemplifying the generic force of myth which shapes the communal [Mexican-American] identity” (Beekman Taylor 133-34). In the interviews conducted for their book Conversations with Rudolfo Anaya, Bruce Dick and Silvio Sirias asked Anaya about his country and culture. In one of the interviews, Anaya explains that his way of recreating myths in the form of stories gives room to explore
Two Worlds, Two Similar Traditions

fundamental human concerns, such as life and death, spirituality, and fear of the unknown (Dick and Sirias x). Anaya believes that mythology has been so important in Mexican-American culture because myths expose the most basic elements in life and because they are linked with the New Mexican landscape (Dick and Sirias x). Critics have praised Anaya for his use of myths in his works and, consequently, presenting to contemporary readers the tenuous harmony between European and Latino heritage in Mexican-American culture (“Rudolfo A. Anaya”). Also in Serafina’s Stories, Anaya exemplifies this sense of harmony in Mexican-American culture, by telling stories that are equally influenced by Pueblo Indian and Spanish elements.

Functions of Storytelling

The role of storytelling in Mexican-American culture is comparable to that in Irish culture. In both cultures the sharing of stories has provided the necessary lessons of socialization in which ideals, perspectives and cultural mores have been handed down from generation to generation (Garcia 5). Stories have been used to communicate knowledge, morals and histories to others - often the younger generation - in order to preserve Irish and Mexican-American cultural heritage. Also, stories have been told to explain supernatural, spiritual and other, often unexplainable, events in life, providing an explanation as to how these elements came into existence. In addition to that, stories have also functioned as a form of entertainment; as a way to pass time and escape reality, particularly when there were no books or television.

Regardless of the fact whether stories were merely told to entertain, they have not lost their function and, consequently, deeper meaning, which is exactly what distinguishes ancient myths and folktales from ordinary stories: the sense that the content of the story is valuable – of “traditional nature”- and that folktales often have a deeper underlying message or point (Thompson 4). The practical function of storytelling may have changed over time – battles, for instance, are no longer fought as they were hundreds of years ago – yet, despite these changes, stories still serve the purpose to
create insight into history and culture and to pass these insights on from generation to generation. Traditional stories still propagate people’s history in times of oppression, help to explain spiritual occurrences and educate children in their culture’s religious practices and other cultural traditions.

Besides the fact that the Irish and Mexican-American storytelling tradition have similar functions, their oral narratives also have parallels in the use of subjects. Mexican-Americans, like the Irish, are a Catholic people due to the colonisation of the Roman-Catholic Christian Spanish, which is reflected in the preoccupation in the two oral traditions with saints, or santos, as they are called in Spanish (West 68-70). However, also spiritual elements, remnant from Celtic and pre-Hispanic society, abound in contemporary Irish and Mexican-American oral narratives respectively; for instance, nature and animals can frequently be found as main characters in these stories. Particularly in Mexican-American oral narratives, every mountain, river or tree may be a telling witness if not participant in the stories (Beekman Taylor 134). These natural elements represent the connection between the land, its people and the spirits of their ancestors, which have been of great significance in Pueblo Indian traditions (Beekman Taylor 134). Thus, both Irish and Mexican-American culture, their storytelling traditions and the subjects present in the stories share quite some similarities.

In the following chapter, I explore the distinctive functions of storytelling; the historical, religious and cultural functions in particular, which are fundamental to the Irish as well as the Mexican-American storytelling tradition. These ancient functions are still very much alive in two contemporary works on storytelling, Ireland by Frank Delaney and Serafina’s Stories by Rudolfo Anaya. An analysis of the historical, religious and cultural function in these novels then, may contribute to understanding the role of storytelling in Irish and Mexican-American culture and how Ireland and Serafina’s Stories have helped to preserve this important, shared tradition.
Chapter Two: Storytelling in Ireland

The tradition of storytelling has many distinctive functions, of which the historical, religious and cultural function are three very important ones. The historical function of storytelling is of great importance, because a great number of stories have been told throughout time to memorise and glorify memorable people and events in Irish history. Stories have helped to raise awareness and understanding of Ireland’s turbulent past, so that the historical events that shaped Ireland as a nation will not be forgotten by future generations. Richard Kearney underscores this function in his book Transitions, Narratives in Modern Irish Culture, stating that human beings have the need to perpetually re-evaluate their heritage through stories, because stories help to fulfill the universal human desire to make sense of history and, consequently, understand it (272).

Secondly, the religious function of storytelling is of importance because many stories carry a religious meaning or explain supernatural – often spiritual – events. Mircea Eliade defines the religious function of storytelling as “an account of creation: it relates how something was produced, began to be” (qtd. in Carloye 176). This is clearly

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3 In my dissertation, I have chosen to refer to this particular function of storytelling as religious and not spiritual with “religious” including both Christian as well as pagan beliefs.
expressed in *Ireland*; a number of stories written down by Delaney explain the beginnings of Christianity in Ireland. Walter J. Ong underscores the religious function of storytelling in his book *Orality and Literacy*; stating that oral cultures – of which Irish culture is an important example – felt the need to conceptualise and verbalise all their knowledge with close reference to the human life world, including supernatural events and the beginnings of Christianity, in order to try to understand these occurrences (42).

Thirdly, and also of central significance, is the cultural function of stories. The majority of stories serve to generate and sustain traditions of value (Gergen, qtd. in Straub 110). According to Richard Kearney, contemporary Irish culture could face a problem precisely because people nowadays have to mediate between the images of their past and future. This could lead to a petrifaction of tradition because of people’s preoccupation with Ireland’s past and her traditions (16). Yet, despite the possibility of petrification, Kearney considers the tradition of storytelling and its function of passing on cultural customs and traditions Ireland’s greatest cultural asset (16). Kearney quotes Paul Ricoeur to solidify his assertion, who states that history and tradition remain the *raison d’être* of a nation (qtd. in Kearney 16). In this chapter, I discuss these three important functions in the stories in Frank Delaney’s novel *Ireland*.

**The historical function of storytelling**

Ireland’s turbulent past is clearly reflected in the Irish storytelling tradition, such as the great battles fought against Norse and English invaders, but also the more recent political upheaval like the Easter Rising in 1916. Frank Delaney uses several of these *blarneys* – stories - in *Ireland*: the “Story of the king of Munster”, Brian Boru; “The battle of the Yellow Ford” and “The battle of the Boyne” being a few significant examples.

In *Ireland*, the stories not only serve the purpose to emphasise the pride and courage of Irish warriors, but also to show the power of the Irish nation, mainly in times when Ireland was raided by foreign invaders. This function has been quite important over the centuries and does not seem to have lost its value even in the twenty-first
Two Worlds, Two Similar Traditions

century, as Delaney’s novel illustrates. The “Story of King Brian Boru” exemplifies this: Brian, an Irishman with great ambitions who lived in the tenth century AD, wanted to rule all of Ireland. After a big battle, Brian eventually succeeded in defeating the Vikings. Yet, while thanking God on his knees for his victory, he was killed by a fleeing Norse soldier (185-191). In the story, Brian Boru uses rhetorical language to show the courage of the Irish, emphasising that they are “twice as strong, twice as swift and twice as fierce... [and] shall be twice as victorious” (189). Particularly in times of war and oppression, these stories were used to boost the Irish morale. Irish soldiers could lean heavily on these success stories to muster up the strength to fight against Norse or English invaders, but also against people from other Irish tribes.

The historical function of storytelling in the Irish tradition has changed over time, in the sense that it has shifted more towards a glorification of important people and events from Ireland’s past than to serve the purpose of keeping up morale. Yet, the historical function can still be considered a contemporary purpose of storytelling. As John Brain states in his article “Ireland Mythologized”, every nation needs its own stories, because they give people pride in their past, meaning in their present, and faith in their future (182). In Ireland, Frank Delaney has followed this shift in the historical function of storytelling. An example of this is the “Story of the Easter Rising”, also known as the story about The General Post Office. The story is told by the storyteller, who turns out to be Ronan’s grandfather, which partly explains his important instructive role towards Ronan, the novel’s protagonist. As he opens his story, in this “anniversary year”, thirty-five years after the Easter Rising took place, he tells how he was an eyewitness of the 1916 insurrection, which took place in Dublin’s General Post Office. A civilian army seized the post office –along with other strategic buildings - in Dublin, then proclaimed the Irish Republic and set up a provisional government. However, after only five days the Irish insurgents were overpowered by the English army. The rebel leaders agreed to surrender so that the soldiers would be set free; the Irish commanders were all executed for their actions, but, contrary to the agreement, two thousand civilians – both men and women - were also imprisoned. The Easter Rising was
Two Worlds, Two Similar Traditions

a crucial moment in Irish history, because it is viewed as the forerunner of Irish independence from England. It has been very important to pass on this story; not only to remember and honour the men who have given their lives for Irish independence, but also, in the case of Ronan, to learn about Irish history and “help recognize instinctively the country and the people to whom [he] belonged” (477). It is with good reason that Ronan considers these stories to be “the greatest gifts available in humanity”, because they provide him with the necessary background to construct an accurate picture of his country, his family and himself (477).

The storyteller in Ireland quotes one of the leaders of the occupying force in his story: “you [the storyteller] maybe the most important man here [in the post office]... you have to create our memory... what would be the point of all this if nobody told the generations to come what we meant?” (475). In his last performance, Ronan’s grandfather answers to this and recreates memory by giving an account of his experiences, passing it on to Ronan and the other listeners. Ronan reflects on what he has learnt from the stories, feeling that his grandfather has “planted seeds of thought” in him, providing him with important lessons in life (478).

Through the rebel leader’s observation, that memory has to be created to be able to share history, Delaney shows the importance of the historical function of storytelling. This particular purpose of storytelling has, according to critics, become increasingly important in contemporary Irish society: people who grow up in the twenty-first century should also be aware of the struggles the Irish endured to liberate themselves from the English (Brian 182). The danger in overly glorifying and praising Ireland’s historical figures and events, according to John Brian, is that myths told for this purpose can include distorted historical facts which have been used for political ends (182). However, as Delaney makes clear in Ireland, within the bounds of historical truth, fiction has a place. As the storyteller says: “If I’m within the bounds of history I invent a little... but otherwise I’ll [always] follow the historical facts largely as I was taught them” (449).
The religious function of storytelling

The Irish have known different religions in their past: the Celts had their pagan rituals and believed in the power of druids; with the arrival of Patrick – now known as Ireland’s patron saint - Ireland was familiarised with the Roman-Catholic faith; and later, the English tried to enforce Protestantism on the Irish. A number of stories in Ireland deal with the subject of religion or serve the purpose to offer an explanation as to how certain supernatural elements have come into existence.

Explaining supernatural events has been particularly important in stories from a Celtic origin. This becomes clear in Frank Delaney’s story about the construction of the Tomb of New Grange: a “great and mysterious edifice under the ground of County Meath” that was created by, as Delaney calls him, the Architect of New Grange (12). The Tomb of New Grange is an immense creation made out of stone, through which the sun, on the twenty-third of December - the shortest day of the year – shines exactly through several holes into a dish that is placed within the tomb. Precisely because of its size, people wondered how men were able to create such a gigantic construction; the story about the Tomb of New Grange offered the Irish a plausible explanation for that. The facts of the story might not be entirely accurate, yet the function of the story is important, because the story has provided the Irish with a way to imagine how a mysterious monument like the Tomb of New Grange came into existence.

Since the arrival of Saint Patrick in Ireland, stories have also been told to advocate the spread of Christianity in Ireland, particularly in times when the Celts still believed in many different gods. In Ireland, this element of the religious function of storytelling is brought forward in “The legend of Saint Patrick” (84-104). Patrick, a Roman who originally lived in England, was captured by Irish raiders at the age of sixteen and taken to Ireland, where he was enslaved. After six hard years of working as a swineherd, he had a dream, which led him to go to Europe and embrace Christianity (85-86). There, he entered priesthood and decided to bring the Irish people the word of Christ (87). By telling his experiences to Celts who did not yet believe in God, he tried to
convert the Irish, in which he succeeded since Ireland became a Christian country. The legend of Saint Patrick includes many examples of ordinary people who, from being pagan, became followers of Patrick and his Roman-Catholic faith. In the story, Patrick is presented as an ordinary man who has committed sins and mistakes in his life as any other, which made it easier for the Irish to identify with Patrick and his followers.

“The legend about Saint Patrick” also has a mythical-historical function, besides its primary religious function. In the legend about Patrick it is not only explained how the Irish were converted, but also how the Devil was chased out of Ireland, into England. This mythical element of the story has been used by some to offer an explanation for the ongoing troubles between England and Ireland which led to England’s colonisation of Ireland (104). Nowadays, “The Legend of Saint Patrick” is still considered to represent the beginnings of Christianity in Ireland. Despite the fact that it is “only” a legend and is therefore not historically accurate, modern-day readers still accept Patrick’s story as a plausible explanation of the beginning of Christianity in Ireland. This is clearly illustrated in Ireland; the story of Patrick confirms Ronan’s belief in the storyteller’s words; he thinks that the storyteller “had lived in the world of his tales” (104). Unfortunately, Ronan’s strongly Catholic mother, Alison, seizes the story about Patrick as an excuse to send the storyteller away from their house. Alison feels that, by telling a story about Saint Patrick, the storyteller vilifies St. Patrick’s character, which Alison does not tolerate in her house (106-7). This is a crucial moment in the novel, because from that moment on, Ronan has to search for his grandfather’s stories, which instruct him in important lessons in life as he grows up.

During the English invasions, and particularly from the nineteenth century onwards, the religious function of storytelling shifted from explaining mysterious events and the beginning of Christianity to stimulating the unification of the Irish by means of their religion. It is with good reason that Irish folklore is often connected with a conservative, Catholic mindset (Markey 34). Holding on to their Roman-Catholic faith provided the Irish with a way to unite themselves under English rule and, consequently, emphasise their Irishness by means of a shared religion (Foster, Robert F. xviii). Even
nowadays, Catholicism is still an important part of Irish identity and culture, which is reflected in a number of stories with religious elements that continue to circulate in Irish oral tradition but also, until quite recently, in Irish politics and law.

In *Ireland*, this religious function of storytelling is illustrated by Delaney’s story about Charles Stewart Parnell and Kitty O’Shea. Charles Stewart Parnell is a historical figure who became known as the “Uncrowned King of Ireland”, because of his political power during the late nineteenth century. In “The story of Parnell and O’Shea”, T. Bartlett Ryle, the lecturer who functions as the storyteller in this tale, tells about how English rule became more and more widespread in the nineteenth century which led to the Irish losing their identity; or, as Bartlett Ryle calls it, “domination by assimilation” (419). Increasingly, the English attacked Irish identity, outlawing their religion, their language and the possibility of ownership or education (419). Parnell gave the Irish a voice in English Parliament and gave the Irish back some of the rights that the English had taken from them, such as the permission to practice their religion (422). Yet, as the story explains, it is the unifying element, the Irish Catholic faith which Parnell fought for, that ruined him: Parnell’s colleague O’Shea had a beautiful wife, Kitty, whom Parnell fell in love with. Parnell’s core followers, who were devout Catholics and therefore condemned adultery and divorce, made it impossible for Parnell to stay on; Ireland’s Uncrowned King lost the Catholic vote, which quickly ended his political career (413-22). This story, containing crucial moments in Irish history, also marks a significant moment in Ronan’s own life; it is during Bartlett Ryle’s lecture that Ronan realises he wants to get his life back in order, after having tried to flee his problems (423).

*The cultural function of storytelling*

Stories have always had the function to generate and sustain cultural mores and customs. As Kenneth Gergen states in his article “Narrative, Moral Identity, and Historical Consciousness”, stories reflect and create cultural value (qtd. in Straub 110). Also in *Ireland*, stories are told to pass on Ireland’s cultural background and traditions.
“The Story of the Harp”, for instance, explains how the harp was invented and why it is such an important symbol for the Irish so that it can even be found on the Irish coat of arms (229-233). Anne Pellowski underscores the importance of the harp in Irish culture, claiming that it is one of the instruments most closely associated in the popular mind with storytelling, as harps were frequently used in bardic performances (119). The story in *Ireland* tells about a lady who, while walking on the beach, hears the wind go through a whale’s carcass, making beautiful sounds. When trying to recreate this sound, carpenters eventually construct the harp, which has become the national symbol of Ireland because of the beautiful melodies it can produce. The harp represents a part of Irish culture, namely Ireland’s Celtic origin and its connection with Irish history and rich musical tradition. By means of storytelling, this traditional element of Irish culture is passed on, and shared with people from future generations, like Ronan. “The Story of the Harp” is delivered to Ronan at an important moment, and, particularly, by a significant person, his father John. By showing Ronan the television programme in which the storyteller tells his tale, John supports Ronan in learning more from the storyteller, and thus in Ronan’s search for his grandfather, although Alison, Ronan’s mother, does not approve of contact between Ronan and his grandfather.

The cultural function of storytelling also involves helping to pass on Irish culture in the sense that stories serve to educate the Irish in Ireland’s cultural mores and customs. In her book *The World of Storytelling*, Anne Pellowski quotes Linda Dégh to support this notion: Dégh believes that storytellers are the bearers of tradition in their communities (qtd. in Pellowski 15). In *Ireland*, none of the stories explicitly serve the purpose to teach morals and traditional values. Yet, the novel as a whole is a bildungsroman, portraying the education and maturation process of Ronan, the protagonist. In the novel, Ronan is not only educated in Ireland’s history, but also in cultural traditions, and, most of all, in life; all through the stories told by the *seanchai*. Reflecting on the storyteller’s life at the end of the novel, Ronan says: “he [the storyteller] had grown me up [with his stories], giving me benchmarks by which I could judge myself —delivered, it has to be said, in a most unusual way” (477-78). Thus, it is
not one story in particular that teaches Ronan important lessons, but the sum of stories that provide him with valuable lessons in life.

Stories have also served as a form of entertainment, although this function was initially frowned upon in the early Christian tradition, according to Anne Pellowski (11). Only when stories were increasingly told in a social context— and not exclusively in a religious context— the entertainment function of storytelling became relevant (Pellowski 11). In times when there were fewer other means for entertainment, people needed to entertain themselves in different ways. Entertainment is a human need, which stories could provide by offering people a way to escape from reality (Pellowski 10; Leeming 74).

In Ireland it is apparent that the entertainment function of storytelling is of importance, as, in the novel, stories are told on cold winter nights to entertain an eager audience. An example of a story told mainly to entertain is “The story of Annan and Senan”. Annan and Senan were two monks who, together with their brother monks, had to elect a new abbot for their monastery. Annan and Senan were considered the best candidates and had to enter a competition who could make the most beautiful scriptorium. The winner of the competition would then become the new abbot (144-157). Since both scriptoriums were equally beautiful, both Annan and Senan won, which, according to the storyteller, “goes to show that things of great beauty can sometimes come out of awkward situations...” (157). Although this story’s main purpose is to entertain, the story also ends with an educational note: that unusual circumstances ask for unusual measures, in this case that Annan and Senan both become abbot of the monastery. Nowadays, stories no longer serve as a main source of entertainment. Yet, according to Jack Maguire, storytelling will not entirely give way to modern forms of entertainment, since it has its own irreplaceable contribution to make in many different aspects of society (8).

Reflecting on these three functions of storytelling, it becomes clear that the historical function predominates over the religious and cultural function in Frank Delaney’s Ireland. The historical function of storytelling is generally strong in the Irish oral tradition because religion in Ireland has been influenced by political-historical
Two Worlds, Two Similar Traditions

circumstances, such as the colonisation by the English. The cultural function, also, is inextricably bound up with history: valuable traditions which are created and shaped by Ireland’s history are supposed to be passed on to future generations by means of storytelling. Understanding the Irish storytelling tradition, then, it is almost impossible to leave out of consideration the historical context and its influence on the religious and cultural function. The stories told in Ireland also clearly illustrate this.

These functions, as well as the frame narrative, add to the contents of the novel. Not only does the narrative build up tension in the story and the lives of the main characters, it also makes available a way to share stories important to Irish culture with contemporary readers. This is done in the same way a storyteller would do: namely by telling a story when the main character – and with him also the audience - is in need of instruction or entertainment. The frame narrative combined with the historical, religious and cultural function portrayed, then, allows Ireland to stay as close to reality as possible regarding the storytelling tradition. In what respects the historical, religious and cultural function of storytelling are similarly significant in the Mexican-American storytelling tradition and in Rudolfo Anaya's Serafina’s Stories will be examined and discussed in the following chapter.
“If a culture forgets
the stories of its ancestors
then it dies.”
- Rudolfo A. Anaya.

**Chapter Three: Storytelling in *Serafina’s Stories***

In Mexican-American culture the tradition of storytelling has played a vital role throughout time. As Rudolfo Anaya states: “Mexican-Americans, their history and culture survived on oral stories and traditions” (qtd. in Dick and Sirias 13). This is quite similar to the Irish storytelling tradition; in both cultures, stories have served the purpose to instruct and educate people in important elements in life and have historical, religious and cultural functions, which is illustrated by Rudolfo Anaya’s *Serafina’s Stories*. In this respect, *Serafina’s Stories* resembles Delaney’s *Ireland*: the stories in both novels, as well as their frame stories, provide a modern interpretation of an ancient tradition, which is upheld by the two novels and made available for a contemporary audience.

The historical function is significant in the Mexican-American oral narrative because, like Ireland, New Mexico has had a turbulent history of colonisation and oppression. Stories have functioned as a means to share this dark period in New Mexico’s history and to give Mexican-Americans a sense of pride in their own history and culture by emphasising the positive influences from the variety of cultures on Mexican-American culture (Dick and Sirias 13).
Secondly, the religious function of storytelling has also played an important role in New Mexico’s storytelling tradition. Comparable to the religious function in the Irish storytelling tradition, stories have helped to explain how natural elements, for example the river the Río Grande, vital to the Pueblo Indian living environment, came into existence. In addition, stories have also served the purpose to spread the Roman-Catholic faith, which was initially forced upon the Indians by Spanish colonisers. Yet, in the course of Spanish rule the Indians gradually accepted the Roman-Catholicism; trying to combine their new religion with elements from their traditional faith. This integration of the two religions did not occur without a struggle as Anaya makes clear through the character of the Spanish Governor: “the deepest conflict in [Mexican-American history] was created by the friars who tried to force the Indians to give up their religion” (44). In Serafina’s Stories, a number of tales illustrate the mix of Roman-Catholic elements and Indian rituals in Mexican-American culture.

Thirdly, the cultural function of storytelling, already discussed as central to Irish oral narrative, is also of great importance in the Mexican-American tradition. As Anaya states in Serafina’s Stories’ epilogue, people can learn the value of Mexican-American culture and its oral tradition by listening to stories, just as he did as a child (199). By means of stories, important folkways, values and traditions can be preserved and, according to Anaya, people’s values and concerns in the folktales recognised (201). In his book Narratives of Greater Mexico, Héctor Caldéron underscores the importance of the cultural function, stating that this function of storytelling is to bind a culture together because the stories told represent human experience (105). These experiences have been used to instruct people in morals and values, but also to sustain Mexican-American culture and to pass it on to future generations. The cultural function of storytelling also includes the use of stories as a form of entertainment, which, in Serafina’s Stories, becomes particularly clear through the character of the Governor, as I will explain later in this chapter.
Two Worlds, Two Similar Traditions

The historical function of storytelling

The area of New Mexico was colonised twice; first by the Spanish and later by the Americans, which has left deep marks in Mexican-American cultural memory. In Serafina’s Stories, the stories told by Serafina, a Pueblo Indian girl who was raised by missionaries, and the conversations she has with the Spanish Governor who keeps her prisoner, serve the purpose to inform the Governor – and, consequently, also the reader – about New Mexico’s turbulent history. During one of the conversations with the Governor, Serafina emphasises this important function of storytelling, saying: “In our tradition we keep history alive. Our stories tell of the battles we have fought against the Castillos. Cruelty like that will never be forgotten. It will haunt your people for many generations” (55). Serafina does not tell one story with a specific historical function; rather, the frame story itself has the purpose to inform the reader about New Mexico’s stirring history. The frame story, based on historical facts, is set in 1680, when twenty-four Indians are arrested for revolting against Spanish rule. This rebellion is considered a significant moment in Mexican-American history, because it provided the Indians with a short-lived independence from the Spanish. Particularly these major historical events are important to pass on to future generations, so that New Mexico’s troubled past and its effect on Mexican-American culture will not be forgotten. Anaya alludes to this, as he states in an interview with Paul Vassallo “[Storytelling] is extremely important. [Our] history has been transmitted through the oral tradition” (qtd. in Dick and Sirias 93). This particular function of storytelling in Serafina’s Stories is quite similar to that in Ireland: in both novels, a number of stories contribute to the preservation of national history.

The historical function of storytelling may also imply here giving Mexican-Americans a sense of pride in their own history (Dick and Sirias 13). New Mexico’s culture has been shaped by various influences: by Native American culture due to the indigenous inhabitants of the area; by Moorish and Jewish traditions through Spanish colonisation and by Anglo-American culture due to annexation to America in the

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4 Mexican-Americans refer to the Spanish as Castillos.
nineteenth century (Vassallo 5-6). In Serafina’s Stories, “The Native” underscores the presence of mixed influences in Mexican-American culture. “The Native” is a story that tells about a poor boy who obtains a genie in a bottle that fulfils all his wishes. “The Native” is an originally Spanish story, which, in the Mexican-American storytelling tradition, no longer has a Spanish, but an Indian heroic main character and is set in New Mexico instead of Spain (140-144). However, some Spanish elements have remained: for instance, the king and princess are typical subjects in stories, which were transmitted by the Spanish cuentistas. By integrating Pueblo Indian and Spanish elements into stories such as “The Native”, Mexican-Americans have been able to understand this mix of cultures and blend it into their own, heterogeneous Mexican-American culture. It is through this story that the Governor, again, learns more about Pueblo Indians in his colony, namely that Spanish cuentos — although altered with Pueblo Indian characters and setting - are being shared amongst the Pueblo Indians. Through Serafina’s story, the Governor gains a better understanding of Pueblo Indian culture, saying that “this sharing of stories could be the best thing that ever happened to us”, which – next to freeing her fellow prisoners – is another important reason for Serafina to tell her stories (145).

**The religious function of storytelling**

In New Mexico, religious activities have been reflected by Mexican oral and cultural traditions, which are heavily influenced by European cultural practices (Caldéron 3). This becomes particularly clear in Serafina’s Stories, in which a number of stories tell about the religious rituals and ceremonies of the Pueblo Indians, but also about Roman-Catholic teachings. Especially during Spanish colonisation, it was important for Indians to hold on their own beliefs and the ways of their ancestors (88). Ancestors, and particularly their spirits, were of central significance and were therefore honoured with
paintings and Kachina dances (88;118). However, despite Indian efforts to hold on to their rituals and beliefs, they were forced to adopt the Roman-Catholic faith. The consequential mix of Pueblo Indian religion and Roman-Catholicism was initially forbidden by the Spanish, because they felt that this mix meant that Indians believed in God as well as the Devil by holding on to their own religious traditions (72). Consequently, to be able to memorise and sustain the customs of their ancestors in times when they were not allowed to do so, Indians passed on these rituals and ceremonies by means of stories. This religious struggle is a major theme in Serafina’s Stories; in her conversations with the Governor, but also in her stories, Serafina stresses the importance of acknowledging Pueblo Indian rituals. As she says to the Governor: “I [may] have become a Catholic according to the teaching of the friars, but I [must] keep the path of my people” (161).

In Serafina’s Stories, a number of stories serve the purpose to explain the Pueblo Indian view of life by using myths which clarify how they believe that important natural elements, vital to the living environment of the Indians, came into existence. An example of such a story is “Juan del Oso”. In the story, a boy, Juan, is born of an Pueblo Indian woman and a bear. During his attempt to escape his cruel father, he experiences mysterious things; for instance, by making a scoop with a shovel, Juan creates the Río Grande, the largest and most important river in the area. Likewise, by sticking a pick into the ground, he forms the Sangre de Cristo Mountains (14). Stories such as this offered a way to understand how certain natural elements came into existence. Providing a way to understand these elements of nature is particularly important in Serafina’s Stories, because Serafina tries to explain to the Governor why Indians feel strongly connected, and in harmony with nature and their “sacred grounds” (Dick and Sirias 35). The importance of “sacred grounds” to Pueblo Indians is that such a particular piece of land is necessary to honour the spirits of their ancestors. As Serafina makes clear to the Governor: “[our religion] is a way to honour the cloud people [ancestors] who bring

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5 Kachina dances are Pueblo Indian masked rituals which are performed to honour their ancestors and to ask for the well-being of the community (Beck et al.)
rain” (194). By trying to gain understanding from the Governor for their traditional beliefs, Serafina tries to obtain permission to continue their rituals and ceremonies.

“The Devil’s Godchild” illustrates the religious function of storytelling and the role the ancestors play in Pueblo Indian religion and culture. In this story, the Devil—who is in disguise—wants to take a boy, Pelucas, away from his family. Initially, Pelucas’ father agrees, but when the Devil arrives, he does not trust him. However, the Devil does not tolerate any resistance, so he kills the father and takes Pelucas with him. Years later, Pelucas manages to escape, but has to endure many hardships to obtain his freedom. During these hardships, he is assisted by a horse, who gives him instructions to be able to survive the tests that are set up by the Devil. In the end, the horse appears to be Pelucas’ reincarnated father, who was sent to earth to help him and make up for the mistake he made by giving Pelucas to the Devil (76-84). The story of Pelucas is very important to Pueblo Indians, because it shows that the spirits of the ancestors will return to earth— in whatever shape or form - to guide and help Indians in their lives, which is why their sacred grounds are so important to the Indians: these grounds are inhabited by the returned spirits of their ancestors (Dick and Sirias x). As Rudolfo Anaya says: “New Mexico [the sacred ground] is home, stability and history. It has the feel of my ancestors. Their spirits are here” (Dick and Sirias x). By telling “The Devil’s Godchild” to the Governor, Serafina attempts once more to create understanding for the preservation of Pueblo Indian religion, culture and sacred grounds.

In order to hold on to their own traditional beliefs, Pueblo Indians gradually developed a compromise between Spanish Roman-Catholicism and their own traditional beliefs, rituals and ceremonies. As Serafina emphasises in one of the conversations with the Governor: “I believe in the ways of my ancestors. Christ and his mother have come to join our holy people” (72). The story about “Marcos and María” illustrates this: in this *cuento*, important Roman-Catholic elements, such as Adam and Eve and a church, are mentioned in the same breath as pagan features, mainly animals - who are presumably spirits – which warn Marcos and María against possible dangers (93-100). By means of stories, Pueblo Indian beliefs were passed on in a concealed way, which was necessary
Two Worlds, Two Similar Traditions

during Spanish colonisation because the Spanish considered Pueblo Indian religious activities to be connected with the Devil (91). This function, telling stories to preserve a people’s traditional religion, is also present in Delaney’s *Ireland*: a number of stories serve the purpose to preserve Roman-Catholicism and have been considered vital instruments in the unification of the Irish against English rule.

Although up to this present day the Indians have held on to their beliefs and practices, they have also taken over the Roman-Catholic faith. Nowadays, it is still the most practiced religion in the area of New Mexico. A number of stories in the Mexican-American storytelling tradition have followed this change; they tell about Christian morals and values, emphasise the difference between wrong and right and warn people against temptations created by the devil. The story of the “Two Compadres” demonstrates this: Vicente, an honest merchant, and Manuel, a businessman, place a bet on who profits more, the man who rises early and works hard, or the man whom God helps (110-116). Manuel, who believes that the man who rises early has what he has because he worked for it, wins the bet with help from the Devil. His greed blinds him, which is why he does not see that “the Devil always travels the road looking for an opportunity to grab a sinful soul” (110). Vicente continues to keep his faith in God, although he has to endure several tribulations, and eventually “survives and prospers thanks to God” (115). Vicente and Manuel serve as examples of what can happen if you put your trust in God and when you yield to temptations created by the Devil. By emphasising this message and passing it on to younger generations, the story instructs Pueblo Indians in Christian morals and values. The morale of “The Two Compadres” is also applicable to Serafina’s situation. Serafina puts her trust in God as well as in the spirits of her ancestors, to ensure a good ending for all her fellow prisoners. Despite the fact that Serafina remains imprisoned at the end of the novel, she is able to free the other twenty-three prisoners by means of her stories. Just like Vicente, Serafina’s faith has helped her to wield the power she has with her stories.
In Mexican-American culture, the cultural function of storytelling is very important, because stories bind a culture together by representing human experience and provide both entertainment and instruction (Caldéron 105). As becomes clear in Serafina's Stories, a great number of stories are told with the intention to instruct Mexican-Americans in morals and traditional values. As Serafina says to the Governor: “When I tell a story, I feel I am passing on knowledge” (179). In the novel, a story that demonstrates this function of storytelling is the tale of “Fabiano and Reyes”, in which Fabiano frequently tells his friend Reyes, a girl who does not think herself beautiful, that he’d “rather be blind than be seen with an ugly girl” (63-68). In the end of the story, this is indeed what happens to Fabiano, as a punishment for despising those he calls ugly. This story is didactical in intent, teaching people through the experiences of Fabiano and Reyes how we should treat each other equally and not judge each other by their appearance. Serafina tells stories such as “Fabiano and Reyes” to the Governor with the purpose to influence his judgment and stimulate him to make humane decisions regarding Serafina’s fellow prisoners. She succeeds to a great extent: the Governor says he is “so affected by the story” and, after each of Serafina’s stories, releases a prisoner (69). Telling stories for the purpose of moral instruction is not only important in Serafina’s Stories, but also in Irish oral narrative; as the stories in both novels demonstrate, a majority of stories end with a moral instruction.

By telling moral stories, people also try to inform about, and consequently warn against, the risks of giving in to sins, such as greed or envy. An example of this form of moral instruction can be found in the story “The Tree That Sings” (125-131). The story tells about three sisters who are overheard by the king whilst joking about who they want to marry. All their wishes are granted, but only the youngest, whose wish was to marry the king, is happy. The other two sisters are jealous and do everything in their power to frustrate their youngest sisters’ happiness. Eventually, their tricks are revealed and the two sisters are punished by being dragged by horses into the desert (131).
message of the story is emphasised by the Governor, who says that “Envy is a monster in the heart” (132). “Fabiano and Reyes” and “The Tree That Sings” are two stories that function to underscore core values of the Mexican-American community and instruct people in them, retelling experiences from people who did not live by those values and paid a price for that.

In *Serafina’s Stories*, stories also aim to combine Pueblo Indian culture with the cultural elements forced upon them by the Spanish. Although, according to Serafina, combining the two cultures will be difficult as long as the Spanish forbid the Indians to tell stories about their traditions (132). As Serafina says: “We must keep the ways of our ancestors and not lose our customs” (88). Despite Spanish rule and the fear of losing their traditions, the Indians have, to a great extent, been able to hold on to their customs and, in order to preserve them, converged both Pueblo Indian and Spanish elements in their culture as well as their stories. Again, the story of “The Native” serves as an example of this: the tale consists of both Indian and Spanish features, which results in a story that shows that Spanish and Pueblo Indian culture can go hand in hand. By passing on this story, in this case to the Governor, Serafina becomes a binding factor between the two distinctive cultures, which is a step into the direction of a peaceful living environment for both Pueblo Indians and the Spanish (60).

The entertainment function of storytelling, too, is very important in *Serafina’s Stories*. Throughout the novel, Serafina tells her stories to entertain the Governor, who misses the cuentos from his homeland on lonely winter nights. Stories give him joy, rest, a sense of reflection and a different view on his own situation and the political situation in New Mexico; “As he [the Governor] listened to her [Serafina] he felt the burdensome responsibility of being governor lifted” (21). A story that is told by Serafina particularly for the purpose of entertainment is the story of “Belda and the Beast”. This story tells about a girl who sacrifices her life and marries a beast to save her father from dying. In the end, the beast turns out to be a handsome prince, enchanted by an evil sorcerer (152-155). The story of “Belda and the Beast” does not express a particular message, in the sense that it instructs people in important morals or informs people about New
Mexico’s history; its main purpose is to entertain. This becomes clear when Serafina finishes her story and the Governor reacts, saying that her stories “free himself from the pressures of the day” (157). By telling this story, Serafina also succeeds in providing the Governor with “a mirror in which [he] can see [himself]” (157). This way, the Governor can reflect on his actions, realising that he is becoming attached to his conversations with Serafina and to her stories. Serafina’s stories, then, have exerted the effect she hoped for: namely understanding for the situation of the Pueblo Indians, by familiarising the Governor with Pueblo Indian culture in the form of stories.

Considering the historical, religious and cultural function in Anaya’s *Serafina’s Stories*, it becomes apparent that, despite the importance of the historical and religious function, the cultural function is more central. Nearly all the stories told carry a morale and, consequently, serve the purpose to instruct people in traditional values and customs significant to Mexican-American culture. Anaya himself underscores this in an interview with Paul Vassallo, stating that he is “wholeheartedly committed to expanding public awareness of Chicano [Mexican-American] values” by means of telling stories and laying these stories down in writing (5). Anaya feels that Mexican-Americans have a distinctive perspective on life, moulded and guided by culture, history, language and native mythology, which needs to be passed on to future generations (Dick and Sirias 22). It is clear that in the Mexican-American storytelling tradition, and in *Serafina’s Stories* in particular, the cultural – and instructive - function of storytelling is highly significant; also in stories which are told for a historical or religious purpose, the cultural and instructive function is present and often even dominant.

As in *Ireland*, the frame narrative in *Serafina’s Stories* also contributes to the impact of the stories. One the one hand, the tension is raised with every story that Serafina tells to the Governor: only if he likes the story she tells him, one of the Pueblo Indian prisoners will be set free. On the other hand, the frame story allows the novel to continue the storytelling tradition as it has been done for centuries; the storyteller – Serafina - tells a story when she deems it necessary to inform or instruct the audience – the Governor – in important historical, religious or cultural elements of Pueblo Indian
Two Worlds, Two Similar Traditions

life. In the following and concluding chapter, I will compare and contrast my findings on the historical, religious and cultural function in Ireland and Serafina’s Stories and explore how these functions are important to the two novels.
“Stories will live long after we are gone and forgotten”
- Rudolfo Anaya

Conclusion

The general purpose of this dissertation has been to place Frank Delaney’s *Ireland* and Rudolfo Anaya’s *Serafina’s Stories* in the Irish and Mexican-American storytelling tradition. Reflecting on the previous chapters, it is clear that the Irish and Mexican-American storytelling tradition resemble each other in quite a number of ways, which is illustrated by Delaney’s *Ireland* and Anaya’s *Serafina’s Stories*. As is brought forward in these two novels, both cultures possess a clearly oral mindset and a flourishing storytelling tradition; both cultures have been influenced by colonisation and oppression which is reflected in this tradition, and, both cultures share the significance of the historical, religious and cultural function in their storytelling traditions. *Ireland* and *Serafina’s Stories*, then, are clear representations of the Irish and Mexican-American storytelling tradition, because they preserve and pass on stories and a tradition important to the two cultures.

When exploring *Ireland* and *Serafina’s Stories* on the presence of the historical, religious and cultural function of storytelling, several issues persistently emerge; for instance, what the functions that I have distinguished so far mean for the two novels
themselves. In *Ireland*, the significance of the historical function means that the novel represents Irish history and culture, by portraying the most crucial moments and people in Irish history. Delaney’s novel could be considered a chronicle of the history of Ireland on a fictional level, because, not only does *Ireland* portray mere historical facts, but, as Delaney says, also what it feels like to be Irish. By writing *Ireland*, Delaney has not only created a meaningful work of art that contributes to giving shape and meaning to Ireland’s otherwise fractured personal and national histories, but also an epic work that draws attention to Ireland, its people and its historical legacy (Sheehan, Purgavie 2-3). Particularly by examining the historical function in *Ireland*, it has become clear that the novel represents the heart of Irishness, namely the stories that have passed on Ireland’s history and cultural legacy from generation to generation.

In *Serafina’s Stories*, the historical, religious and primarily the cultural function signify the importance of storytelling in Mexican-American culture. Moreover, the cultural function that is amply presented in Anaya’s novel shows that storytelling can unite a culture because the stories told represent shared human experiences (Caldéron 105). The three functions discerned in *Serafina’s Stories* add to the notion that stories are not simply told to entertain and pass time, but predominantly to instruct Mexican-Americans in the values that identify them as descendants of the modern and ancient cultures of Indian America, Mexico and Spain; cultures which have contributed to present-day Mexican-American, or, Chicano culture (Anaya and Lomelí 206). Ultimately, *Serafina’s Stories* can be considered a novel highly significant to Mexican-American culture and its literature: just like *Ireland*, Anaya’s novel contributes to the preservation of the rich Mexican-American storytelling tradition and, simultaneously, helps spread communal values, which strengthen Mexican-American identity according to Anaya (Anaya and Lomelí 3).

My exploration of the two storytelling traditions in *Ireland* and *Serafina’s Stories* has demonstrated that the historical, religious or cultural function make an important contribution to the novels; not only do they give the stories a sense of authenticity, they also help to keep the novels, and their representation of the storytelling traditions in the
Two Worlds, Two Similar Traditions

two cultures, closer to reality. The use of a frame narrative add to this sense of authenticity: in both novels, the frame narrative serves the purpose to pass on the stories as storytellers have done in the ancient tradition of storytelling. Particularly Delaney was able to bring this notion across in *Ireland*; Ronan’s maturation process through the stories of his grandfather is a very faithful representation of this function of storytelling, showing that stories have been as important in everyday life as they are to the main characters in the novels. In *Ireland*, Ronan learns through stories not only the complex history and culture of Ireland, but also, on a more personal level, the history of his family, which helps him to reflect on, and eventually understand life. In *Ireland*, the frame narrative also adds to the build-up of tension in the novel; with each story told, the reader learns more about Ronan’s personal life and, thus, the plot of the frame story.

In *Serafina’s Stories*, the narrative adds more to the way the stories are delivered to the reader. Serafina, in her role as storyteller, imparts knowledge about her people and her culture to the Governor. Through her stories and conversations with him, the Governor learns about a people he at first considers dissidents, a religion he deems pagan and a culture he finds inferior to his own. His gained knowledge helps him to create understanding for their situation, and, eventually leads to the release of all the prisoners, except for Serafina. In *Serafina’s Stories*, the frame narrative –similarly as in *Ireland* – also has a text-internal function; after each story that is told by Serafina, the reader learns whether a prisoner will be released or not, which helps to build up tension as the novel progresses.

*Ireland* and *Serafina’s Stories*, then, are contemporary works which help to continue the rich tradition of storytelling in Ireland and New Mexico. Passing on the tradition of storytelling itself could be considered a goal Delaney and Anaya wanted to achieve: their novels attract a modern audience which, by reading *Ireland* and *Serafina’s Stories*, is informed of the importance of the storytelling tradition and of the fact that one can still learn from stories, no matter the time and place in which they were created.

Walter J. Ong, as well as other researchers, have set off a spark in the research of oral narratives and storytelling traditions, which served as a background for this
dissertation. On the basis of their research and Ireland’s and New Mexico’s history, I have been able to bring new insights into the reading of Ireland and Serafina’s Stories. Yet, the storytelling tradition in general, but also the Irish and Mexican-American oral narrative in particular, leaves much more to be explored. For instance, as an elaboration on this dissertation, a more extensive, comparative research could be done on more stories known from the Irish and Mexican-American storytelling tradition, in order to find more possible parallels between the two distinctive cultures.

My – relatively short - academic journey into Irish and Mexican-American culture and their storytelling traditions has been a very pleasurable one. The two distinctive cultures from two completely different continents share a beautiful tradition, which will hopefully be preserved for many centuries to come, so it can inform and instruct more generations in Irish and Mexican-American history, morals, cultural identity and communal values. After all, stories are a powerful way to bind people and bridge cultural gaps. As Anaya underscores in Serafina’s Stories: “understanding and respect for other cultures can begin by learning their stories” (201).
Two Worlds, Two Similar Traditions

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Two Worlds, Two Similar Traditions

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Two Worlds, Two Similar Traditions


