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Language and Storytelling

I read your article about the use of foul language in writing, and it really got me thinking. I find myself largely in agreement with you. I don't enjoy listening to four letter words, although, like you, I can turn the air blue when things go badly wrong, or when something heavy is dropped on my toe.

For me there are two strands to this. One is why have four letter words become so much more common in everyday conversation, and so much more acceptable? I wonder if it has anything to do with the amount of pressure heaped on people these days, particularly the young; so much fear, frustration and anxiety building up in people on a global level, that vehement obscenities are sometimes the only thing which help to vent, like pus from a boil.

The other strand you made me think about is my own career as a Storyteller in the oral tradition, which spans more than a quarter of a century . Although a lot of my work is with children, I also do a lot of adult storytelling. The old tales were never intended for children alone. They would have been told to the tribe in caves around a fire, in the mead halls of warriors, in the inns and taverns. Children may well have been present, but they were not the intended audience. The old tales can be very dark, filled with violence and atrocities.

It occurred to me, thinking about what you said, that I have never, ever felt the need to swear in any of my performances. Over thirty odd years I have listened to many other wonderful storytellers from all over the globe. I cannot recall any one of them ever using foul language of any kind either.

Which proves your point; why would you need to, when language is so wonderful, rich and strange? Anything can be conveyed, anything at all, without the need to resort to poverty of language. I agree that it somehow diminishes us, and is almost like physical violence, which leaves the perpetrator having lost something infinitely precious, as well as the victim

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