Elaborate Versionings: Characteristics of Emergent Performance in Three Print/Oral/Aural Poets

[**eCompanion at <u>www.oraltradition.org</u>*[1]]

Kenneth Sherwood

From Page to Performance

The significant influence of oral literature, song, and vernacular speech forms on nineteenth- and twentieth-century American literature is generally recognized by scholars, teachers, and editors. The authoritative, four-volume *American Poetry* series published by the Library of America serves as an index of this consensus, with sections on anonymous ballads, blues lyrics, popular song, Native American poetry (song and narrative), folk songs, and spirituals.[2] These and other popular teaching anthologies that represent poems from oral contexts effectively subsume the poems within an economy in which they are appreciated, taught, and analyzed as though they were originally written, literary texts—according minimal attention to the mechanisms of transposition (from performance to print).[3]

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[1] To listen to the four performances described in this article, visit the eCompanion at www.oraltradition.org.

[2] A brief list of American writers from the vast catalogue of oral/literate cross-pollinations would have to include: Walt Whitman, seen as an originator of distinctively American poetry, who drew upon contemporary speech forms and the Old Testament; Ezra Pound, who studied and translated the troubadour poetry of Provence (as did his apprentice, Paul Blackburn); Langston Hughes, Sterling Brown, and James Weldon Johnson (among other poets associated with the Harlem Renaissance), who drew upon vernacular oral genres, blues lyrics, and African American sermons, as did writers associated with the Beats, like Jack Kerouac and Allen Ginsburg; Jerome Rothenberg, Ann Waldman, and others associated with Ethnopoetics, who translated and incorporated elements of the traditional poetries of the Americas into their writing.

[3] The texts have been collected, transcribed, translated, and edited. In this highly respected anthology, print sources are indicated in the notes; typical of academic and general-interest literary collections, it omits detailed contextual information about performance.

Given the general lack of appreciation, within literary criticism, of the oral/textual dynamics relevant to orally produced poetries, it should come as no surprise that little attention has been paid to the analysis of the oral delivery of poems composed on paper. Should a "poetry reading" be classified as a dramatic reading, a recitation, or a performance? Can the oral delivery of a written poem constitute a significant or primary means of publication and reception? These have not often seemed like fundamental questions or meaningful distinctions for literary criticism.

The very phrase "poetry reading" shows how criticism marginalizes performance, tending to see it as subsidiary, a secondary mode of presentation.[4] The reluctance of literary criticism to conceive of orality as a medium for modern poetry is at least partly a reflection of the success, over a half-century ago, of New Criticism in casting a focus upon the autonomous text. Scholars of oral poetry have derived useful interpretive guidance from focussing on "performance as the enabling event" (Foley 1995:27), with a consequent emphasis on the "radical integration, or situatedness, of verbal art in cultural context" (*ibid.*:30); New Criticism moved literary study in the opposite direction: towards an approach to analysis as an interaction between reader and text, with a minimization of cultural, intertextual, or authorial context.[5]

This essay considers the implications of situating literate, postmodern poetry in a performance context. Using recordings/transcriptions of "poetry readings" by Amiri Baraka, Kamau Brathwaite, and Cecilia Vicuña, its aims are: 1) to demonstrate that each event constitutes an emergent performance; 2) to explore how the performativity draws upon classically oral dynamics[6];

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[4] Several recent critical texts, such as *Wireless Imagination* (Kahn and Whitehead 1992), *Close Listening* (Bernstein 1998), and *Sound States* (Morris 1997), have initiated a discourse about sound and performance in literature. The special topics of each tend to circumscribe the implications, limiting them to more marginal avant-garde or intermedia contexts such as radio art.

[5] The remarkable shifts in literary critical methods during the second half of the twentieth-century—from Structuralism, Psychoanalysis, and Marxist criticism to Feminism, Deconstruction, New Historicism and gender and ethnicity theory—have opened certain contextual or extratextual spheres and showed the text itself to be less than stable and determinate but, with respect to performance, have effectively left the published text firmly anchored as the object of literary study.

[6] Each of the poets analyzed below has some direct and indirect knowledge of some traditional verbal art. I am not, however, arguing that their work represents a specific continuation of particular oral traditions, only that it is informed by these traditions and as such needs to be received performatively.

and 3) to show how the emergent qualities of the performances are achieved through the specific means of "elaboration" and "versioning." By means of elaboration and versioning, these poems break through into performativity; literary criticism cannot be content to receive them as conventional texts but must consider their emergent dimensions.

Looking at print poetry within a performance context implicitly creates a friction with the lingering, teleological narrative (of the passage from orality to literacy), but it explicitly challenges the habitual privileging of the written text in literary studies. Scholars of both written and oral traditional literature have often operated, perhaps under the guidance of the paradigms of their fields, as if boundary questions belonged properly to the other's domain. The literary critic who ventures into the terrain of oral tradition and orality frequently finds such exploration discouraged. Beginning with a classic text in the scholarship, she or he finds Albert Lord claiming that "once the oral technique is lost, it is never regained" (1960: 129). Reflective as it may be of the situation of the oral epic in Yugoslavia, the extrapolation to oral art more generally serves as a rebuff to the literary critic. Committed to a strict definition of oral poetry—centered on the use of formula and composition-in-performance (the necessity for which, he quite rightly observes, is obviated by literate technologies)—Lord holds that there can be no transitional texts, because literacy impels oral composition in the direction of "simple performance of a fixed text" (130).[7] Walter Ong is led

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[7] I draw here from the classic *Singer of Tales* (1960) because it is the text with which a literary scholar is most likely to be familiar. Perusing subsequent work, one notes that whatever softening occurred in his position, Lord continued to take a course observing the Great Divide, as when he worried: "Just as there are those who would overemphasize 'oral performance,' there are those would underemphasize, to the point of eliminating, the concept of 'traditional'" (1986:468); and "oral traditional literature without a clear distinction between it and 'written literature' ceases to exist" (*idem*). This boundary policing continues in *The Singer Resumes the Tale* (1995), where the notion of a transitional text is cautiously admitted, in relation to medieval texts particularly, but the focus on delineating the oral and written as sharply as possible (a maintenance of the concerns that led to investigations in formula density) continues: ". . . at what point does a singer pass from being traditional to being nontraditional? Could it be that point when he does begin to think of really fixed lines, when he actually memorizes them?" (1995:213). The continued preoccupation with oral-formulaic narrative over other forms of oral art and the notion that fixity marks a poem as non-oral does not invite ready application of his thinking to contemporary poetry readings.

One should perhaps stop short of venturing an overall critique of this dichotomization of oral tradition and literature, given both the necessity to establish a discipline and methodology for oral study and the existence of an ongoing discussion that exceeds the sphere of this essay. I do want to emphasize that the formative basis for oral traditional study has effected a kind of barrier against literary criticism.

to a similar theorization of orality and literacy as discrete, by his biding interest in the psychodynamics of orality (that is, how literacy reshapes consciousness). The passage from orality into literacy is seen by Ong as a kind of irreversible, teleological narrative (the exteriorization of ideas: orality giving way to literacy). In this view, one might engage in the identification of oral elements in contemporary literature, but they would at best constitute an "oral residue" (115) or a diminished kind of "secondary orality" (115)—a formulation that seems almost to validate the marginalization of the performative in literary contexts.

Of course, as any discipline must when isolated, literary criticism suffers when it respects the absolute divide between the oral and the literate. Among scholars and theorists of orality, interest in the "interface of oral and written literature" has recently grown, leading as far as the questioning "if in fact these are still viable opposite categories" (Foley 1995:107). This readiness to draw on oral theory to explore intermediate texts opens a door for literary critics, though they have not been universally ready to follow.[8] For instance, slam poetry—a primary instance of contemporary "voiced texts," poetry which is composed in print but performed orally and received aurally (Foley 2002:39)—is often discounted as non-literary by critics, according to Maria Damon. She critiques as retrograde the perspective common in literary study that holds that the theatrical qualities of delivery and appeal to audience in performance-based poetries are irreconcilable with aesthetic quality (1988:326-30).

The poems I consider are all products of written composition; their composers are established authors, each credited with many books. Because their publication (performance) and reception are both written and oral, these poems are not identical to what Foley calls "voiced texts" (such as the slam poem, which is a written composition performed and received orally/ aurally).[9] But poems that may be encountered both in print by readers and in

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[8] Sobol deals with the "distinction between oral traditional and oral interpretive modes," or intermediate texts in relation to storytelling (1992:72).

[9] John Foley's "system of media categories" proposes four main "guises" of oral poetry: oral performance, voiced texts, voices from the past, and written oral poems (2002:39); they are distinguished in terms of the means of composition, performance, and reception, which provides a more subtle means of thinking about texts than does the simple "oral/literate" binary opposition. While it has an unfortunate print connotation, I must substitute the term publication for Foley's performance because the argument of this study involves the claim that print-published poetry may become "performative" when also made public through oral means.

performance by audiences are located upon a curious threshold. Does the poem composed by a writer become a voiced text whenever it is read aloud? When its initial publication is oral? When its maker claims to have prioritized the voiced over the printed form? When its audience receives the voiced text as the authoritative one? As tangled as these questions may be, some means of figuring when performance becomes constitutive is necessary if literary criticism is to become capable of responding to print/oral/aural poetry.

Three Performances

Amiri Baraka

Do we enter a performance each time and in whatever context a poem is spoken aloud? If we want to mobilize some of the concerns of orality more selectively, perhaps we can adopt the notion that performances can be distinguished from non-performances by a set of features which "key" performances (framing or marking them for an audience). According to Richard Bauman in *Verbal Art as Performance* (1977), these keying features may include "special codes; figurative language; parallelism; special paralinguistic features (e.g., speaking tone, volume, style); special formulae; appeal to tradition; disclaimer of performance" (16). Of the keys in this catalogue, paralinguistic features have special bearing for this study. The contemporary poet Amiri Baraka has a reputation for giving performances in which he uses his voice to skillfully and dramatically work with paralinguistic features highlighted by Bauman, such as "rate, length, pause duration, pitch contour, tone of voice, loudness, and stress" (20).[10]

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[10] Bauman bemoans that fact that in the print publication of traditional oral poetry "paralinguistic features, by their very nature, tend not to be captured in the transcribed or published versions of texts, with the exception of certain aspects of prosody in clearly poetic forms. . . . [and] in many cases, especially before the ready availability of tape recorders, the conditions of recording artistic texts *required* that conventional paralinguistic patterns be distorted . . ." (19-20). In the study of traditional oral poetry, sound recordings have become essential for addressing the issue of the exclusion of paralinguistic features from transcriptions/translations. These extratextual elements in some performance traditions may be exactly what constitute the telling of a story or poem as verbal art in the eyes of the culture. At the same time, these features, along with other markers such as parallelism, serve as more than simple frames of performance. They play a powerful role in the casting of the form of the art. In this sense, one might argue that they are as crucial to the poetics of the oral poem as is end-rhyme in an English sonnet.

Amiri Baraka (formerly Leroi Jones) began to earn renown as a writer within the context of the Beat and then the Black Arts movements, working with other Black Nationalists to produce plays and poetry performances that were both political and populist. Importantly, this reading scene meant that for many writers oral performance became a significant (usually the initial and sometimes the sole) means of publication. Lorenzo Thomas observes that in the Black Arts period "the poetry reading as a characteristic mode of *publication* reinforced poets' tendency to employ 'dramatic' structures and direct first-person address" (1988:310). In explaining Baraka's poetics, Thomas emphasizes a further pair of touchstones: projective verse,[11] a post-war avant-garde movement, which emphasized that "poetry is an act of *speech*, that its element is *breath*, and that writing it down is a skill" (308); and the black vernacular, which he accessed by exploiting the "time-honored techniques of street corner orators" and "rhetorical conventions of the black church" (309). The speeches and sermons become like traditional models, so that in the poetry "what you hear is the speaking voice that trespasses into song; and an antiphonal interaction with the congregation that reveals the same structures that inform the early 'collective improvisation' of New Orleans jazz, bebop, and the avant-garde jazz of the 1960s" (310).

Amiri Baraka's poem titled "In the Funk World" is collected in his 1996 volume *Funk Lore*.[12] A diminutive, four-line poem in the mode of a sardonic riddle, it immediately precedes a sequence of similarly short, pithy and direct poems that Baraka ironically names Lowcoup.

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[11] The influence of projective verse on the poetics of Amiri Baraka has additional connections with oral tradition. The phrase was coined by the influential poet and idiosyncratic theorist Charles Olson (1997) in an essay of the same name. Through his polemical essays and as rector of the experimental Black Mountain College (with which some of the most influential figures in twentieth-century writing, music, architecture, and dance were associated), Olson was a major figure in American poetry after World War II. His essay not only proposed ideas about breath and speech rhythm as essential to all poetry (leading to a kind of reoralization in United States poetry), but also proposed that poets make use of the typewriter and contemporary printing technology to produce visual texts that could serve as scores for performance. His application of this theory reveals his own poems to be visually formatted as scores in only the loosest sense, but the spirit was influential. Not incidentally, Olson, and the movement he championed, led ethnopoetics scholar Dennis Tedlock (1999) to develop his own method of transcription that premiered in *Finding the Center*.

[12] In their extended, discursive play with speech-driven rhythms, poems like "The Politics of Rich Painters," "Black Dada Nihilismus," and "Pres Spoke in a Language" are perhaps more representative of Baraka's work over five decades that is the minimalistic "In the Funk World" or other lowcoup.

If Elvis Presley / is
King
Who is James Brown,
God?

The following analysis of the performativity of the poem is based on Baraka's delivery of the performance at an October 1996 event in Buffalo, New York. The reading was part of a celebration for fellow poet Robert Creeley that was sponsored by City University and a local arts organization and was hosted by a performance art center located in a former windshield wiper factory. The audience was comprised largely of undergraduate and graduate students, faculty, community members, and art patrons—most of whom had some previous acquaintance with Baraka's poetry, at least through his books. On this evening, Baraka augmented the poem known to readers of his *Funk Lore* in several ways, skillfully controlling its paralinguistic dimensions and demonstrating a particular kind of performativity. The transcription below reveals significant changes in the language and marks variations in rate, tone, loudness, and stress.[13]

FIGURE 1

In the **Funk World**

Well you know, we created ah, you know, small band music, in New Orleans, and uh, they said it was Dixie Land, and then we created Big Band, and they said it was Swing but it didn't swing,

[audience laughter]

and then they told us that, uh,   Paul White Man, was the King of Swing and no, he was the king of jazz, that's right, Benny Good Man was the king of swing **What I want to kno___w**

In the Funk World
If El_vis   Presley
is King

Who is Ja__mes   Brown?
God?

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[13] To listen to the audio clip (Baraka 1996b), visit the eCompanion to this article at www.oraltradition.org. For the printed text, see Baraka 1996a.

With the announcement of the title—a framing gesture—Baraka introduces the poem in a strong voice. The pace and tone with which the next lines are delivered give them the feel of an improvisation, perhaps even of an aside. This quickly, quietly delivered historical catalogue of the misrepresentations and appropriations of African American musical forms is marked by the modulation of such paralinguistic features as rate, pause, pitch, tone, loudness and stress. As the listeners lean forward to audit the rapid, soft stream of words, they are brought up short by the final phrase of the second line, which is shouted and followed by a pause. The short lines that make up the second half of the poem are delivered forcefully, with a definite, rhythmic timing that establishes a contrast and leads to a close that arrives with the force of a comic punchline.

To begin with the methodological questions raised by what we might call the new material: Do we consider the additional material as an intervening "commentary"? Or is it a part of the poem? It follows the announcement of the title but has not, as far as I know, been published in any of Baraka's books. Does the second articulation of the title render the prior one a false start? Would an audience member encountering the poem for the first time and listening with closed eyes respond in the same way as a reader following the printed text in *Funk Lore*? Whether improvised or prepared, the off-script catalogue that Baraka included in this performance establishes the poem's theme and so increases the pointedness of the punch-line, even as it sets up the aural contrast with the published closing, which is delivered in an exhortative style.

Evidencing some of the characteristic "keys to performance" proposed by Bauman, this Baraka clip exemplifies how such keys frame a given event as a performance. Regarding it as a potential performance allows for thinking about what significance the distinction between performance and recitation holds. Baraka's approach to the occasion reflects what Bauman identifies as a central element of a true performance—an emergent dimension. As an emergent event, the performance must be dynamic, in flux at some level (1977:40):

> The point is that completely novel and completely fixed texts represent the poles of an ideal continuum, and that between the poles lies the range of emergent text structures to be found in empirical performance. The study of the factors contributing to the emergent quality of the oral literary text promises to bring about a major reconceptualization of the nature of the text, freeing it from the apparent fixity it assumes when abstracted from performance and placed on the written page.

The augmentation of performance in Baraka's "In the Funk World" marks its affinity with oral composition-in-performance, in which, according to Ruth Finnegan, "there [is] no concept of a correct version. Each performance [is] unique in its own right" (1992:120). Aspects of composition in performance have been identified in most oral traditions, and characteristically it is expected among the performers to demonstrate their skill by incorporating into the piece current events, audience response, even an accident in the midst of the performance itself. And though Baraka has composed the poem in writing, using a notebook or a typewriter, he draws on particular African-American oral forms such as blues lyrics, the dozens, and jazz improvisation in his performances, which do indeed vary from event to event.[14]

The cluster of generative or improvisational moves that distinguish an emergent performance from a poetry recitation can be indicated by the term "elaboration." Though a common practice, elaboration is not always reflected in the transcription of a traditional oral performance; in some cases, extended performances are reduced to minimal texts (even sometimes made to resemble haiku) and then celebrated for the spare aesthetic (Sherwood 2001). In literary study, the published print version of a poem may occupy a similar space. But when recognized as an emergent technique, elaboration gives powerful new weight to the particulars of the event, specifically "keying" it as a poetry performance, and distinguishing it from a recitation or reading.

Cecilia Vicuña

Where Baraka, operating with text in hand, enacts an elaboration that augments the source text through the addition of new material and vocal shaping, Cecilia Vicuña gives a demonstration of another way in which a minimal text may be elaborated, through the repetition and variation of patterns implicit in the source text. The Chilean-born poet and artist, who now works out of New York, explores the themes of sound, voice, writing, and weaving in all her major volumes of English and bilingual poetry (*Unravelling Words*, *The Precarious*, *El Templo*, *InStan*). Recognized as an

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[14] The degree of variation between performances will vary with the poet. As in the study of traditional oral poetry, literary analyses of voiced texts manifesting elaboration will want to theorize this phenomenon. It may be useful to stipulate that some degree of variation is necessary for a rendering to move from being a recitation or dramatic reading to a true performance. For instance, the staged reading one might expect of an actor, which is memorized and rehearsed towards a singular ideal, may need to be distinguished from a performance.

installation artist as well as a poet, Vicuña frequently prepares the site for a poetry performance in advance by weaving threads throughout a space.[15] Her Texas performance began with the silent screening of a video featuring dancers weaving on a Hudson River pier at twilight. As the video closed, Vicuña began singing from her seat at the rear of the audience. Rising, she slowly moved to the podium, still singing and using a hand-held light to cast thread-like lines upon the walls, ceiling, and audience.

Published Version: El Templo (np 16)		Performance Transcription	FIGURE 2
Adiano y Azumbar		Adiano y Azumbar	
Adiano y azumbar	1	Adia___no	1a
se huaca el purpur	2	Adia___no	1a
		Adia___no	1a
Temblando siempre	3	Adia___no	1a
su pobre arenal	4		
		adiano y azumbar	1
Con qué celo	5	adiano y azumbar	1
se adumbra	6	se huaca el purpur	2
		se huaca el purpur	2
su manantial	7		
		Temblando siempre	3
Con qué celo	8	Temblando siempre	3
bebe	9	su pobre arenal	4
		su pobre arenal	4
Su seco	10		
caudal	11	Con qué celo	5
		se adumbra	6
El manque y el hue	12	Con qué celo	5
apurpurándose están.	13		
		adumbra su manantial	6a/7
[np 16]		su manantial	7
		Con qué celo	8
		Con qué celo	8
		bebe	9
		Su seco	10
		cau / dal	11
		El manque y el hue	12
		El manque y el hue	12
		apur___/ pur___/ ándose	13a
		apurpurándose están.	13

Coming early in the performance, the poem "Adiano y Azumbar" was published in *El Templo* as a text that consists of 13 lines (only one of which is repeated). Exemplifying elaboration through performance, the performance of the poem that Vicuña sang (in March of 2002, in Odessa,

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[15] See chapter two of Sherwood 1997 for an extended performance analysis in relation to Andean aesthetics. Further context for Andean cultural connections as well as discussion of Vicuña's installation and visual art can be gained from the essays collected in de Zengher 1997.

Texas) might easily be transcribed at twice the length of the print version, or 26 lines with 14 repetitions.[16]

Elaboration, through the repetition of lines, stanzas, and whole songs, is common in the songs of traditional oral cultures (Evers and Molina 1990; Densmore 1910) and Vicuña's study of Andean song influences her performance style. Without being mechanical, Vicuña patterns her performance repetitions in a delicately proportioned manner, extending or elaborating the material in the print-text.[17] The first stanza consists of the four-fold repetition of the first word in the print-text, "adiano," which is itself drawn out. The second and third stanzas each double the lines in the first two print-text stanzas (lines 1-4). Stanza four begins a series of partial repetitions that, with the insertion of pauses at variance with the print-text, effectively present a new, syncopated lineation. The penultimate stanzas of both versions are nearly identical, with a slight pause interrupting the performed "cau/dal" (perf.-tran., line 11). The final stanza returns to the pattern of absolute doubling with a repetition (lines 12, 12) then a partial repetition with the single word "apurpurándose" elongated before the poem concludes with the final line, "apurpurándose están." Review of several of Vicuña's performances suggests that the patterning is neither fixed nor predetermined; the unit and frequency of repetition varies to suit the expressive emphasis of the poem.

The mode of elaboration that Vicuña adopts varies from poem to poem and performance to performance. In most performances, one also hears Vicuña move into a purely improvisational mode, relating a narrative or spontaneously composing a song. She sometimes performs an occasion-specific poem, composed on paper but not previously published. The poem above, published in facing Spanish and English, was performed in Spanish alone, perhaps in acknowledgment of the large number of Spanish speakers

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[16] To listen to an audio clip (Vicuña 2002), visit the eCompanion to this article at www.oraltradition.org. For the printed version, see Vicuña 2001.

[17] Rosa Alcala's translation is as follows: "Ancient and Star Flowered / the purpur huacates divine // Transforming dunes // With such fervor / she enshadows // With such fervor / she drinks // Her arid / riches // The manque and the hue / dusking purpur." Vicuña glosses "el manque y el hue" as the condor-shaped mountain watching over Santiago, Chile; the Quechua *huaca purpur*, as "arid sacredness [and an] ever-changing dune" of Peru's Viru valley. She associates *purpur*, a bilingual pun, with the polluting haze that produces brilliant sunsets in Santiago. Numbering in the righthand column marks repetitions and repetitions with variation in relation to the print-text. Since many of the repetitions are absolute, they do not constitute parallelism in the strictest sense; but the effect on reception is similar, and helps to key performance in this case.

in the audience. The Texas performance from which the last poem was drawn allows me to sketch out a second way in which print-texts may be inserted into an oral/aural performance context.
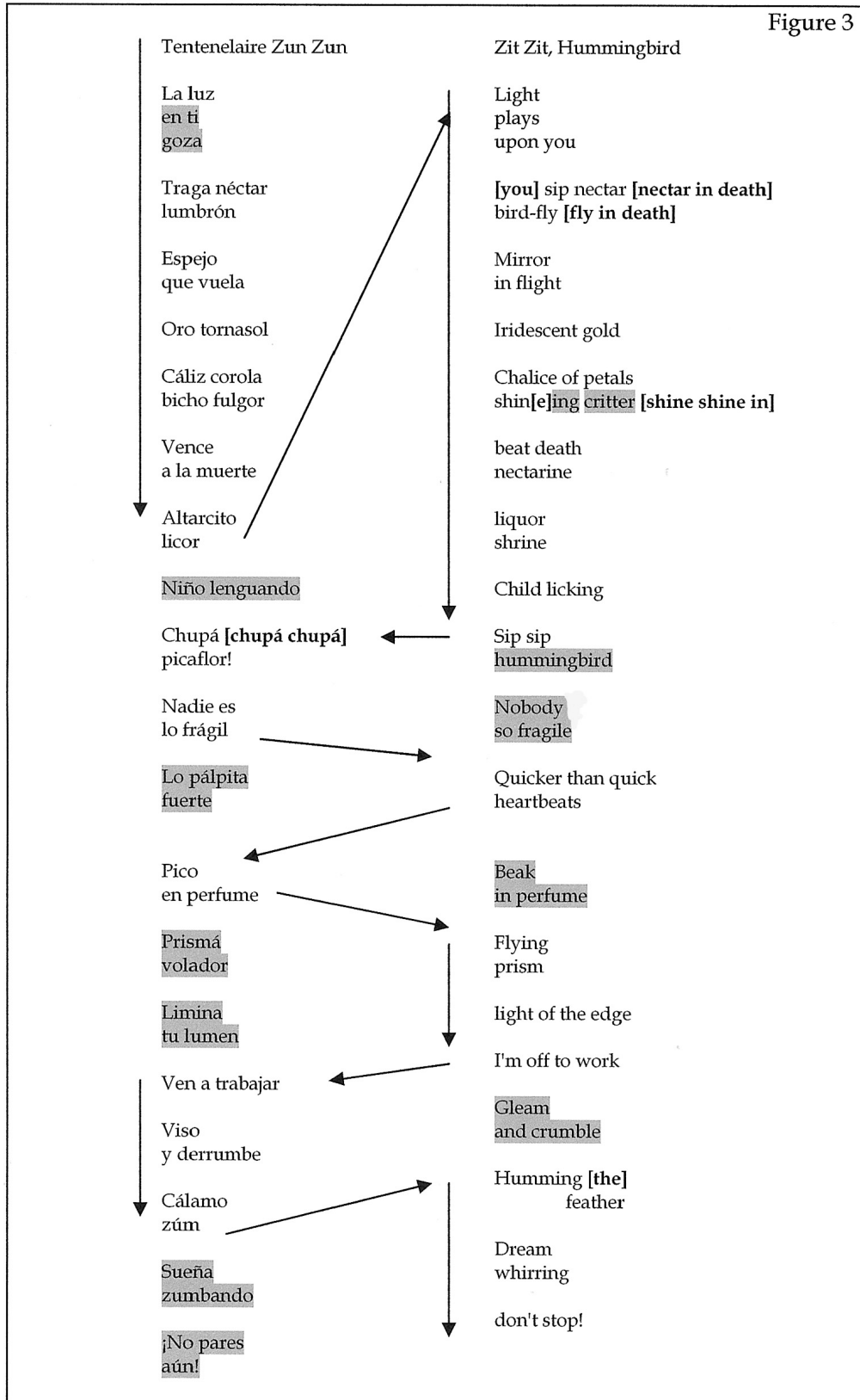
With "Tentenelaire Zun Zun" ("Zit Zit, Hummingbird"), Vicuña offered a more characteristically bilingual performance of a text published years earlier in the familiar, facing-page format of bilingual editions. However, Vicuña chooses not to simply voice the piece as published, beginning on the left in Spanish and following with the righthand English. Rather, the performance dances deliberately back and forth between Spanish and English, creating a new arrangement—a poem in two languages that does not fully correspond to either of the two published versions.[18]

Vicuña's performance cannot be called oral composition in the usual sense; it begins from a text, and with the exception of the improvised "death" in two lines and an additional "the," little new material is added. Yet the virtuoso oscillation between Spanish and English, along with selective omissions and repetitions, present a poem that is quite unlike the print-text (see Figure 3).[19] Even without considering the expressive contributions of the stylized vocal qualities (paralinguistic features keying performance), it seems clear that in the active rearrangement of the poem's elements a new work has been constructed—a version.

Versioning—creating a radically new arrangement of a poem during performance—shifts the literary critic's orientation with respect to "the" poem even more dramatically than elaboration, particularly when the aesthetic impact of the version is comparable to that of the print text. In writing about the effects of performance, Henry Sayre observes (1995:94): "The concept of the 'original,' the self-contained and transcendent masterwork, containing certain discernible intentions, has been undermined, and a plurality of possible performative gestures has supplanted it." This seems to be an apt characterization of the effect of Vicuña's versioning with, perhaps, one qualification. Sayre's description recalls the indeterminacy that deconstruction proposes as an ineluctable aspect of textuality. As deployed by Vicuña, at least, the performance does not call meaning into question so much as it invites a sensual, creative engagement in the continuation of meaning-making (by virtue of the metaphors of song, flight, weaving, and so on).

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[18] In the following transcription, the course of the reading is mapped graphically with arrows. Omitted words and lines are matted gray; added or varied language is bracketed and printed in boldface.

[19] To listen to an audio clip (Vicuña 2002), visit the eCompanion to this article at www.oraltradition.org. For the printed text, see Vicuña 1992:74-77.

Figure 3

Tentenelaire Zun Zun	Zit Zit, Hummingbird
La luz en ti goza	Light plays upon you
Traga néctar lumbrón	**[you]** sip nectar **[nectar in death]** bird-fly **[fly in death]**
Espejo que vuela	Mirror in flight
Oro tornasol	Iridescent gold
Cáliz corola bicho fulgor	Chalice of petals shin[e]ing critter **[shine shine in]**
Vence a la muerte	beat death nectarine
Altarcito licor	liquor shrine
Niño lenguando	Child licking
Chupá **[chupá chupá]** picaflor!	Sip sip hummingbird
Nadie es lo frágil	Nobody so fragile
Lo pálpita fuerte	Quicker than quick heartbeats
Pico en perfume	Beak in perfume
Prismá volador	Flying prism
Limina tu lumen	light of the edge
Ven a trabajar	I'm off to work
Viso y derrumbe	Gleam and crumble
Cálamo zúm	Humming **[the]** feather
Sueña zumbando	Dream whirring
¡No pares aún!	don't stop!

Kamau Brathwaite

The emergent dimensions of the oral performance by Kamau Brathwaite are more subtle than those identified in the analyses of Baraka and Vicuña above. Deeply committed to the forging of what he calls Nation Language—an English reflective of the sociohistorical richness of his Afro-Caribbean vernacular speech—Brathwaite also draws on observations of oral performance in Ghana, where he worked for some years. The way in which aspects of traditional orality serve an emergent function in Brathwaite's work can perhaps be understood in light of comments by Henry Sayre about literary performance (1995:94):

> A good way to think of performance is to realize that in it the potentially disruptive forces of the "outside" (what is "outside" the text—the physical space in which it is presented, the other media it might engage or find itself among, the various frames of mind the diverse members of a given audience might bring to it, and, over time, the changing forces of history itself) are encouraged to assert themselves.

For Brathwaite, the spoken language and the lived culture of Caribbean peoples have been historically relegated to a space outside the literary realm. His project involves opening up poetry to history, to excluded registers of language and, in particular, to forms of language that sustain diasporic memory or the sounds and physical rhythms of island life.

Music and song have had a place in all three poets' work. In several poems from the same event discussed above, Baraka explicitly brings his poems into relation with music by humming or scatting recognizable jazz melodies to frame a poem or to establish a syncopation between word and song. Vicuña delivered one of the poems analyzed above by singing it, introducing a melody; she also often frames a performance with chants. Brathwaite's poem, "Angel/Engine," published most recently in the revised *Ancestors* (2001), opens itself up to dance, drumming, and the interactive space of ritual. The poem loosely narrates a woman's spiritual possession by Shango, whom he explains is the "Yoruba and Black New World god of lightning and thunder." Shango is also closely related to Ogun, his complement "in the 'destructive-creative principle' . . . . One of their (technological) apotheoses is the train. The jazz rhythms of John Coltrane . . . and the forward gospel impetus of Aretha Franklin . . . are other aspects of this" (2001:101).

Brathwaite performed a portion of "Angel/Engine" at the University of Minnesota in October of 1997 in the context of a combined talk and

poetry reading. He framed the event with a warm, introductory speech establishing his deep allegiance to the theme of the gathering—cross-cultural poetics. More emphatic than the usual acknowledgment given by a public speaker at the outset of a talk, the gesture established a reciprocal relationship with the audience—emphasizing aural reception, in a specific space, for a determined occasion.

A theme of this poem is the spiritual force of sound and rhythm, which, without venturing into the territory of high drama, Brathwaite nonetheless manages to convey performatively. His voicing displays how parallelism and the oral vocables, which are also present on the page, are themselves performance keys. The two sustaining motifs of the poem— "praaaze be to/praaaze be to/paaaze be to gg" and "bub-a-dups/bub-a-dups/ bub-a-dups/ /hah"—establish a rhythm that opens the poem into a spatial dimension, articulate the presence of a speaking body, and even imply an associated dance. The rhythms set in play and the viscerally physical articulation of paralinguistic vocables and grunts do not simply ornament or enrich the text; they mark it as a temporal experience (1997):

> *praaaze be to*
> *praaaze be to*
> *praaaze be to* **gg**
>
> *praaaze be to*
> *praaaze be to*
> *praaaze be to* **gg**
>
> & uh holdin my hands up high in dis place
> & de palms turn to
>
> *praaaze be to*
> *praaaze be to*
> *praaaze be to* **gg**
>
> an the fingers flutter and flyin away
> an uh crying out
>
> *praaaze be to*
> *praaaze be to*
> *praaaze be to*

Though the implied temporal dimension is not specifically one of the performance keys enumerated by Bauman, the dramatic way in which words transform into purely percussive vocables constitutes a kind of special code—a metonym for the dance and drum beat that activate the language in

and through performance. The use of irregular line breaks and visual spacing to indicate stanzas suggests possibilities for oral delivery. A kind of visual rhythm also appears that graphically establishes some of the repetitions (in a way not unlike Dell Hymes' transcription preferences [2004]). As a performance score, the printed poem is radically underdetermined. In performance, Brathwaite renders the lines with such emphatic rhythmic patterning as to evoke percussion. The use of a guttural /g/, nearly unpronounceable in English by itself, emphasizes this blending of articulate speech and purely rhythmic sound.[20]

A curious dimension of this performance is the commentary that Brathwaite interjects. Unlike Vicuña's versioning, the transcription of Baraka's performance of the poem varies only minimally from the published version. The context and mode of delivery leads me to distinguish this interjection from the elaboration in the Baraka poem; a shift in tone and pace seems to frame the comments as non-performative asides (marked by square brackets):

> hah
>
> is a hearse
> is a horse
> is a horseman
>
> is a trip
> is a trick
> is a seemless hiss
>
> that does rattle these i:ron tracks
>
> *bub-a-dups*
> *bub-a-dups*
> *bub-a-dups*
>
> huh
>
> *bub-a-dups*
> *bub-a-dups*
> *bub-a-dups*

---

[20] The audio version of Brathwaite's performance (1997) may be heard at the eCompanion to this article at www.oraltradition.org. For a recent published version, see Braithwaite 2001:132-38. A full, comparative transcription of the portion of this poem performed by Brathwaite, side-by-side with the published text, is provided in the appendix to this article.

hah

is a scissors gone *shhhaaaaa*

[For the moment, for the first time, the sibilant song comes in and release
is started. When she's been going now to become that sound that the
engine makes when it ... whoo... she becomes at last the sibilance of sea
and Shango. And the gutturals begin to disappear in her performance and
in the poem.]

under de rattle an pain

i de go
huh

i de go
shhhaaaaa

an a black curl calling my name

praaaze be to
praaaze be to
praaaze be to

Brathwaite frames the comments that punctuate the performance of this
poem by altering pace and volume. Each also enacts a shift in address
(speaking to a scholarly audience, making demonstrative observations),
directly commenting on the poem, and is further marked by an alteration in
the register of diction. The significance of these moves can best be
understood in contrast to conventions of the contemporary poetry reading.
Poets giving such readings, particularly in academic or high-cultural
contexts (such as conferences or festivals, as opposed to a slam or open-mic
night) often provide commentary. However, that latter kind of commentary
is usually of a biographical or anecdotal nature, often narrating the context
that inspired the work, naming relevant persons or clarifying potentially
obscure references and allusions. Almost always introductory, such
commentaries rarely intrude into the body of the poem. More rarely does the
commentary comment on the space created by the poem—its activation of
language—as Brathwaite's performance does.

Each of the three poets discussed creates performance events by
drawing on different aspects of orality, with related but distinct motives. For
Baraka, a vernacular consciousness of "how you sound" and a jazz-derived

interplay with audience shape his practice. For Vicuña, the spiritual symbolism of sound and the way its deployment can spatially weave listeners into an event leads to her emphasis on voice. For Brathwaite, vernacular expressivity and traditional/sacred notions of efficacious language are equally informing. Each poet begins with published texts and transforms them into emergent events through the use of elaboration and versioning. Bringing these two concepts to the poetry of Baraka, Vicuña, and Brathwaite allows for a fuller appreciation of the oral and performative dimensions of their work, rendering their performances as significant instances of the poems rather than as imperfect and secondary re-presentations of prior texts. The full measure of such contemporary written poetries cannot be taken if they are considered only in relation to the conventional, text-oriented terms of literary analysis. Scholarly consideration of how these performative poetries are positioned with respect to the speakers' mouths and listeners' ears should lead to transcription, performance analysis, and the development of new critical practices that adapt and extend the best practices of oral and literary studies.

Representing the Emergent

Treating elaboration, versioning, and other emergent dimensions of print poetries in performance involves literary critics in some of the practices and issues familiar to scholars of oral tradition. I have made use of audio tape and transcription as a way to begin attending to emergent dimensions of the poems. Readers may have puzzled over the variation in the systems by which the poems were transcribed. The first of several transcriptions follows the ethnopoetic method exemplified by Tedlock and further theorized by Elizabeth Fine (1984), preferring some simplification with the aim of approaching a performable script. Type size represents perceived volume and emphasis, while internal and interlinear spacing indicates pace and pausing, with additional comments and descriptors placed in brackets.

This approach reflects something of the skepticism about the ideal of maximizing data through ever thicker transcription practices that is voiced by Eric L. Montenyohl (1993). The alternative method of narrative embedding that he proposes produces an interesting result, though it may best serve the kind of minimal, quotidian materials that interest Montenyohl, that is, jokes and proverbs. The objections to the Tedlock variant on total translation presented in *Finding the Center* and developed by various authors in *Alcheringa* (Goodwin 1972, Titon 1976, and Borgatti 1976) seem to me to be misplaced, since it is not at all difficult for readers to develop the

skills to give passable renderings of score-like transcriptions. Whether the reader chooses to re-perform the texts or, as digital technology makes increasingly possible, to read along with an audio recording, a graphic transcription helps the critic to draw out relevant paralinguistic features.[21]

Attractive though it would be to posit the modified form of total transcription as an authoritative method for the analysis of print/oral/aural poets, I have varied the format for each of the examples. The second transcription, (Figure 2, Cecilia Vicuña's "Adiano y Azumbar") appears in a comparative, two-column format. It juxtaposes the print version and performance transcription and adds line numbering to emphasize repetitions, partial repetitions, and the general elaboration. The third transcription (Figure 3, Vicuña's "Tentenelaire Zun Zun") uses graphic symbols to simulate the reading path taken by the performer as she composed a new version, through performance, by mixing elements of the print-published poems in Spanish and English. The rhythmic effect of Brathwaite's "Angel/Engine" is conveyed through descriptive prose rather than graphic rendering. In practice, this flexibility facilitates concentration on specific elements of elaboration and versioning in each of the poems. The use of a variety of methods also underscores the necessary insufficiency of any transcription, which can only render selected elements, in the face of multidimensional oral performance. Finally, it avoids the false impression that performance practices are largely homogenous, an impression that would otherwise be conveyed by presenting non-heterogeneous scripts. Following this argument, it may be advisable to develop particularized transcription methods adequate to each genre, performance tradition, even customized to each individual performer.

In the cases of the three poets whose poems are addressed in this study, all have extensive grounding in their respective literary traditions as well as significant life experience with and study of some oral traditions. As publishing poets, all three are also familiar with issues of performance and textualization that have been formative of twentieth-century poetries on several continents—from the experimentalism of Mallarmé in France, to the Dadaist Tristan Tzara's collection and translation of African traditional

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[21] Montenyohl seems to assume, somewhat puzzlingly, that total translation texts are not only unreadable but inaccurate, in that paralinguistic features are often produced in one language but translated into the target language of the scholarly audience. Rothenberg (1983) has famously (if controversially) translated Navajo vocables into their English "equivalents." But the challenge seems to dispute without actually engaging Tedlock's fundamental argument of *Spoken Word and the Work of Interpretation* (1983), that the paralinguistic features utilized in formal, spoken performance are roughly comparable, and thus "legible," across languages and performance traditions.

poetry, to concrete poetry in Brazil, and on to the Pound/Black Mountain tradition in the United States. These literary traditions include experiments with suggestive visual and typographical design as well as texts formatted as oral performance scores. Literary criticism adequate to the multiple dimensions of their work will need to become fluent in these same multiple traditions and, stepping outside of current disciplinary conventions, learn from the insights and errors of allied fields.

Indiana University of Pennsylvania

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Appendix

Transcription of Edward Kamau Brathwaite, "Angel/Engine." Lecture/Poetry Reading. 19 October 1997. XCP: Cross-Cultural Poetics Conference, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, MN.

Published Version: <u>Ancestors</u> 132-8   Performance Transcription

praaaze be to praaaze be to paaaze be to **gg**	praaaze be to praaaze be to paaaze be to **gg**
praaaze be to praaaze be to paaaze be to **gg**	praaaze be to praaaze be to paaaze be to **gg**
& uh holdin my hands up high in dis place & de palms turn to	& uh holdin my hands up high in dat place & de palms turn to
praaaze be to praaaze be to paaaze be to **gg**	praaaze be to praaaze be to paaaze be to **gg**
an the fingers flutter and flyin away an uh crying out	an the fingers flutter and flyin away an uh crying out
praaaze be to praaaze be to paaaze be to to	praaaze be to praaaze be to paaaze be to
	praaaze be to praaaze be to paaaze be to
	[What was also very frightening about this situation, if this were a Jamaican context, where this activity was taking place, if it were Haiti or Cuba, there would be not be this agony of transformation. But in Barbados, where that English imprint is so pervasive and so powerful, even in the secret, submerged umfor,

softly

an de soffness flyin away

is a black
is a bat
is a flap

a de kerosene lamp

an it spinn
an it spinn
an it spinn

in rounn
-an it stagger-
in down

'to a gutter-
in shark
a de worl

praaaze be to
praaaze be to
paaaze be to **gg**

praaaze be to
praaaze be to
paaaze be to **gg**

de tongue curlin back
an muh face flowin empty
all muh skin cradle and cracle an ole

i is water of wood
ants
crawlin crawlin

i is spiders
weavin away
my ball

headed head
is ancient &

the change from Christian, the change from west, and to return to [. . .], gave that women who let's say is not an academic, she does not know anything about the history of it, even then her subsconscious gave her to[. . . .] It was as if she were torn apart with the forces of west. It was an amazing experience. Here was a big woman being torn to pieces by some . . . by forces of cultural [return]. That's why I'm using these words like "an de softness flyin away."

is a black
is a bat
is a flap

a de kerosene lamp

an it spinn
an it spinn
an it spinn

in rounn
-an it stagger-
in down

'to a gutter-
in shark
a de worl

praaaze be to
praaaze be to
paaaze be to **gg**

praaaze be to
praaaze be to
paaaze be to **gg**

de tongue curlin back
an muh face flowin empty
all muh skin cradle and cracle an ole

i is water of wood
ants
crawlin crawlin

i is spiders

black &

is fall from de top a de *praaaze be to*

tree
to de rat-hearted coco-
nut hill

so uh walk-
in an talk

-in. uh steppin
an call-

in thru
echo-

in times
that barrel and bare of my name

thru crick
crack

thru crick
crack

uh creakin-
thru crev-

ices. reach-
in for icicle light

who hant me
huh

who haunt me
huh

my head is a cross
is a cross-

road

weavin away

my ball headed head
is ancient &
black &

is fall from de top a de *praaaze be to*

hill
to de rat-hearted coco-
nut tree

so uh walk-
in an talk

-in. uh steppin
an call-

in thru
echo-

in faces
that barrel and bare of my name

thru crick
crack

thru crick
crack

uh creakin-
thru crev-

ices. reach-
in for icicle light

[You see she's breaking through, and the
rhythm has now become that train. That was
what was so amazing that night. That as soon
as she got out of that turbulence, what we
suddenly sense is a coming home, as many of
the gospel songs do.]

who hant me
huh

who haunt me

<div style="display: flex;">
<div style="width: 50%;">

who hant me
is red

who haunt me
is blue

is a man
is a moo
is a ton ton macou

is a coo
is a cow
is a cow-

itch

bub-a-dups
bub-a-dups
bub-a-dups

huh

bub-a-dups
bub-a-dups
bub-a-dups

hah

is a hearse
is a horse
is a horseman

is a trip
is a trick
is a seemless hiss

that does rattle these i:ron tracks

bub-a-dups
bub-a-dups
bub-a-dups

huh

bub-a-dups

</div>
<div style="width: 50%;">

huh

my head is a cross
is a cross-

road

who hant me
is red

who haunt me
is blue

is a man
is a moo
is a ton ton macou

is a coo
is a cow
is a cow-

itch

bub-a-dups
bub-a-dups
bub-a-dups

huh

bub-a-dups
bub-a-dups
bub-a-dups

hah

is a hearse
is a horse
is a horseman

is a trip
is a trick
is a seemless hiss

that does rattle these i:ron tracks

bub-a-dups

</div>
</div>

bub-a-dups
bub-a-dups

hah

is a scissors gone *shhhaaaaa*

under de rattle an pain

i de go
huh

i de go
shhhaaaaa

an a black curl calling my name

praaaze be to
praaaze be to
paaaze be to

sh

praaaze be to
praaaze be to
paaaze be to

shang

praaaze be to

sh

praaaze be to

gg

praaaze be to

---

bub-a-dups
bub-a-dups

huh

bub-a-dups
bub-a-dups
bub-a-dups

hah

is a scissors gone *shhhaaaaa*

[For the moment, for the first time, the sibilant song comes in and release is started. When she's been going now to become that sound that the engine makes when it ... whoo... she becomes at last the sibilance of sea and Shango. And the gutterals begin to disappear in her performance and in the poem.]

under de rattle an pain

i de go
huh

i de go
shhhaaaaa

an a black curl calling my name

praaaze be to
praaaze be to
paaaze be to

[_____]

praaaze be to
praaaze be to
paaaze be to

sh

praaaze be to

praaaze be to paaaze be to *sh* **praaaze be to** **praaaze be to** **praaaze be to** *sssssssssssssssssssssssssssssssssssssssssshhhhh* *hhhhhhhhh* > ... an de train comin in wid de rain. . . . . . ç . . .	praaaze be to paaaze be to huh praaaze be to praaaze be to paaaze be to shaaaaaa **praaaze be to** **praaaze be to** **paaaze be to** *sssssssssssssssssssssssssssssssssssssssssssshhhhh* *hhhhhhhhh* ... an de train comin in wid de rain. . .