

## **Strategies for the Presentation of Oral Traditions in Print**

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The study of literature entails several fundamental concerns. These usually include matters of creation, form, history, meaning, and significance. However, if “literature” is no longer restricted only to written works<sup>1</sup> and encompasses all works of verbal art (oral and orally based, as well as written), then other matters must also be considered. Oral traditions occur in contexts (cultural, social, linguistic), and without consideration of these contexts one cannot begin to deal with questions of function, meaning, and significance. Learning to present and analyze performances of oral traditions—at all levels—as literature may teach scholars a great deal more about how and how not to view all literature.

In the study of literature, certain forms have been privileged and have attracted most of the attention of scholars and critics. In written literature, drama, lyric and narrative poetry, and certain kinds of prose fiction (the novel and short story) dominate in Western culture. In the study of oral traditions, it has been the epic, with lesser interest in folktales and ballads. Yet the range of forms available for study is much broader. In oral tradition this may include forms as diverse as legend and proverb; folktale and belief; myth and personal narrative; riddle, joke, and anecdote. These may be found among nearly all familial, regional, occupational, social, and

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<sup>1</sup> I take literature to be verbal expression valued for its aesthetic qualities. While the term “literature” derives from a Latin word associated with writing, attempts to restrict literature today only to written materials is an appeal to the past and a denial of realistic dynamics.

ethnic groups as well as in events at which different groups interact.<sup>2</sup> Each of these traditions is important *per se*, and any one of them may shed light on much earlier texts now preserved only in written form.<sup>3</sup>

Scholars have now been collecting, analyzing, and interpreting oral traditions—and in particular, oral narrative forms—for well over 175 years.<sup>4</sup> Over this span, many views have changed, including the romantic notion that the folk are the true poets of the nation and that only marginal (rural, peasant, primitive, unlettered, illiterate) peoples have oral traditions.<sup>5</sup> Now scholars can study oral traditions from epics to sermons, from sagas to curses, from charms to beliefs. And topics such as compositional techniques, aesthetic qualities, and meaning have been and are being pursued at long last. Yet one aspect of the study of oral traditional materials has been questioned very little, if at all, since the very beginning of scholarly notice: the manner of presentation of oral traditions.

When Jakob and Wilhelm Grimm brought out their *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* (1812, 1815), the work was clearly intended for a scholarly audience. The brothers included an introduction that contained statements about how they gathered their collection of tales, how they viewed its significance, and even how much of it was appropriate to an audience of children. In 1819 they brought out a third volume to the collection containing scholarly notes for the tales. This format—a scholarly introduction, usually by the collector/editor, followed by the collection of

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<sup>2</sup> As yet there is no adequate measure of the oral traditions of any one culture as manifest in and between these different kinds of groups. Rather, there are only contributions towards this goal. Even for families, full studies would involve considerable work. Leonard Roberts's work (1959, 1974) on the Couch and Harris families serves as an excellent example. Multi-volume collections such as the *Frank C. Brown Collection of North Carolina Folklore* (White 1952-64) and James Walker's works on the Lakota (e.g. 1980, 1983) would be dwarfed by more rigorous collection of other forms and larger groups.

<sup>3</sup> The work of Milman Parry and Albert Lord has been significant in recognizing that some of the stylistic traits of the Homeric epics are directly related to their oral composition. However, the Parry-Lord collection of traditional Serbo-Croatian poetry is priceless not just because the texts provide insights into the Homeric materials but also for what they contain of South Slavic culture.

<sup>4</sup> The origins of scholarly interest in oral traditions is usually acknowledged as the publication of Jakob and Wilhelm Grimm's *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* in 1812.

<sup>5</sup> On the point, see Alan Dundes, "Who Are the Folk?" (1980:1-6).

texts *per se* and then scholarly comparative notes—set the model for collections of oral traditional materials ever since. Certainly the format has evolved somewhat over 175 years, but the changes have consisted only of minor refinements and additions based on approaches to the material. For example, introductions to recent collections have included more attention to the role of the oral traditions in the culture, to individual performers' skills, and to repertoire analysis.<sup>6</sup> Early introductions tended to focus primarily on the question of the origins of oral traditions, with a lesser interest in the transmission of the materials.<sup>7</sup> Nevertheless, this tripartite organizational format for presenting scholarly editions of oral traditions, begun in 1812, has remained the standard up to the 1980s.<sup>8</sup>

What are the problems inherent in this scheme? There are three major faults with this format for presenting oral literature: (1) the pretense of “scientific” objectivity on the part of the scholar/collector; (2) the treatment of oral traditions as discrete textual units; and (3) the decontextualization of the cultural materials. In the first place, the separation of collector/scholar from the oral traditional performer harks back to the beginnings of ethnographic collections, with the fundamental assumption being the distinction of “we” versus “they”—the familiar, literate writer as differentiated from the other, the “bearers of tradition.” Here, the pretense of scientific objectivity is created through the entire organization. The introduction is intentionally scholarly, methodical, and analytical—quite unlike the texts themselves. The writer is, by convention, dispassionate and apparently even disinterested in the materials except in a “scientific” discussion—that is, as to what the texts “reveal about” the particular informants and group. The methodology for the research is sometimes explained, usually with appropriate scholarly references for major

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<sup>6</sup> See, for example, Dorson 1967. The form is certainly not dead: Daryl Cumber Dance uses the format in *Shuckin' and Jivin'* (1978), as does the current Pantheon Fairy Tale and Folklore Library with volumes such as Abrahams 1985.

<sup>7</sup> See, for example, Sir George Webbe Dasent's introduction to Asbjornsen's collection of folktales (1888) or Andrew Lang's introduction to Margaret Hunt's translation of the Grimm tales (1884).

<sup>8</sup> This format is not unique to collections of oral literature. In fact, this pattern is the most familiar one for literary texts, whether in translation or not, whether ancient or modern. Exactly what this convention implies about contemporary readers and their ability to comprehend written texts without the scholarly (and contextualizing) frame is left to others.

theoretical questions. The culture is frequently described by way of a summary of data, including anything from climate and kinship systems to social organization and linguistic categories.

Yet this convention of distance on the part of the scholar/collector is misleading. Fundamentally, the study of oral traditions is one involving human interactions, direct as well as indirect. Value judgments and personal reactions are part of that research and should be acknowledged as such. In particular, separating the introduction from the texts tends to dramatize the division between the scholar/collector (read *literate*) and the culture from which he drew the texts (read *oral, primitive, exotic*, and so forth). That is, this format juxtaposes material written by a highly educated scholar for a literate audience with, printed next to it, oral traditional materials. It is no wonder that a reading audience sometimes finds orally collected texts very strange and generally quite different from familiar written forms—after all, the audience has just *read* the scholarly introduction, a form familiar to these readers. This organizational format works against the efficacy of the texts, either as oral tradition *or* as literature.

Furthermore, this “scientific objectivity” encourages (and is based upon) an unconscious ethnocentrism. Since the introduction is written by a scholar, (reading) audiences see print and that scholar’s tradition as the norm. In fact, they rarely question or consider the culture, values, or concerns of the collector/scholar. Indeed, the data is presented as though the collector and audience have *no* culture—which is of course impossible—because the organizational format has made it completely transparent. The pretense is that one culture can be found and collected in isolation. Instead of acknowledging that the material inevitably involves the interaction of at least two cultures, most collections pretend that oral traditions from only the one culture are being presented with scrupulous scientific care.

As to the second objection, oral traditional materials tend to be presented as discrete units, often even numbered for reference by the scholar as in collections of ballads (Child # 23), epic poetry texts (Lord # 35), folktales (originally Grimm # 21; now Aarne-Thompson 510A), or legends (Christiansen # 3040). But is what is printed in the collections (much less the indexes) really representative of traditional behavior? Surely no one performs oral literary materials that are viewed within their own culture as quantified.<sup>9</sup> What culture really enumerates narratives and songs,

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<sup>9</sup> See Dundes 1975 and Ben-Amos 1976.

or counts words, narratives, or jokes in an evening?<sup>10</sup> What audience reacts to a traditional performer with pleasure or disappointment simply because he/she has generated *x* more verses than other performers? Oral traditions are not naturally (emically) categorized in the way that most scholars have presented them.<sup>11</sup> The interest in accumulating masses of textual units (“data”) has led to confusing *knowledge* (data) for *wisdom* (understanding). Perhaps Walter Ong has in fact understated the impact of the printed word. It seems that as people have become more used to writing/print (literacy in one sense), they also have become fascinated, even mesmerized and blinded by the word as record.<sup>12</sup> Printing and newer forms such as magnetic tape and digital recording have permitted amazing accumulations of data. But to what purpose? Data accumulation does not make a superior individual or culture—only one that has more records.<sup>13</sup>

In sum, human behavior is not so neat and discrete as these textual collections seem to indicate. In fact, the representation of situated human behavior as an isolated series of texts says a good deal about the scholar’s view of the culture and the performances, including what is meaningful and

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<sup>10</sup> There are, admittedly, jokes about folklorists who tell jokes or tales by simply referring to the appropriate number. This is part of the folklore of folklorists. However, even folklorists normally utilize type numbers primarily for scholarly reference, not in performance.

<sup>11</sup> Compare, for example, the numerous folktale collections from around the world to recent, more focused studies on specific cultures: Abrahams 1983, Glassie 1982, and Gossen 1974.

<sup>12</sup> Walter Ong has written extensively on the impact of literacy; see especially 1981, 1982.

<sup>13</sup> To cite but one example from folkloristics, consider the case of Marian Roalfe Cox, who worked for several years with a team of English scholars to accumulate variants of the Cinderella tale. In 1893 she published a monograph containing 345 variants of the folktale. Folk narrative scholars eagerly expected that this definitive collection would reveal the origins of this story (and presumably, by association, other Märchen). Yet Cox’s collection could not demonstrate this lineage and therefore support any one particular theory of the origins of this tale or of folklore in general. Ironically, the frustrations over this massive collection of data convinced the Folk-Lore Society, then the dominant group of folk narrative scholars in the world, not to pursue such studies any further and thus led to the decline of English folk narrative scholarship.

significant to the scholar.<sup>14</sup> In effect, the traditional scholar has carved human interactions into familiar units, usually with little regard for the views of informants and their culture.

Finally, the texts presented *per se* are decontextualized; that is, the oral traditional materials have been removed from their original contexts and are presented simply as printed texts. Admittedly, part of the purpose of the scholarly introduction is to provide some insight into the culture (and sometimes other contributing aspects such as the performer's style). Rarely, however, does one find individual performers differentiated by their own behavior in verbal interactions—such aspects are usually noted in a summary by the scholar. Because the reading audiences are presented only with decontextualized texts, they are limited as to how they can view the material. Individual items (jokes, tales, epics) can always be approached *as texts*—that is, as written literature—since textual approaches are the only ones available. Thus, one can study form, structure, character, compositional techniques, style, and even the relationship of a particular text to the tradition as a whole. But questions of function, meaning, and significance remain speculative so long as the works are considered only textually. Since oral traditions emerge in varying contexts, one cannot truly discuss the impact of the work on the culture and the tradition until context is added. And since the traditional text-based collection format described above does not consider the social, cultural, and linguistic context of the performances, this model proves inadequate for the contemporary study of oral traditional materials.

Perhaps more significant than the processes of decontextualization (on the part of the scholar) and contextualization (on the part of the reading audience) is the fact that the texts are now outside of the subculture for which the text generates common images, ones that the performer already knows and counts upon. In this sense, the texts as they are encountered by readers are constantly being contextualized, but not recontextualized, for the texts cannot generate the same associations and meanings outside their native culture and contexts.

Since approximately 1965 scholars have begun to pay attention to

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<sup>14</sup> As a result, folklorists and anthropologists have recently begun to reconsider who should be making these decisions. The goals, materials, and meanings of cultural studies now call for collaborative efforts involving informants rather than giving way to programs institutionally superimposed by outside scholars.

oral traditions in context.<sup>15</sup> In anthropology and folklore new paradigms arose based upon linguistics (the Prague School), comparative literature (Parry and Lord's oral-formulaic theory), anthropology (the ethnography of speaking), and cultural studies in general. Many of these ideas were fused in the performance-centered approach to "verbal art."<sup>16</sup> A chief spokesman for the group of young scholars advocating the new approach was Richard Bauman, who defined "performance" as "a mode of spoken verbal communication which consists in the assumption of responsibility to an audience for a display of communicative competence. This competence rests on the knowledge and ability to speak in socially appropriate ways" (quoted in Fine 1984:47). This theoretical paradigm has a great deal to offer in the study of oral traditions, including the perception of appropriate cultural roles; the training of the traditional performer; and the heightened awareness of native language performance categories.<sup>17</sup> Yet one area in which this new paradigm has not succeeded, and indeed has not made coherent advances, is in revising the format for presentation of oral traditional materials in print.

Performance-oriented scholars have specifically addressed the issue of representing performances in print several times. Perhaps the first to question the traditional model was Dennis Tedlock, who pointed out a number of problems with traditional print conventions in his 1971 essay "On the Translation of Style in Oral Narrative." In 1972 he brought out *Finding the Center: Narrative Poetry of the Zuni Indians*, in which he introduced several print conventions in order to represent performance features used by his Zuni narrators. First, he prints the Zuni narratives in English poetic form, arguing that poetry permits the representation of silence: "What makes written prose most unfit for representing spoken narrative is that it rolls on for whole paragraphs at a time without taking a breath: there is no silence in it. To solve this problem I have broken Zuni narratives into lines..." (1972:xix). Tedlock also creates conventions to represent other elements of the oral performances (xxi):

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<sup>15</sup> Dundes 1964 is an early statement of this interest; for a history of this development and scholarship embodying it, see Fine 1984.

<sup>16</sup> For advocacy of the term "verbal art," see Bascom 1955; for popularization of the term see Bauman 1977.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Abrahams 1983, Bauman and Sherzer 1974, Glassie 1982, and Gossen 1974 for excellent examples of this scholarship.

The loudness of Zuni narratives ranges from just short of a shout to just short of a whisper. Representing this on the page is something of a problem, since some of the devices offered by our writing tradition are ambiguous: an exclamation point, for example, most often indicates something loud, but it is also appropriate after a whispered interjection. My present solution to the problem is to use small type for soft passages or words, larger type for middle-level passages, and capitals for loud passages.

In addition, he indicates changes in pitch by moving letters or words above (higher) or below (lower) the normal line. The result is a text which is a bit foreign-looking in its typographic representation (Figure 1; after Tedlock 1972:96-97).

Elizabeth Fine's dissertation, published as *The Folklore Text* in 1984, focused entirely on the question of how to represent verbal art. Ultimately she creates a print representation of a performance of an Afro-American toast ("Stagolee") to demonstrate what a performance record of a speech event should look like (Figure 2). Her keys to the representation are formidable (Figure 3) and include such aspects as paralinguistic and kinesic features as well as traditional textual characteristics. The result is a radically different kind of "text," one that is extremely difficult to read and even more difficult to appreciate fully.

The Tedlock and Fine models have several fundamental shortcomings in their approach to representing performance. First, their goals are unclear. If one goal is to represent the *original* performance as witnessed by the collector as accurately and completely as possible (in order, for example, to study performing styles, audience interaction, and the influence of context upon the performance), then translation is of secondary importance. Print conventions marking pitch and the line separations marking pauses would presumably work for the original language, and this strategy would more accurately represent the original performance. This is not to deny the value of Tedlock's translations of the Zuni oral traditions. And yet the data presented are only his English translations of the original Zuni narratives. On this ground, Alcée Fortier's early collection of Creole French folk tales (1895) is much more useful, for he publishes *both* the original French dialect stories *and* his English translations on facing pages. Fine's one text of an Afro-American toast is set down in exacting, even numbing detail—with so many different aspects represented (as best as they can be by these print conventions) that reading the toast as narrative poetry becomes significantly harder *with* all of her added features.

## FIGURE 1

•

During the day his headdress would quiver,

o———n until, in the evening

it would become still:

this was a SIGN for them.

Then they slept through the night.

•

The elder brother Payatamu hadn't come home, and

FOUR DAYS HAD PASSED.

When four days had passed

•

the Payatamu

men said

“Our elder brother hasn't come home and the days

have gone by.

Our Sun Father hasn't come up.

What should we do about this?”

•

That's what they said.

Their society chief spoke:

“Well now

let's try something, even though it might not HELP:

•

we'll ask our grandfathers

to come here.

Perhaps

one of them might find him

for us.”

That's what their society chief said.

“Indeed.”

“Which one should it be?” he said.

“Well now, our grandfather  
who lives in the north, the mountain lion:  
let’s summon him.”

•

Their society chief  
summoned the mountain lion.  
There in the north he arose, the mountain lion.

•

Coming on and on——n, he arrived at Shuun Hill.

He entered:

“My fathers, my children  
how have you been passing the days?” “Happily, our  
grandfather, so you’ve come now.”

“Yes.” “Now sit down,” they said, and they  
set out their turquoise seat for him and he sat down.

•

The society chief sat down facing him.  
The mountain lion now questioned them: “NOW, my  
CHILDREN

for what reason have you summoned ME?  
You would not summon me for no reason.  
Perhaps it is because of a WORD of some importance  
that you have summoned me.

You must make this known to me  
so that I may think about it as I pass the days,” that’s  
what the mountain lion said.

“YES, in TRUTH. . . .

If, however, Tedlock and Fine wish to impress a wider (English-language) audience with the verbal art of these oral performances, then they may face a somewhat different task. In that case, one must certainly utilize the characteristics of the target language (presumably standard English) and, to some extent, target medium.<sup>18</sup>

Tedlock's *Finding the Center*, for example, is a translation of Zuni narratives into English. In this regard, the volume seems to be aimed at an English-language reading audience. But the typographical conventions for pauses, pitch, and so forth are based on the original Zuni performances, and not on how they would be performed once they are brought over into English. Thus he has created an odd product, neither a strictly scholarly study of Zuni performance features nor a presentation of the poetic texts in English.

Fine's text of "Stagolee" does not require translation from one language to another.<sup>19</sup> Rather, she believes that a complete record of the performance should include notations of paralinguistic and kinesic features. In so doing, she is adding new material (and systems of representation), and arguing that performances represented in this manner will be better textual data. Yet she ignores the proxemics of the situation (a key part of the physical context) and most of the linguistic context leading up to and following the particular text. Further, one wonders just how much good the new notation systems dealing with her African American performer's style actually are to the reading audience. They represent a record of the performance characteristics of James Hutchinson (rendered as faithfully and accurately as possible). And yet the print representation of a text implies that Fine intends it for a reading audience. This situation opens several possibilities. The most obvious one is that a contemporary reading audience would have to read the performance record several times, concentrating on different aspects each time. Perhaps Fine believes that a reader can learn to read her text the way some musicians can read musical scores, interpreting multiple parts simultaneously. Such a facility seems unlikely for any but the most highly trained audience after some years of practice, and even then

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<sup>18</sup> I am indebted to points made by Eugene A. Nida and Burton Raffel on translation. In very different ways and with different examples, both point out the importance of knowing the target culture, audience, and language.

<sup>19</sup> Fine does maintain the performer's African American dialectal usages in her representation. As to the issues involved in this choice, see her text (135-40) and the debate between Fine and Dennis Preston cited in Fine's bibliography.

FIGURE 2

	<u>HE had his FO'ty-fo'.</u> <i>juts rt. hip out</i>	<i>rt. arm down; mimes pulling gun from lt. hip pocket—</i>
	<u>HE was REAdy.</u>	<i>—holds gun; rt. hand emphasis</i>
<i>conversational—</i>	↑ <u>Now on this ONE particular occasion</u>	<i>hip; hand stance*</i>
	<u>STAGolee was playin' cards with Billy</u>	
	<u>LYons,</u>	
	and ↑ <u>NATurally Stagolee was jest takin'</u> <i>both hands emphasis</i>	
	<u>ALL of Billy Lyons' money.</u>	<i>hip/arm stance</i>
<i>emphatic—</i>	<u>BILly got mad.</u>	<i>furrowed brow; both hands clinched, down at sides</i>
	He <u>JUMPED UP</u> and	
	a- <u>KNOCKED</u> Stagolee's Stetson <u>HAT</u> <i>claps outstretched hands</i>	
	<u>off his HEAD</u> —	<i>hip/arm stance</i>
	and-uh <u>HUGHGH-PEW!</u> <u>SPIT</u> in it! <i>clears throat, mimes spitting, both hands on hips</i>	<i>hip/arm stance</i>
<i>confidential, softer—</i>	<u>Now he coulda done anything in</u>	<i>hip/hand stance—</i>
	<u>the WOR-LD but that to StagoLEE</u> —	<i>(- - -)</i>
	<u>Stagolee looked over at him</u> —	<i>struts 1 step; assumes hip/arm stance—</i>
<i>1/2 step higher crescendo</i>	<u>gave him that E--vil evil EYE</u> —	<i>(- - -) narrows 1 eye, juts out chin</i>
<i>faster</i>	<u>And Billy got to pleadin',</u>	<i>fists clinched at chest</i>
<i>loud, almost sobbing—</i>	<u>"PLEASE Mr. Stagolee,</u>	<i>fingers interlocked as in prayer, upturned eyes—</i>
	<u>I've got a wife and three chillun! PLEASE!"</u> <i>(- - -)</i>	
	[chuckles]	

<i>lower—</i>	<u>Stagolee say,</u>	<i>hip/hand, rt. hip out—</i>
	<u>“Well, that’s cool—”</u>	<i>(- - -) slight shrug of shoulder, eyes down, holds tight-lipped frown after “cool”</i>
	[loud laughter]	
<i>crisp—</i>	“because the <u>LORD’S gonna take care of</u> <small><i>eyes up, throws rt. hand up, shakes it</i></small>	<i>hip/hand stance</i>
	<u>your CHILLun,</u>	
	and <u>I gonna take care of your WIFE.”</u> <small><i>thumps chest with fingers</i></small>	<i>holds tight-lipped smile, eyebrows up, hip/hand stance</i>
	[laughter]	
<i>matter of fact—</i>	<u>That’s JEST what he did.</u>	<i>hip/hand; rt. hand points in emphasis</i>
	He <u>BLEW Billy Lyons away.</u> <small><i>flings rt. hand up in air</i></small>	<i>hip/hand</i>
<i>cheerful—</i>	<u>WELL, later on that DAY Stagolee went over</u>	
	<u>to Billy Lyons ↑HOUSE.</u>	<i>lt. hand on hip, rt. arm down</i>
	<u>He KNOCKED on the do’.</u>	<i>knocks rt. hand in air as he stamps rt. foot on floor three times, lt. hand on hip</i>
	<u>Mrs. Lyons come to the do’.</u>	<i>pulls rt. hand back to open door, lt. hand on hip</i>
<i>rapidly</i>	He say, <u>“My name is Stagolee</u> <small><i>taps chest, rt. fingers</i></small>	
	your <u>husband’s dead</u> the <u>Lord’s</u> <small><i>thumbs out at hips</i>      <i>points up,</i></small>	
	<u>gonna take care of your chillun</u> <small><i>rt. finger</i></small>	
	and <u>I’m movin’ in.”</u> <small><i>taps chest, rt. fingers</i></small>	
	[chuckles]	<i>both hands out as if to silence objections—</i>
<i>truthful</i>	<u>Jest what he did.</u>	<i>(- - -) cocks head</i>

FIGURE 3

*Paralinguistic Features*

words in left margin

"crisp"

↑ ↑ ↑ ↑

↑- -↑

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ALL CAPS

ris<sup>i</sup>n<sup>g</sup> letters

hyphens between letters in a word

end of line

commas, periods, exclamation marks within a line

question mark

Indicates vocal characterizers and voice qualities. A word followed by a dash indicates that the feature continues until the next description. Words without dashes apply only to the line to the right.

Indicates clipped, stacatto-like articulation.

Indicates four degrees of falsetto. / ↑ / is slight; / ↑↑ / is extreme.

When more than one word is said in falsetto, these symbols bracket the falsetto passage.

Indicates a rasp, or harsh, guttural, grating quality.

Indicates words said with greater emphasis or stress.

Indicates a rise in pitch on those letters.

Indicate that the preceding vowel is held longer than usual. The longer a sound is stretched, the more hyphens appear.

Indicates a major pause of about three-quarters of a second. Lines followed by audience response have slightly longer pauses. Indented lines are used when a line is too long for the page; pause only at the end of the indented line.

Indicate a barely perceptible pause. Do not pause nearly as long as at the end of a line.

Used only for questions with a rising pitch at the end. Questions delivered with a falling or sustained pitch are marked by falling or sustained juncture symbols.

|                                                   |                                                                                                                                                                         |
|---------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| / — / or /?/                                      | Indicates rising juncture; pitch on last phoneme rises slightly.                                                                                                        |
| /—/                                               | Indicates sustained juncture; pitch of last phoneme is retained.                                                                                                        |
| ./ /, & !/                                        | Indicates falling juncture; pitch of last phoneme falls or fades away.                                                                                                  |
| <i>Kinesic Features</i>                           |                                                                                                                                                                         |
| words in right margin                             | Describes movements that occur with the underlined words in the line to the left.                                                                                       |
| words in rt. margin followed by dash—             | The movements immediately preceding the dash and following the preceding semi-colon continue for the next line.                                                         |
| (- - -)                                           | Indicates the same movements as the line above.                                                                                                                         |
| hip/arm stance                                    | Left hand on hip, right arm across chest with hand closed. See Figure 6.                                                                                                |
| hip/hand stance                                   | Left hand on hip, right hand held up at shoulder level to emphasize points. See Figure 6.                                                                               |
| left hand on hip, rt. arm forms swan neck to side | See Figure 7. A stereotyped stance for a sexy woman.                                                                                                                    |
| strut                                             | Leans back throwing his chest and head up; swings arms in a slow exaggerated rhythmic way; bends knees as his heels hit the ground, giving a slight spring to the walk. |
| stylized "cool" walk                              | Involves the same springy step of the strut, but the arm swing is not as exaggerated nor does he throw his chest and chin up.                                           |
| stylized running pose                             | Freezes in the first step of a run, jumping down on his right foot while pulling both bent arms back and snapping fingers on both hands.                                |
| arms crooked                                      | Arms bent, akimbo; fists closed.                                                                                                                                        |

there are problems with this approach.<sup>20</sup> A more unlikely possibility would be that Fine believes that the audience can not only read her text of “Stagolee,” but perform it. This assumption would violate one of the fundamental tenets of oral tradition—that it is spread face-to-face, orally. One hopes that such a recycling is not at all what is intended by those interested in performance studies and the communication of oral traditions.

Ultimately, Fine’s model of representing oral traditions in print is based upon *more* data: adding paralinguistic and kinesic features to the text. That is, a more “accurate” record of an oral performance is understood as including features beyond the text. But simply more is not necessarily better (the data versus knowledge distinction). Representation of any cultural behavior is necessarily selective on the part of the recorder, whether the person is a missionary, novelist, ethnographer, film-maker, or native of the culture. *More* (technology, data, views, texts) is not necessarily what is needed.

Finally, and ironically, neither Tedlock nor Fine resolves any of the problems associated with the original tripartite format of presentation—because both authors use it. Both offer scholarly introductions. Fine focuses on one text, while Tedlock provides an entire volume of them. Although they present them in new and different typographical formats, they are still isolated as data. Fine concludes her work with extensive notes and a bibliography, Tedlock with notes.

Thus the models of representation so far pursued by performance advocates do not solve the existing problems in the presentation of oral traditional materials. Is there a manner, then, of presenting oral traditions that will avoid the objections cited above? What is desired is a strategy that will engage and involve the reader at once as an audience. The medium of presentation must be print, and the audience is expected to encounter it as individual, silent readers.<sup>21</sup> The goal is to translate oral traditions from one subculture into appropriate print forms so that a wider, reading audience can experience these verbal artistic expressions (subject to the limitations of

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<sup>20</sup> Consider, for example, that Fine does not include aspects such as proxemics in her system and that for many forms of oral performance such aspects are particularly relevant. Does this mean the addition of another layer of data for each text?

<sup>21</sup> The argument for individual, silent reading is based simply upon contemporary cultural norms and is subject to change and variation according to the target culture and time.

translation).<sup>22</sup> This is no simple task, because the process of translation may involve translation of media (oral performance to print), language, and cultural associations.<sup>23</sup> In addition, there should be no pretense of objectivity in the description of cultures, people, and texts. Verbal performances should be situated in cultural, social, and linguistic context rather than enumerated and separated. If at all possible, no new print conventions should be necessary.<sup>24</sup>

It should become clear now why certain oral traditional forms have historically been more privileged than others. Long narrative forms—such as epic, ballad, saga, folktale—can most easily stand alone and engage the reading audience in the story. Thus, even if the traditional tripartite print format omitted the scholarly frame, the reader might accept these oral traditions *as* literature as well as *in* literature. This format (texts alone), however, seems to work best in an anthology devoted to a particular genre in that the collection provides comparative materials for the audience.<sup>25</sup> Even this format, however, fails to resolve some of the problems. First, it is generally limited to long narrative genres, and thus restricts the presentation of cultural expressions to ones most like written literature in terms of length and form. Unfamiliar and short genres, whether rhymes and limericks or customs and proverbs, tend to be ignored—not on the grounds of aesthetics, poetics, or cultural significance but simply because they are not commonly read as literature. Second, because the verbal art is

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<sup>22</sup> On this point Fine cites Nida's discussion of formal and dynamic equivalence; ultimately, Fine argues for formal equivalence. Raffle (1988:21) points out the fallacy of the belief that one can truly have formal equivalence; there and elsewhere (1971) he argues for translation more in line with what Nida calls dynamic equivalence. The goal is to translate the verbal art into a target language and culture and in so doing to create as closely as possible an equivalent meaning and effect for the new audience.

<sup>23</sup> The translation of medium and language are self-explanatory. On cultural associations, see Nida 1964a:4, where he considers how to translate a "simple" comic strip (Maggie and Jiggs), especially Jiggs's favorite food.

<sup>24</sup> This is simply an acknowledgment of the traditions and options already existing in writing and print.

<sup>25</sup> This is one of the reasons why Andrew Lang's colored fairy books, which are devoid of scholarship and are simply accumulations of fairy tales from around the world, succeeded, whereas competing collections by Joseph Jacobs and E. S. Hartland, for example, did not. Other examples dealing with epic, ballad, and other forms could easily be cited.

still presented as discrete texts, the (reading) audience is limited to consideration of the oral tradition in textual form, not in context. And while in an anthology the reader may be able to see relationships between and among the texts, the reading audience has little opportunity to relate the texts to the greater culture, its people, or its other forms of artistic expression. Thus the anthology proves not to be very much better than other strategies for the presentation of oral traditions.

There is one format that seems to offer some hope. It is rather unusual compared to the traditional scholarly format, yet it resolves most of the problems associated with the translation and representation of oral traditions. This format involves contextualization via a personal narrative on the part of the scholar/collector. Utilizing the frame of a personal experience story engages the audience at once in a traditional, familiar, and universal form: narrative. The reading audience is already accustomed to reading (as well as hearing) narratives. Further, the readers encounter the “foreign” culture through an intermediary, an intercessor, who is familiar in that he/she is a member of their own (target, reading) culture. In this sense, translation need not focus so much on formal versus dynamic equivalence of the text, since the audience encounters the text framed by a larger narrative. This frame helps situate the oral traditions inside the experiences of the narrator. Further, a personal experience narrative is, by nature, a personal story—and therefore cannot be scientific, “objective.” Thus “scholarly distance” and the “pursuit of science” are eliminated. Texts are presented as part of the experience of the collector, ordered in whatever manner he/she wishes; they are not accumulated and quantified. There is less need for new printing conventions, since personal experience narratives are already a familiar genre in both oral and literary traditions. To be sure, the collector still faces the choice of how best to represent verbal performances on the page—as drama, prose, poetry, or some combination of them. But there is less need to depict the performance characteristics of a particular narrator by way of complex orthographic devices when the oral tradition is being presented by a literate collector who has the opportunity to describe these characteristics in their context as part of the frame. Finally, and obviously, all performances can be situated in cultural, social, and linguistic context.

Two very brief examples may help illustrate this strategy:

I. Several years ago, one of the folklore graduate students at Indiana University invited a number of others over for a birthday party. The host’s apartment was soon crowded with twenty-odd grad students along with a number of spouses, dates, and friends. Most brought some form of alcohol (beer, wine) and stashed it

in the kitchen, and their coats in a bedroom, before joining the others. Small groups formed in several areas, primarily in the kitchen and the living room. One of the groups (of which I was a part) stood in the living room, alternating occasional jokes with complaints about particular courses and professors. As another couple entered the room, one person asked “*How many hillbillies [residents, presumably natives of Kentucky] does it take to change a light bulb?*” (I began to smile, anticipating a clever response.) “*None. Why would people with no electricity bother to change a light bulb?*” The joke was greeted with a modest amount of laughter and was followed by another light-bulb joke in response.

II. My wife and I are both Southerners, and when we finished graduate school we hoped to move south. Louisiana certainly was south, but, with the exception of one cousin, we were still nearly a thousand miles from our closest family. The birth of our daughter showed us a great deal more about the special culture into which we had moved.

We discovered in the fall that we were expecting and spread the good news among family and friends, neighbors and colleagues. Everyone, especially those in the neighborhood and at the university, was pleased, and looked forward to the baby’s arrival. The fall semester was relatively uneventful, and we took some time to make preparations for the baby. In the spring, Margaret suggested that we prepare the nursery over Mardi Gras (a week-long school holiday), so we painted the room and moved furniture around as needed. By that time, one of the secretaries in her office had already predicted that we would have a girl.

“Why?”

“*Because Margaret sits so long at a computer terminal. There’s something about the radiation from those screens. They just seem to cause girls.*”<sup>26</sup>

Over the Easter holidays, Margaret wanted to take advantage of the beautiful weather to do some gardening. So we went out and bought a bunch of shrubs and trees and started to dig up the front yard. Barbara, our next door neighbor, saw Margaret—then eight months pregnant—and came running over.

“*You shouldn’t be digging in the yard. It’ll bring on the baby.*”

“Oh.” This was a good enough excuse for Margaret to take a break and watch while I dug and planted for a while. Soon, however, she decided to take a walk around the neighborhood. When she came back, our neighbor across the street, Gail, came over to check on her.

“*You know you really shouldn’t go walking like that. That will bring on the baby.*”

The baby was not quite so eager, though. During that spring semester I felt obliged to announce to my classes that we were expecting a child and that I might

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<sup>26</sup> The remark was likely based on the fact that recent births to computer science faculty had all been girls. However, since Margaret was one of only two female faculty and the only one of them pregnant within the last four years, the generalization was based on the assumption that male faculty using computer terminals generated female children. This relationship was still valid in our case, so presumably the prediction was still good.

miss a class whenever that occurred. My students immediately became interested—not in missing school, but in what we were going to have.

“Do you know what you’re going to have ?”

“No, we didn’t have an ultrasound scan.”

“*You don’t need all that fancy equipment. Just tie your wedding ring on a string and hang it over her stomach. The way the string swings will tell you whether it will be a boy or a girl.*” Other students added that it could also be done with a needle on a string.<sup>27</sup> We resisted the temptation to discover the sex of the baby this way. Nevertheless, another secretary also predicted that we would have a girl.

“Why ?”

“*Because of the way Margaret’s carrying the baby. When they carry high, it’ll be a girl. When they’re low and wide, it’s a boy.*”

By now, I could hardly wait to see if all the predictions were going to be accurate. Finally, on April 18, Margaret went into labor. When we checked into the maternity ward the head nurse there also announced that we were going to have a girl.

“Why ?”

“*Phase of the moon. Last weekend was a full moon and we had all boys. This weekend we’re due for girls.*”

She later confirmed her prediction based on how Margaret was carrying the baby. By 4:00 p.m. that afternoon she and all the others were proven correct.

There are a number of points that need to be made about these examples. First, they were selected because both the expressions of oral tradition and the resulting overall narratives are short, and thus manageable within the scope of a short paper. In point of fact, the “texts” here are a joke and several folk beliefs, not extended narratives. Nevertheless, they are bona fide oral traditions collected in southern Indiana and Louisiana. The overall effect of the narrative may be unrepresentative in that it is telescoped, with too much of the text focusing on the collector himself, rather than the cultures under consideration. That is an unavoidable problem with the notion of a “short example.”

Second, the texts are symmetrical expressions. The riddle joke is in the form of question and answer, a binary opposition.<sup>28</sup> The second example includes several manifestations of folk belief, expressed in a binary structure: if a, then b (if you dig in the garden when you’re eight months

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<sup>27</sup> Other variations included using either partner’s wedding ring and having to perform the ritual only in the spot where the pregnancy began. The meaning of the swinging varied because different families seemed to interpret the same motion differently.

<sup>28</sup> For more on the structure of the riddle in general, see Dundes and George 1975.

pregnant, this will bring on the baby). This structure is common to expressions and belief systems of many other cultures around the world. Neither the form nor the themes (in the first, regional identity; in the second, pregnancy and childbirth) are unique to a particular culture.

Third, Indiana Hoosiers are no more boastful or egocentric than other groups. Indeed this was one of the few times when such an expression of the “difference” between Hoosiers and “hillbillies” was expressed to me. Similarly, Louisiana Cajuns are neither more ignorant nor more superstitious than other American ethnic subcultures. None of the friends, students, or neighbors quoted above holds less than a high school diploma and most of the informants have at least two years of college. Literacy (in Cajun French or English) therefore seems to be very definitely *not* the issue. In fact, most of the friends and students in the second example are conversant in Cajun French as well as English but were forced to perform in English since we were not fluent in their other tongue. Indeed, as Deborah Tannen has suggested, “oral” and “literate” may be more akin to strategies (1982b) than states of consciousness (Ong 1982). “Oral” and “literate” here do not differentiate cultures but worldviews, *strategies for dealing with situations*. Although I had been training for a couple of years when the first example occurred and had experience collecting already, I had not heard the Hoosier-hillbilly rivalry expressed in performance. And later, although I had worked as a folklorist in southern Louisiana for a year and a half, I had not encountered the range of beliefs that emerged from neighbors, students, and colleagues during this term. Yet this “folk knowledge” (if you will pardon the term) was there to be used when needed. Unlike literate knowledge, no one accumulates it (as in libraries and private collections). Folk knowledge may seem to be contradictory, frustrating, and irrational—according to one logic. But there is an internal and consistent logic underlying it.<sup>29</sup> And such knowledge always remains available to those in the community.

Further, the oral traditions were all expressed to meet a need. At first, I thought that the riddle joke was told to help bond a group of graduate students from around the world, in Bloomington for similar training, by forcing them to view themselves as Hoosiers in contrast to the “hillbillies” of Kentucky, a regional rival. And to be sure, the joke did serve this purpose. But *in context*, there is substantially more to the joke. The performer began the joke as a new couple entered the room—in this case, a male grad student and his wife, both of whom were from Kentucky.

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<sup>29</sup> See Toelken 1976 and Glassie 1982 for excellent examples of this point.

The performer knew this, and the joke on hillbillies—Kentuckians—then was selected from the performer’s repertoire because it was appropriate. Here it served several functions simultaneously. It still served to bond the graduate students together by laughing at the neighboring “hillbillies.” Numerous rivalries around the United States and world exist that generate such jokes and blason populaires.<sup>30</sup> And yet the joke served, in context, as a device to invite the newly arrived couple to join an already established group in their ongoing activity (conversation and joke-telling). The insult to Kentuckians invited an approach and a verbal response. In fact, the couple did join our group, but without responding (themselves) with another light-bulb joke immediately. That is, they chose to accept the invitation to the group activity without responding to the invitation to respond to the insult to their home. Thus this simple two-line joke, when described in context, has multiple functions and meanings—and more significance than a textual record of the event can possibly indicate in and of itself.<sup>31</sup>

Likewise, there is more to the folk beliefs about pregnancy than meets the eye. The warnings from our neighbors Gail and Barbara about what behavior would “bring on the baby” were expressions of concern that Margaret might be doing too much. Yet instead of simply saying that, they used expressions based in cultural authority, not personal feelings. Certainly, their attitudes may have been a holdover from an earlier generation that recommended longer periods of rest and inactivity for women going through pregnancy and childbirth. Yet expressing their beliefs in a culturally traditional form was an appropriate means to indicate concern without making the message too personal.

The other folk beliefs dealt with how to reveal the gender of an unborn baby. Explaining the full significance of this practice would require beginning with a cultural history of the Cajuns in southern Louisiana and their struggle to retain a distinct identity under hostile conditions. In short, however, the Cajuns highly value the family, including additions to it. Large families are common, with the average family in Lafayette Parish containing about six children. Such beliefs serve as a source of traditional wisdom and can shape the family’s expectations for the birth of the child. Both male and female children are valued among Cajuns (albeit somewhat differently), so the prediction of a girl was not, to my knowledge, a

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<sup>30</sup> See, for example, Fuller 1981.

<sup>31</sup> For another example of the complexity of oral traditions performed in context, see Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1975.

particular kind of wish for us. All of the predictions were based upon natural signs (from the lunar cycle and its relationship to childbirth to how the baby is carried in the womb). The task, then, is to read and interpret them correctly. There are multiple signs available for analysis, and this richness may be indicative of the relative importance of the event within the culture.

These very brief illustrations hardly constitute more than a hint at a strategy for presenting oral traditions in print. Perhaps, however, they at least point out how limiting texts, and especially just those privileged forms most like literature, can be for the understanding of other cultures. With records of performances in context presented through the collector's narrative, an audience has a greater opportunity to understand the value of other verbal forms and traditional performances.

There are some ramifications of this proposal that need to be addressed in conclusion. First, in terms of impact, this format could help change how fieldwork itself is performed. Collecting would no longer be something that could be done on quick visits (days or weeks), as a tourist might do in visiting a strange culture. The task now becomes a matter of knowing different languages (perhaps), cultures (certainly), and their respective worldviews. The very notion of "knowing" multiple groups or regions, even within the United States, is a huge task.

Second, the personal experience narrative *can* work as a strategy for presenting the oral traditions in print to the wider reading audience. The scholar does become something of a performer (although perhaps not as dramatically as my illustrations suggest), but then what he is doing is bringing his work before an audience of his own design. There is no wholesale change, however, since it has always been the collector/scholar who has won praise or damnation for collections, not the culture or the informants. What has changed is the discarding of the pretense of scientific objectivity, of distance from the culture under study. Because the collector is now also the narrator, such distance is a disadvantage.

Third, the proposed narrative format avoids the quest for more complex print formats proposed by Tedlock and Fine. What becomes significant is not better records in and of themselves—more data, presumably recorded with more equipment—but more skill on the part of the ethnographer in making connections and expressing them clearly in the narrative. Thus Henry Glassie's presentation of a Northern Ireland community in *Passing the Time in Ballymenone* (1982) is radically different from the models proposed by Tedlock and Fine, while still conveying much of what those models strive to convey.

Finally, this format would seem to work for any verbal form. Dance, music, drama, and other multi-media forms may also be worth considering, but virtually every genre of oral tradition (from belief to epic) can be presented in this fashion. Perhaps if more fieldworkers utilize such a strategy, future scholars will not be limited to only a few privileged forms. There will still be genres preferred by any particular scholar, but hopefully there will also be data on other cultural expressions as well as on how the forms interrelate. This wide-angle perspective would then open up literature to a true study of its verbal art.

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