

War with Troy – interview with Hugh Lupton and Daniel Morden

Interviewer: Hugh and Daniel, you're going to tell me who you are and introduce yourself, and tell us a bit about how you became interested in storytelling. So Hugh, perhaps you could go first?

Hugh: Yes, I'm Hugh Lupton and I've been telling stories for more than 20 years. I think I first became interested in storytelling, and first discovered I was any good at it, when I was at boarding school. And at night we'd be in dormitories, the lights would be turned off and we'd try and make each other laugh, and we'd try and scare each other, and I discovered that I was quite good at it. And that was probably my first experience of telling stories to entertain other people. Later on, I got – when I was in my teens – I got very interested in the ballads, these songs that tell stories, and it was from those that I started actually telling stories as a living.

Interviewer: And Daniel, what about you?

Daniel: I'm Daniel Morden. I think for me, the time when I got really interested in storytelling was when my father and mother used to read to me before I went to sleep. I can remember my father reading me some of a story called *The Hobbit*. And he was describing a moment where the hero, Bilbo, is under the ground in a cave and it's very very dark, and something comes out of the dark towards him. And I can remember being fascinated by this image in my mind's eye, this image that was being created by the words my father was saying. And after that I began to make up stories as much as I possibly could, so if I went for a walk, I'd talk to myself making up a story. Sometimes I'd have to go for a longer walk in order to finish off the story because I was dying to find out what happened next, even though I was making the story up as I went along.

Interviewer: Some of those walks must have been quite long, I guess. What about the Greeks, though, Daniel? How did you get interested in the Ancient Greeks?

Daniel: Well, I used to read a lot of comics as well as books, and I would read them in the same way, I would read the myths of Ancient Greece with the gods and goddesses in the same way that I would read stories of Spiderman and Superman and Batman. In both the stories of Greek gods and goddesses and the comics, there were these super-powered characters who could do incredible things, but would often make tremendously

foolish mistakes, and would behave just like we behave. And so, they weren't that different for me from superheroes.

Interviewer: Hugh, what about you?

Hugh: I think the first thing that got me enthusiastic about the Greek stories was when we did a school play and we did the story from the Odyssey of the Cyclops, the blinding of the Cyclops. And I was at a school in Cambridge, and to introduce the play they invited an old man, the provost of King's College, an old scholar with long white hair. And he was asked to do an introduction, but as he was doing the introduction to the play, he got completely carried away by the story. And he must have spent about 45 minutes telling the whole story of Odysseus and the Cyclops before the play even started. And I remember he had his walking stick, and he was enacting the blinding of the Cyclops with his walking stick, and occasionally he would wave his stick in the air going "Odysseus the wily one, the wily one, the wily one". And his introduction was far better than the school play. And I remember going home afterwards and finding the book and reading the adventures of Odysseus, and those stories led into other stories. And I got very enthusiastic about the Greek stories — I suppose I was about 9 or 10.

Interviewer: And this story of the war with Troy comes before the story of Odysseus. So, when did you first come across this story of the war with Troy?

Hugh: Well, I knew bits of the story of the war with Troy at about that time, things like the Trojan horse – probably the first bit of the story that I came across, I probably discovered that when I was about 9 or 10 – but I didn't really find out about Achilles and Agamemnon and Menelaus and all those characters until later on, when I was doing my A-levels and we did a play called Troilus and Cressida. And it was through that play that I really started to discover about the full story of the Iliad as opposed to the wooden horse itself.

Interviewer: And what about you Daniel, when did you first come across the war with Troy, and also the Odyssey?

Daniel: As well as the comics that I was buying of Batman and Superman and so on, my parents would buy me this magazine, which they thought was a bit more educational. It was called Look and Learn. And in Look and Learn there were bits of science and bits of history, and bits of sport and also bits of mythology: and they serialised the story of

Odysseus in Look and Learn, and they started before the Odyssey, they started during the Trojan War. So that was when I first encountered the story of the Trojan War, as part of a longer story all about King Odysseus.

Interviewer: As you say, Daniel, these are very long stories, and I think people would be fascinated to know how you remember such long, epic tales?

Daniel: Well, people always remember things that they're fascinated by. Some people can remember who won the World Cup in 1968 and who scored a goal at what point in the match, and some people can remember the route they travelled when they drove their car from one side of England to the other. I have always loved stories, and so I find it quite easy to remember the plots of stories that excite me.

Interviewer: Do you think – you described yourself a bit earlier walking round, and I can imagine you walking round the base of higher and higher mountains as your own stories got longer and longer – do you think that's because you think like a storyteller, that you can remember, or do you think because you are a storyteller you can remember better?

Daniel: I think I am a storyteller because I love stories. So I think the starting point for me is an excitement with the story, and that's how I can remember it, because I'm excited by it, I love to think about it. If I can't sleep then I think about stories, I go through stories in my mind as though I'm watching a video; I try and imagine it all happening inside my mind.

Interviewer: Is it similar for you, Hugh, how you remember stories?

Hugh: Yes. As Daniel says, I think the stories are a language of pictures. The pictures are in front of the words: when you're listening to a story and you're really enjoying it, you're seeing it on that little television screen inside your forehead, your mind's eye. So I think when I'm learning a story, I'm learning pictures first of all. First and foremost, a sequence of pictures, one after the other, and then the words wind themselves around the pictures and that's certainly how I remember. I haven't got a very good memory for other things, but I can remember stories.

Interviewer: I think it's probably interesting for people to realise that actually you didn't have a script for this story, and the 12 episodes that are on the CDs that people listen to, you didn't write down as a script. So how do you remember when an episode starts and

Interviewer: And Daniel, is there anything about the language or the images or the poetry in the words that you've chosen that you know comes from Homer's original, and bits that you don't that you've added, maybe.

Daniel: There are sections that are very, very close to Homer's Iliad. And then there are sections that we have taken from other Greek myths and put them in our version, and then there are tiny sections that we have invented for ourselves. And every time we tell the story we change it in tiny ways. So, every time we tell it, it's a little bit different from the time we told it last time. So, in that way it stays fresh for us, and changes. So, our telling of the Iliad is a blend of all these different elements: some from Homer; some from other Ancient Greek myths; and some from our feelings today, our moods today, and what's been happening in the news, that might make us emphasise a moment in the story that we'd never ever emphasised before because it seems as though that moment in the story is the same as what's been happening in the news. So all of those things combine to form a performance on a particular day.

Hugh: One of the things that is true of the voice of Homer that we've held onto is what are called the similes. And it's those moments when, for example, the Trojans on the city walls are looking at the Greek camp and they see the Greeks busy about their businesslike flies around the cowsheds in the spring when the pails are creamy white with milk. Or there's another moment, when the Trojans horses kick down the wooden palisade as a little boy on the sea shore might kick down a sandcastle. And those similes are very true of the Iliad, and we liked them so much that we wanted to keep them in our version.

Daniel: Another thing to remember is that Homer, as far as we know, would probably have sung this story, so during our telling, you will hear us say "if I could sing, I would sing of Agamemnon" and so on. So what we're doing is we're trying to remember the way that the story was first performed, as best we can, through that tiny little sentence.

Interviewer: So those are some ways you've tried to be faithful to what Homer wrote down, even though Homer's Iliad is only a small part of the story that you tell of the war with Troy. I know you try to keep it secret, Daniel, but can you tell us any of the little bits that you've added that are your own?

Daniel: In the story, there is a very crucial ring. There is a ring that is carved in the shape of a curling arrow, whose sharp point touches its feathered tail. A golden ring, and

it's passed from one character to another. And we invented that ring. It is not in any of the old Greek stories. But rings like that do feature often in fairy tales and myths from other places, so we put it in because it was very useful for us. And we feel as though we have the right to do that because we know stories where rings do serve the purpose that they serve in the story that we're telling.

Interviewer: I think that brings us on nicely to another question, actually, for Hugh to start with, and it's the big question about all stories: it's that historians believe that parts of this story are true, they're real. But as storytellers, how true does this story feel to you?

Hugh: There's an old riddle that goes like this: truth and lies live in the same house. And they both come out of the same door. And they both wipe their feet on the same doormat. What is the house? And the house is the head. And we all contain truth and falsehood inside our heads, and they both wipe their feet on the doormat, which is our tongues. And so, as with all the stories, it's a tangle of things that are true and things that might not be true. But I think, whatever the historical facts of the story are, the story is true because it's true of things that happen. The characters have a truth about them. The questions that the story raises are true questions. Questions that people are still grappling with today, still wrestling with and trying to work out the answers to. So it's full of things that are true and, to me, I'm not really bothered about whether it's historically true or not, because that doesn't matter. But all the stories that are worth telling are true in some way or another.

Interviewer: And Daniel, this story feels true to you?

Daniel: If a story is exciting or frightening or funny, there is something in it that is true because it is connecting with us in some way. And so, I feel the story is true, because every time I know I have to tell this story tomorrow, I get very excited about it. I get very excited at the thought of telling it, because there are things in it that make me feel frightened, make me feel sad and make me laugh.

Hugh: I think, also, that there's quite a lot of evidence that there was a Troy, and that there was at least one siege of that place, that city. Quite a lot of archaeologists have made excavations on the site of what probably was Troy. And so, yes, it seems as though there is a certain amount of truth in the story, but that's not so important to me.

Interviewer: And of course, one story always leads to another story, and you've mentioned that Troy is a real place, and there's a real place called Ithaca, and Odysseus tries to go home there, and I hope that we'll be able to hear your story of the Odyssey and that homecoming — perhaps after we've heard the war with Troy. So we look forward to that, and thanks very much for talking to us today.

Hugh: Thank you.

Daniel: Thank you.