

ON THE BORDERS OF ORAL AND WRITTEN ART

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"Folklore and literature"--the phrase links two fields of study, suggesting that they are similar enough to be meaningfully compared. Specialists in each field, however, tend to view the other with ignorance and suspicion; as a result, "Studies" of folklore and literature more often resemble warfare than scholarship. The time has come to call a truce and seek out the reasons for the war.

Even at the level of nomenclature a basic confusion exists. Both "folklore" and "literature" are vague terms which can be applied too broadly to allow for a useful comparison. "Folklore" denotes traditional forms of entertainment, such as ballads and folktales, but also includes unofficial customs, survival techniques, and beliefs current in any culture. "Literature" designates not only written art, but also anything that is written. Here I will set strict limits on both terms: this study deals exclusively with the artistic uses of folklore and literature. My purpose is to redefine the boundaries between oral and written narrative art.

The problem of boundaries cuts far deeper than any dispute over the choice and meaning of a few key words. Folklorists and literary critics must share an equal measure of blame for the situation as it now stands, for as much as they have tried to establish oral entertainment as a category of art, both groups continue to approach the folktale, the ballad, and the oral epic as if these genres were distinctly different from art. In recent years this situation has grown dangerous: critics have paid lip service to the idea that oral and written art operate according to similar principles. Yet without informing their readers, the same critics have employed methods based on the assumption that the two processes have little in common. A look at the general trends of past scholarship will illustrate the problem.

Historically, the study of folklore and literature has focused on the identification of folklore in literature. Folklore in literature is a detective game: its object is to find traces of oral tradition buried in written art. It can be a worthy and demanding study in its own right--one which requires a thorough knowledge of both oral and written art traditions for its success. But it rests on an assumption that I challenge: that folklore and literature are so distinct that they can be clearly separated in a single text. Folklore in literature studies are instructive here because they show how past critics who claim to find both oral and written art in a single work distinguish between the two. There are two basic forms to this detective game, each with its own set of rules.

A. The Populist-Historical Approach. Some scholars sift through literary records in the attempt to isolate songs, rhymes, and stories which originated among the "folk." Such work can be of great importance in establishing the existence of oral narratives at certain times and places in the past. Literary sources often are the only means of providing historical depth for recently recovered items of folklore.

In such studies, the folklorist uses the artist as an informant and treats the work of art as an historical document. The text is simply a fact; the author's style is unimportant. Any other written record--a newspaper, the transcript of a witch trial, a diary--can be used in much the same way.

This search for sources is literary only in the broadest sense--as the study of documents which are read. Insofar as "literature" denotes the study of art, source studies are not literary; they either ignore the artistic aspect of the source entirely, or look upon art as an impediment, a destructive force which corrupts the purity of the lore and which must be weeded out before the lore is considered authentic.

B. The Elitist Approach. Other critics, who define art as the product of only the greatest literary minds, approach the study of folklore in literature with an opposite bias. Here folklore is unearthed simply to

be discarded. Tradition is a lifeless skeleton which the true artist fills out with flesh and blood, and into which he breathes the life which justifies the critic's study. The artist transforms the contents of folklore and transcends the limits of tradition.

With such an argument, Margaret Schlauch lauded the superiority of Chaucer's "Man of Law's Tale" to the folktale (AT 706) on which it is based:

It remained for Chaucer, however, to add the greatest quality of all: to infuse into the quaint, traditional plot the pathos of sentient and suffering human beings; to elevate what was dead and conventional into the realm of art.¹

Schlauch made this pronouncement without having studied the style of a single oral tale. The folk artist was judged inferior without a trial.

The two approaches outlined above are remarkably different in their biases, yet remarkably similar in their assumptions. They share a single major premise which can be reduced to the following equation:

$$\text{Literature} - \text{Art} = \text{Folklore}$$

Folklore is anything but art. Both approaches define written art as creative, varied, fluid, and individualistic, and characterize folklore as uninventive, repetitious, static, and communal.

Since the late nineteenth century, growing numbers of folklorists have recognized that oral performances are artistic events which draw on the talents of gifted individuals.² There are poor storytellers as surely as there are poor writers, but the best folk narrators, such as Eamon O'Burc, Peig Sayers, Natal'ja O. Vinokurova, Zsuzsánna Palkó, cannot be considered artless.

Once we have accepted the premise that the balladeer and the tale teller are artists, just as the novelist and the academic poet are, we can seriously ask what distinguishes written from oral art. It is

time to reexamine the scholarly tests which have set the folk and the literary artists at opposite ends of the creative rainbow. I shall now take a close look at the eight criteria most often used to build walls between oral and written art; then I shall try to determine if the boundaries marked by these walls match the contours of reality, or if they exist only in the minds of men whose thoughts have been compartmentalized by prejudice.

1. Definition by Medium: Voice vs. Print.

Scholars traditionally have taken the most literal interpretation possible, and simply have assumed that literature signifies a written artwork, while folklore refers to an oral one. This is the easiest means of distinguishing between the two: it relies solely on physical evidence.

In the nineteenth century and for most of the twentieth, folk art and illiteracy were considered inseparable. The true teller of folktales was supposed to be innocent of print; the only means by which he got his art was from the mouths of others. Jakob Grimm, Cecil Sharp, and hundreds of others writing more recently (including Albert Lord) stand firm in their belief that true folk art belongs only to those who cannot read.

In the eyes of the Historic-Geographic school, the printer was the enemy of folklore, and the Finns discredited all oral tales based on written ones. Kaarle Krohn's Folklore Methodology drew a strict line between folklore and literature, even in cases where printed versions had a demonstrable effect on the folk story:

Now and then a hybrid form occurs in which it is extremely difficult to sort the literary aspect from the folk aspect. For lack of more genuine evidence this hybrid form may serve, but it must by all means be checked with great care and must be segregated temporarily³

Following the precepts of Krohn, Martti Haavio produced a tale type study for which he collected hundreds of oral versions. But he refused to consider a large number of tales drawn ultimately from print, even when the tellers could not read and had gotten their book stories from other oral tellers. As a result, Haavio's

study was a poor reflection of the tale as it actually existed in oral circulation.⁴

Within the Finnish school, only Walter Anderson considered both written and oral sources to be of equal value and sought to strike a balance in his studies so that both were seen to be inseparable, organically related partners in the oral expression of Western societies. And only since the studies of Phillips Barry began to register in readers' minds has it become clear that folklore is not a steady state, but is a process in which a work of written art can become a work of oral art with the passage of time.

Folk narrators themselves do not distinguish their tales as written or oral in origin. The illiterate Hungarian narrator Zsuzsánna Palkó retold "book tales" which had been read to her, transforming the originals into individually styled creations which met her community's standard for oral performance.⁵ Mrs. Palkó's nephew, György Andrásfalvi, was one of the best-read members of the same community. Yet Andrásfalvi's literacy did not impair his acknowledged talent as an oral artist.⁶ Studying folksingers in Maine, Eckstorm and Barry discovered that "the favorable results in tradition are in direct ratio to the intelligence and literacy of the singers."⁷ Even in the most traditional societies, writing exerts its influence on oral performance. By ignoring this fact, scholars have separated two means of artistic communication which in reality are closely intertwined.

Most critics now admit that literary and oral artistry overlap; but there are many who hold that oral and written art are so fundamentally different that no individual can possibly master both forms of expression. Albert B. Lord emphatically states:

It is conceivable that a man might be an oral poet in his younger years and a written poet later in life, but it is not possible that he be both an oral and a written poet at any given time in his career. The two by their very nature are mutually exclusive.⁸

Based on years of fieldwork, Lord's findings deserve consideration. However, no one has given the question of "ambidextrous" artistry the attention it deserves. It is well known, for example, that many of the most famous figures of the past--including Robert Burns, Abraham Lincoln, and Mark Twain--were praised for their great talents as both oral and written artists. In the most focused study of this subject yet printed, Sandra K. D. Stahl surveys the oral and written texts of a small-town storyteller whose talents are manifest in both forms of expression.⁹ Stahl's study is important: one man's written and oral versions of the same story stand side by side here, allowing us to judge for ourselves the difference in dynamics which characterized the two media.

Research is bridging the hypothetical chasm between written and oral artistry. It now seems clear that scholars have failed to find any continuity between the two media simply because they have failed to look for it.

2. Fixity vs. Fluidity. Neither the ability to read nor the mastery of writing can of itself rob the narrator of his oral art. Nevertheless, there is one aspect of the written word which has a tremendous altering influence on oral tradition: fixity. Once printed, a written work never changes. As long as people care to read it, a book will have, word for word, the identical story to tell at each "performance." An oral text, however, is bound to vary, even when it is memorized, as ballads normally are.

The intent of the oral artist may be to retell his story without variation, and he may in fact think he has done so. For example, when asked if they changed their tales from telling to telling, many of Lord's informants insisted that they did not.¹⁰ Azadovskii speaks of certain Russian narrators who strive for fixed texts, attempting to repeat a given story verbatim in every performance.¹¹ The idea of fixity, and even the attempt at it, are therefore not unique to literature.

All else aside, there remains the problem of the reality of fixity, and here no one can deny that, once accepted in an oral community, one version of a printed tale exerts an influence comparable to that of many oral

versions. Oral artists and performers will often look upon a printed tale read aloud as simply another oral variant of a familiar story, but as they continue to hear it repeated, the book tale becomes far more influential than any single oral performance.¹²

Literature exerts its most tenacious hold on the content of oral narrative. Form and style do not translate so easily from the written to the spoken word.¹³ As written tales filter into an oral community, they tend to hamper the oral teller's freedom to vary the main outline of his story. Folklore, however, will not stop being folklore as it moves toward stability of content. Oral artistry dies when, and only when, print is held sacred.

3. Complexity. Another assumption often made by scholars is that folk art is, for some reason, simpler than literature; that the folktale, the ballad, and the oral epic arise from an impulse which is naive and lacks artifice. Three different groups of critics use complexity as a criterion in separating the literary aspects from the folkloric core of a given work. Depending on the biases and preconceptions of the critic, the alleged simplicity of oral art can be a virtue or a vice.

To the early Romantics like Grimm and Herder, the simplicity of folklore signified its superiority to written literature. Those who believed that civilization had corrupted and obscured basic human values saw in folk art the relics of a better time and situation, when people created an artistic world which focused unwaveringly on the essential elements of life. The art of the folk was not marred by references to social mobility, politics, or the various cultural baggage of highbrow society which breeds complex, but decadent art.

On the other hand, elitist critics look on the simplicity of oral art as the product of simple minds incapable of deep thought. Reflective (or mimetic) literature, which seeks to imitate reality, is the product of sophisticated, civilized minds. In comparison, the folktale is a crude escapist fantasy which does not confront the deepest questions. Folk-

tales belong to children or to adults with childlike minds. With such definition of folklore in mind, Roger Sherman Loomis maintained that the Arthurian romances were much too well wrought and complex to have "originated in the fancies of plowmen, goose-girls, blacksmiths, miswives, or yokels of any kind."¹⁴

There is a third, less-biased approach, which sees oral art as an evolutionary stepping stone toward written art. The Chadwicks, Veselovsky, and others have argued that oral art is simpler than literature only because it represents an earlier stage in the development of civilization.¹⁵ Oral literature is not necessarily better or worse than literature, but it is simpler. André Jolles canonized this concept in Einfache Formen (Simple Forms), where he identified nine basic oral genres which develop spontaneously from the expressive needs of man.¹⁶ As societies grew increasingly sophisticated, the simple forms gave way to written genres which met the same expressive needs.

"Simple forms for simple people": some of the best contemporary folklorists continue to live by this rule. As recently as 1969, Francis Lee Utley recommended teaching folklore to reluctant English students. According to Utley, oral art communicates the same themes as does "high art," but does so in a simple way which the undereducated can understand. After showing that "The Wife of Usher's Well" (Child 79) treats the same themes found in Elizabethan tragedy, Utley concludes: "Thus, by comparing a simple form [i.e., the ballad] in its variants with a complex Elizabethan tragic form, we may highlight irony and tragedy. . . ." ¹⁷ Utley's observations are based on a faulty comparison. "The Wife of Usher's Well" may indeed seem simple when set next to a Shakespearean tragedy. As a rule, five-stanza ballads are simpler than five-act dramas. It is not the nature of folk poetry, but the nature of the ballad genre which makes this ballad simple. Any literary ballad--by Wordsworth, Goethe, or Auden--is bound to seem simple when compared to King Lear. On the other, hand, folktales can easily surpass King Lear in length and in complexity of action when told by great narrators in vital oral communities. Zsuzsánna Palkó once told a version of "I Don't Know" (AT 314 and AT 532) which lasted nearly twelve hours, and which

deeply moved her audience, living in their memories for years.¹⁸

Readers who do not believe that distinguished tale-tellers can reach great complexity of plot and an accompanying beauty of expression should consult the Highland Scots tales collected by Campbell of Islay or some of the longer tales in Seán Ó'Súilleabháin's Folktales of Ireland.¹⁹ I once read Ó'Súilleabháin's translation of Eamon O'Burc's Ceatach to a college-educated audience; foundering in the intricacies of the plot, my hearers asked me to backtrack several times. Surely, there are some very complex aspects to well-told oral art.

Critics of folk art may still argue that complexity of plot cannot compensate for the complexity of thought found in mimetic (realistic) literature. But it may be a very narrow-minded prejudice on the part of modern readers which assumes that the esthetic of reflection is superior to the esthetic of action. The Iliad, most Chaucer's writings, and much of the work of such modern "realists" as Hemingway and Stephen Crane are similarly action oriented. Critics of these works have not found them wanting in complexity. If the same critics would suspend their prejudices and take an impartial look at some real folktales--not the sort one finds in bedtime storybooks--they would discover equal depths. Assuming that complexity is found only in high art, we can only conclude that there is much high art in folklore.

4. Style and Structure. There is an almost universal agreement that oral art differs greatly from written art in matters of structure and style. Archer Taylor pronounced that literary attempts to duplicate oral style have failed miserably due to authors' ignorance of folk artistry.²⁰ More recently, Georg Vrabie has come to similar conclusions: writers cannot successfully imitate folk structuring techniques.²¹

The folk, for their part, have not even tried to duplicate literary style. In her survey of traditional Hungarian tale-telling, Linda Dégh relates: "When we examine the influence of this reading material upon the style of the folktale, we can truthfully say that it was unimportant." Thus, in questions of

structure and style, scholars find great, and perhaps impassable, chasms separating oral and written expression.

What exactly are the differences? Here the scholars are less precise, and until recently their efforts have been thwarted by the fact that most folktales found in libraries were literary, and not folk, documents. More than 150 years ago, Wilhelm Grimm--despite the protests of his more scientific brother, Jakob--developed what he considered the authentic style of folk narration and proceeded to impose it on all the tales which eventually appeared in the Kinder- und Hausmärchen.²² The influence of this work has been so great that most folktale collections intentionally or unintentionally ape its style. Only a handful of nineteenth-century collectors (most notably Campbell of Islay) recorded tales verbatim from their informants. Until recently, twentieth-century collectors have been equally guilty of putting their own words into the mouths of the folk. Thus, there are three sorts of style which must be distinguished for comparison here: the literary, the oral, and the pseudo-oral style of Wilhelm Grimm.

Scholars who have not had first-hand exposure to tale-telling continue to assume that the Grimm style is the oral style. Thus, such acute literary critics as Scholes and Kellogg state that the oral tale is really a semiliterary form:

The formal characteristics of oral narrative are somewhat modified in both ballad and folktale. These genres are influenced by an idea of a written literature . . . so that individual narratives are not actually composed anew with each performance. But with only minimal use of writing itself they have attained a fixity that goes beyond the formulaic diction of real oral composition.²³

Here, Scholes mistakes the printed folktale for the tale told aloud. If he had examined the two oral variants of the same tale--say, "The Three Stolen Princesses" (AT 301) as told by Imre Tákos in Hungary and the American versions collected from Jim Couch in Kentucky--he would have found astonishing differences.²⁴ If the narrators

of these two tales subscribe to a literary idea of how a tale should be told, it is certainly not evident in their performances. Two versions of "The Maiden without Hands" (AT 706) which are distinctly different in plot and style were collected in Canada from the same French-speaking narrator.²⁵ If any unifying idea of fixity lay behind these performances, it was a subtle and ineffectual one, for the two recorded tales have almost nothing in common.

Forced to define the oral style, most literati would list these five characteristics: repetition, stock epithets, stock characters, a marked preference for fantasy over reality, and an emphasis on action. Are these characteristics truly representative of all oral art, or are they the characteristics of pseudo-oral art?

Examining tales told by true folk narrators, we discover that all of the features mentioned above can truly be regarded as tendencies of folk expression, but that the use of such techniques varies greatly according to the tastes of the teller. In the matter of repetition, for instance, certain narrators (such as the Russian Medvedev)²⁶ see the essence of the tale in its iterative structure and never fail to repeat an episode as often as is required to highlight that structure. If the hero must fight three dragons, Medvedev sets the scene for the conflict three times, always in great detail, and often consciously repeats the scene verbatim. Other narrators, such as the Siberian Vinokurova, will avoid repeating themselves and will concentrate on realistic scenes and detailed personality sketches rather than on duplication of episodes. A third group, which includes the Hungarian András Albert, are so inventive that their tales often seem to lack repetition altogether. In the first part of "Handsome András," Albert improvises so loosely and artfully on his narrative frame that the famed trinary folktale structure is difficult to find.²⁷ It is a challenge to separate the stylistic nuances of Albert from the literary creations of the most imaginative authors.

The use of stock language and stock characters also varies in oral artistry with the tastes and talents of the tellers. An average narrator may continually repeat

the same words to describe heroes, villains, and actions in his story. However, such conventions are not themselves a sign of artistic weakness: Günther Grass used them in Dog Years, and William Faulkner used them to structure the last part of The Bear. Oral artistry varies as widely as does written artistry in its use of stock language. When an oral artist tells his story well, repetition helps create an esthetic unity, a quality which critics since Aristotle have deemed necessary for all art. The best oral artists use commonplaces, not as crutches to support crippled imaginations, but variously in different situations to underline the conflicts which they see as crucial to the themes of their stories.

Critics repeatedly have found folk art inferior to literature because of the former's alleged enslavement to fantasy. The folktale is pictured as a world of escape where conflicts are not resolved, but are avoided. Again, the literary man is defining the folktale from the convenient vantage point of ignorance.

Some folktales, particularly those classed as novellas in the Aarne-Thompson catalogue, are ready-made for realistic presentation. Set in an historically defined world and often free of any events of characters which might tax the listener's belief, these tales are mimetic in their outlines and can be rendered ultra-realistic with little effort. But the greatest oral artists do not need the help of a familiar world to depict familiar thoughts, deeds, and emotions. Narrators like András Albert may indeed specialize in fantasy and also, perhaps, in escape. Others, however, such as Vinokurova and Peig Sayers, invest their tales with a sense of emotional realism which transcends the world of fantasy and belies the charge of escapism. They people the unreal landscape of the Märchen with characters whose depths of experience and feeling penetrate the veil of magic and speak to us in human terms.

Fantasy does not have to be the vehicle of inferior, escapist thoughts. Shakespeare's critics unanimously consider The Tempest one of his greatest plays, though by superficial standards--set on an isolated island, populated by mythical beings, and controlled by supernatural forces--it can hardly be called realistic. If we admit that a great literary artist can transform

fantasy into spiritual reality, we should be able to accept the possibility that an oral artist can do the same. Peig Sayer's story, "The Man Who Was Rescued from Hell," is not easily mistaken for an account of something that may happen in the everyday world; but the critic who can deny the strength of its emotional realism has allowed the acerbic strains of elitism to eat away his basic power to feel.²⁸

The literati have indeed been correct in characterizing oral narrative as action oriented. Oral artists do not need a plot to create art: thousands of plotless but beautifully rendered love lyrics, funeral laments, and occasional poems and songs have been recovered from the field. But when an oral artist announces that he is going to tell a story, the audience expects to hear one--a story with a beginning, a middle, and an end, a story with a wholeness and an interconnectedness which is pleasing in itself.²⁹

There are no slice-of-life Märchen. The action of the tale is an essential ingredient: it is the vehicle of truth. The character acts as he is, and he is rewarded or punished in tangible terms according to his actions or to his "basic nature," depending on how you prefer to translate the symbolic language of the tale. I have already spoken about the action esthetic in an earlier section of this paper (see Complexity, part 3) and feel no need to lengthen my defense of that esthetic here.

The literati have been largely correct in observing that oral art has certain aspects of structure and style, two of which (repetition and action esthetic) are essential, and the remainder of which are common. But, by and large, does not literature share the same characteristics? In a recent study of popular novels, John Cawelti finds that formulaic stories--mysteries, romances, Westerns, and the like--contain all five elements listed above, which literary critics generally ascribe to the folktale. The dynamics of the formula story provide an escape for the audience:

By giving narrative emphasis to a constant flow of action, the writer avoids the necessity of exploring character with any degree of complexity the use of stereotyped characters reflecting the audience's conventional views of life and society also aids the purpose of escapism. Formulaic literature is generally characterized by a simple and emotionally charged style that encourages immediate involvement in a character's actions without much sense of complex irony or psychological subtlety.³⁰

If we accept Cawelti's statements, a good deal of literature--perhaps most of it--corresponds precisely to the literati's definition of the folktale. What is more, this pulp literature is measurably inferior in characterization and emotional realism to folktales told by accomplished oral artists. But these findings should not surprise us, the literary critic has based his definition of the folktale not on oral art, but on a certain kind of formulaic literature: the pseudo-oral folktale derived from Grimm and now found in bedtime storybooks throughout the world.

I do not agree with Cawelti's thesis that action literature is escapist and simple-minded by nature. But his findings lead to an important conclusion: literary critics have maintained the superiority of writing through devious (even if unconsciously devious) means. By skimming the cream of written artistry, digging up the dregs of pseudo-oral art, and comparing the two, they have established a polarity between written and oral art that is grossly unrepresentative. The best written literature is certainly better than the worst folk art, but the comparison may be reversed. Chaucer's "Man of Law's Tale" (AT 706) is the creation of the most esteemed poet of fourteenth-century London. It may be artistically superior to "The Unbaptized Girl" (also AT 706) as told orally by Roderick MacLean in nineteenth-century Scotland.³¹ But by most modern critical standards, the Scots oral version is artistically superior to the same tale as told by John Gower, the second most highly esteemed literary artist of Chaucer's London.³²

5. Tradition vs. Creativity. "Tradition is the one word which literary scholars most often associate with oral art. Tradition is most often understood to be a negative force signifying the monotonous, insensitive, verbatim repetition of stories and songs for generation after generation. Tradition is that quality of folk performance which is most often and most directly contrasted to art.

Undoubtedly, tradition plays an integral role in oral art: it is the rule rather than the exception for a teller to use a plot which he has inherited from his cultural past. Most of the tales found in the Aarne-Thompson catalogue have been in constant oral circulation since medieval times,³³ and Laws has shown that most of the ballads recovered in twentieth-century America are descended from British sources.³⁴ The ballad corpus of this country consists principally of items that were brought here about two centuries ago. The American ballad is certainly traditional.

Yet we cannot consider tradition to be an ossifying force. Tradition itself is merely a frame whose inward parts are dynamic even when its borders are fixed. Eating three meals a day has been traditional in Western societies for thousands of years. Yet the content and duration of those meals, as well as the behavior which accompanies them, have been and remain in a constant state of flux. In the abstract, tradition maintains a neutral value.

To return to the American ballads: Laws finds that about 20 percent of the American repertoire did indeed originate in America.³⁵ Although these songs borrow the traditional plots, structures, and commonplaces found in the older British ballads, it is clear that the subject matter, value systems, and methods of performance have, as often as not, been greatly changed. Even those ballads which originated in Britain are sometimes transformed almost beyond recognition by American artists. The Scots supernatural ballads, which treat fairies as living beings, lost their supernatural qualities when the singers crossed the ocean. Thus, the ballad--perhaps the most fixed of all oral art forms--reflects the changing beliefs, values, and esthetics of each singer and his society.

Tradition is neither the enemy nor the antithesis of art. Even in its greatest examples, literature is also tradition-bound. Scholes and Kellogg find that the transmission of written art and the development of any given writer depend on a process nearly identical to that found in oral art:

Artists learn their craft from their predecessors to a great extent. They begin by conceiving of the possibilities open to them in terms of the achievements they are acquainted with.³⁶

There is some question as to whether art can exist in any form without tradition. A number of formulaic cues are necessary simply to set art apart from reality. When those cues are not given and the audience mistakes art for reality--as in the famous case of Orson Welles' radio broadcast of War of the Worlds--one is justified in asking if the result can be called art at all. Perhaps modern literary art has a wider inventive license than does oral art, but perhaps we are simply so inured to our traditional cues that we take them for granted. As Virginia Woolf once remarked, one of the primary qualities of any book is its tactility: it can be held in the hand; it physically resembles a package for ideas and dreams. Through such practices as bookmaking, as well as the more frequently discussed phenomenon of literary form, we use tradition to help us define literary art.

Literature is as tradition-bound as folklore. The "laws" which govern the execution of a Greek play, a French neoclassical drama, or a Petrarchan sonnet are at least as rigid as the "epic laws" which help set the patterns of folktales.³⁷ Though there has been a relaxing of traditional rules in the recent creations of elite artists--for example, the poems of Ezra Pound, or the fiction of James Joyce--such artists have removed themselves from a frame of reference which would allow the majority of contemporaries to understand them. There is no wide social base for understanding Pound; by ignoring the traditions shared by most speakers of English, digging into classical literature for sources, and arranging his materials in an idiosyncratic way, he has created an art which must be intensively studied to be understood. Thus, art

ceases to communicate when it is separated from its conventions.

The literary critic often argues that the greatest art transcends the boundaries of tradition.³⁸ This may well be true, but Chaucer, for example, did not transcend tradition by ignoring it. The plots and actors of his greatest poems fall well within the expressive boundaries of his native traditions--romance, dream vision, fabliau. Similarly, the best tale-tellers do not deny their patrimony, but rather utilize the traditions at hand. They also can be said to "transcend" their traditions. But neither Chaucer nor the Irish folk narrator Eamon O'Burc is any less traditional for having used the rules of his genre more inventively than other artists have.

Until very recently in human history, the literate as well as the oral artist lived by the esthetic that "familiar stories are always the best." Most of Chaucer's Canterbury Tales are borrowed in part or in full from earlier authors and tellers: the greatest medieval English artist may never have invented a plot of his own.³⁹ For Chaucer, as for the majority of oral artists in our time, creativity lay not in the inventions of new plots but in the masterful retelling of a story well known to its hearers.

Only recently have authors and audiences craved the creation of new stories. And even in these latter days, tradition has not disappeared; it simply has assumed a different form. The Victorian novel, the science fiction epic, the western, the well-made play of Scribe and Ibsen--all have certain artistic conventions and boundaries which dictate to a large extent the disposition of the "new" material which is cast into the story mold. In westerns and mysteries, the same thematic concerns and plot configurations crop up recurrently, though each new product is slightly different from the one which preceded it. The fixity of written texts and the resultant phenomenon of copyright have forced artists of the written word to seek creativity on the superficial level of plot. Now that lawsuits have established that a plot invented by one man cannot be used by another, we must expect that literature will

continue on its course of the last 300 years.⁴⁰

Thus, the facial variety of modern literature makes it seem more creative than oral art. But, as any avid reader of Elizabethan tragedy or modern science fiction knows, the number of possible plots, character types, and themes is finite for each genre. After a while, the reader can no longer derive satisfaction simply from the plots--all of which he will be able to predict--and must turn back to style as a criterion for judging the work. The way in which a story is told becomes more important than the bare outline; the old oral ethic, which stresses stylistic excellence over innovation, is reasserted.

Art is not what remains after tradition is subtracted from a story. Rather, the very tension between tradition and uniqueness creates art. The discipline of tradition and the freedom of creativity are equal partners in the performance of both oral art and written art.

6. Authorship. A long standing and influential critical fallacy holds that true literature is the creation of a single individual, while true folklore is a communal composition, arising as if by magic from the collective throat of the masses. Some of the greatest folklorists of the past--most notably the Grimms and F. B. Gummere--held this distinction to be valid. But in the last fifty years, the communal theory has steadily declined in popularity, and now it is nearly universally agreed that each ballad and folktale, like each novel, has a single original author, and that singing, dancing throngs do not in fact make art.

It would be good if we could look back on the communal theory as an instructive memory, a dreamlike remnant of the sleep of reason which can instruct us who live in the present to look more closely at the folk in the field before we draw sweeping conclusions about them. Unfortunately, however, as much as they laugh at Gummere and his ideas, many of the most sophisticated modern critics still rely heavily on a slightly modified version of the old communal theory. They assume that folk art is faceless and static, while literary art is individualistic and creative.

For example, Scholes and Kellogg argue that Homer as an oral poet and inform us that "the greatness of Homer is the greatness of his tradition."⁴¹ What does this mean? One can just as easily say that Shakespeare's greatness lies in his tradition, or that the greatness of Aeschylus has a similar source. And in all cases there would be some degree of truth in the claim, because some traditions are more readily adaptable than others to the expression of certain ideas which one critic or another may wish to label "great."

But from what we have just determined about the nature of tradition, we also know that tradition alone does not produce great art. No literary critic would seriously maintain that Shakespeare was great only because his tradition was. Why, then, must the folk be treated differently?

Folklorists unwittingly have worked to reinforce the literary critic's stereotype of folklore as a faceless, uniform tradition. As part of their recent inheritance from anthropology, folklorists have adopted the stand that all items of oral art should be treated equally. This objective view is praiseworthy in some respects: it has fostered the collection of more accurate field texts and has revealed much more of the narrator's social background than had been known before. But in treating "items" of folk art impartially, folklorists have erroneously assumed that the folk do the same. This assumption is off-base. The folk are not impartial about what they like.

Just like readers, oral audiences have esthetic values. Even more than a literary critic, the folk oral critic exerts an influence on the artist, for without a live audience there can be no folk performance. Members of folk groups perceive certain stories, certain songs, and certain narrators as better than others. Though the authorship of a given work cannot be as often or as easily determined as the authorship of written art, there is a vital concept of ownership in folk art.

Special individuals are recognized as the owners of certain tales, and other folk artists will generally respect the superior ability of an oral artist to

tell a certain tale. Individual narrators can be quite protective of their own works, even to the point where they will not allow rival narrators to hear them.⁴²

The quantitative methods used by certain folklorists tend to support the communal concept of folklore as static and inartistic. A case in point is Neil R. Grobman's recent "Theory for the Sources and Uses of Folklore in Literature."⁴³ Grobman devises a detailed scheme for determining the authenticity of an item of folklore found within a literary work. According to the scheme, the most valid type of literary folklore is the "authentic transcriptive reproduction," a verbatim rendering of "traditions as they appear in their natural cultural milieu with little adaptation or change." Grobman states:

Examples of this are rarely found in what is generally considered to be "art" literature. The most famous regional writers such as Mark Twain or Jesse Stuart do some degree of embroidering as do the less famous regional writers, e. g., Paul Green, John Voelker, Julian Lee Rayford, and others. . . .⁴⁴

The tacit assumption here is that authentic folk art is static: Twain and Stuart would be giving us authentic texts if only they did not "embroider" their materials. Grobman should have pondered the possibility of Twain or Stuart embroidering their tales for oral transmission within the folk group itself. Twain, a natural oral and literary artist, would change, and probably improve, any tale he heard, regardless of the circumstances. The authenticity of Twain's folk artistry cannot be denied simply on account of his creativity or of his literary treatment of a story he may have told orally in much the same way. Grobman's scheme for identifying folklore in literature (written in 1975) perpetuates the fallacy that folklore is not art.

The idea of the facelessness of oral tradition was cast from official favor long ago, but it has so penetrated our thinking that no one can deny its continued influence. We must no longer be content simply to admit that the oral artist is an artist: we

must also start treating him as such.

7. Compositional techniques. By examining the act of creation itself, can we arrive at a more valid distinction between oral and written literature?

At first, it was assumed that the folk themselves did not create anything, but only adopted the creations of sophisticated artists. Such were the beliefs of Thomas Percy and Walter Scott, who claimed that the ballads were originally romances composed by professional minstrels, which eroded into simple songs when passed on to the fumbling memories of the folk. Only in this century, with the work of scholars like Phillips Barry, Milman Parry, and Albert Lord, have folklorists embraced the notion that in an oral culture, every performance of a tale or song is a new creation--or recreation, if you will.

Lord's oral formulaic theory has made great gains in literary circles. It has led many critics to the realization that folklore studies do indeed have something to contribute to the understanding of art. According to Lord, each performance of a Yugoslavian folk epic is unique, fashioned spontaneously by the folk artist. In order to compose under such circumstances, the artist must master a vocabulary and a syntax of traditional expressions which allow him to put his story together with great speed. After years of apprenticeship, first as a passive listener and then as a fledgling performer, the accomplished oral artist can create a powerful epic song on short notice.⁴⁵

Lord's conclusions have been applied--sometimes too arbitrarily--to such folk-literary creations as Beowulf and the British ballads.⁴⁶ His theory has added much to our understanding of the process of folk creativity; but because it often has been applied by misunderstanding critics, the oral formulaic theory may lead us to draw imaginary distinctions between folk art and literary art as creative processes.

What folklorists and literary critics do not seem to realize is this: in all but one of its particulars, the Parry-Lord theory can be applied with great success

to the creation of written literature. Every artist must learn the formulae, themes, and structuring devices of his tradition.

Shakespeare had to learn how to compose a line in iambs and how to create rhyming couplets to end the more important speeches of his plays. Many of his more common expressions and character types are drawn directly from preceding plays with little or no modification by the playwright. The traditional grammar of the Elizabethan stage dictated that plays be built according to such formulae, and all Shakespeare's contemporaries had to master the same art. Shakespeare also had to learn a certain sort of plot, which corresponds to the "composition by theme" practiced by Yugoslavian epic singers. Each tragedy had to have five acts, with a reversal of fortune in Act III, a partial recovery in Act IV, and a devastating denouement in Act V. Each comedy required a subplot mirroring the main plot, though in a more farcical vein. Since the Elizabethan comedy structure was a recent development in his time, Shakespeare often had to combine two or more sources to shape his comedies according to the rules prescribed for him. For Shakespeare, as for any persistent creative artist, the mastery of structuring techniques grew with experience, and his combination of comic subplots was far more successful toward the end of his career than in its beginning.

Most of the great artists of English literary history have composed their stories formulaically. For Chaucer and Milton, art lay first in a submission to the formulaic rules of poetry and genre. The discipline required for the success of art is reached primarily, and perhaps entirely, from the repeated application of traditional rules.

And though the literary artist has, in theory, far more time to create his artistic product than does the oral artist, the difference is not nearly so great as one would at first expect. Once a literary writer has mastered formulaic composition, he can proceed with incredible speed. In the fever pitch of creation, Balzac, Dickens, and Dostoevsky wrote almost as quickly as they could talk, and apparently did so with no measurable relaxation of artistic quality. To extend

the comparison to Baroque music--another highly formulaic "written" art form--one can call upon Bach (who wrote a cantata a week) and Handel (who wrote The Messiah in twenty-three days) to testify to the facts that formulaic composition is not unique to the folk, and that rapid formulaic composition is no stranger to great art.

On the other side of this artificial boundary, the spontaneity of oral performance has been greatly exaggerated. Anyone who imagines that the lines of a Yugoslav epic simply pop into the singer's head as he opens his mouth to perform, and that the words and themes simply leave his head when he stops singing, is sadly mistaken. Lord has shown that even the most traditional of oral bards do indeed memorize certain passages--often their own creations--and repeat them verbatim in each performance of a given work. Each singer has his own stock of expressive formulae, drawn from years of experience and experimentation, which he remembers from song to song. As a case in point, consider Avdo Mededović, whom Lord considered the greatest of the Yugoslav singers. On one occasion, Parry and Lord asked Avdo to listen to another singer perform an epic which Avdo had never heard before. Then, without warning, the scholars asked him if he could sing the new song. Avdo produced a magnificent epic--twice as long as the tale he had heard and much superior to it as a work of art. But obviously Avdo did not tell the story exactly as he had heard it--nor did he try. He remembered and retold the plot outline of the new song. In embroidering the story, he used all the personal esthetic devices which he had developed in years of singing. He borrowed one scene after another from his earlier works, fleshing out the skeleton of the new plot with formulae and passages which he himself had created and performed many times before. The result can hardly be called spontaneous composition; rather, it is the product of years of practice, experience, discipline, and the creative application of traditional rules. Avdo had rehearsed his "new" song for forty years.⁴⁷

Formulaic composition--written as well as oral--continues today. Agatha Christie, acknowledged as one of the greatest modern mystery writers, was also one of the most prolific. The speed with which P. G.

Wodehouse wrote his comic novels of manners did not detract from their quality. Today, as in every other age, formulaic composition can be well or poorly done; but it remains an intrinsic quality of art--not just oral art, but all art of any value.

The difference between oral and written composition does not lie in traditionality, the presence of formulae, or the speed of composition. The real boundary rests in the fact that the oral artist creates his work before a live audience, while the literary artist composes in silence.

8. Audience. Most of the boundaries previously set up to distinguish folklore from literature do not in fact exist. Among the criteria examined here, only three, as most, are valid: (1) The most obvious difference is the fixity of the written text, which gives it a tenacity no single oral presentation can match. The two other criteria can be used only to distinguish oral art from the written art of the last three centuries: (2) the idea that an artistic creation must have a unique plot, and (3) the tendency of the written-narrative artist to subordinate the esthetic of action to the esthetic of reflection. These last two criteria are new to literature since Shakespeare's day but can truthfully be said to indicate a valid difference at this time. They are not the underlying causes of the difference, but merely are symptoms of the primary cause. It is to the audience that we must turn to find the most significant boundary between the printed and the spoken work of art.

Here is a difference which is truly enormous and which is true, not simply for one period of history or one given location, but for all times and places. The oral narrative cannot exist without an audience. This audience often determines which story the narrator will tell, how long the story will be, and whether the teller will be permitted to finish his tale at all. For the folk artist, artistry consists not simply in esthetic training, but in social training as well. His audience has a generalizing effect on his method of composition--the story must literally please everyone. The tale will be comprehensible to all, embracing issues, conflicts, and scenes which can be readily recognized and shared by

everyone who hears. No matter how deeply into personal philosophy the narrator may wish to probe, no matter how much of himself he may wish to reveal, he must first and foremost gain the understanding and approval of his listeners. The celebrated action esthetic of the tale insures such a performance. The familiar story, tested by generations and shaped in the heat of the social crucible, is the only place the artist can start; and it is to the time-honored tales that he will return again and again.

As he grows in competence, the narrator learns to better reach the depths of the community and to involve himself with it, so that he takes on a sort of ownership of those tales which he tells best. This ownership is a mutual decision dictated both by the skill of the teller and by the values of a very critical audience. Paradoxically, the oral artist owns only what he shares with his listeners; the tale is his only insofar as it is theirs.

Some students of folklore and literature now are trying to bridge the gap between the two art forms through the use of communications models. Most applications of such models to oral art have failed miserably because they have stressed the idea of interaction without heeding the idea of social consensus.⁴⁸ It is fashionable now to propose that folklore and literature are similar or identical because they are both forms of interpersonal communication. In a recent article, Dow and Sandrock claim that Peter Rosegger's novel Erdsagen may be considered folklore because

Rosegger (the author/encoder) is interacting directly, i.e., firsthand, in a one-to-one relationship with the audience (reader/decoder), in order to initiate the latter into a set of values which he considers to be desirable. . . . If "firsthand" is interpreted to allow for that dynamic interplay between two or more minds, no matter how they are brought together, . . . then we have new grounds for speculations about folklore in literature.⁴⁹

Dow and Sandrock's speculation is ultimately groundless. First, their interpretation is so vague that "folklore" becomes meaningless in this context. By the same reasoning, chlorophyll can be considered folklore, because it is the product of a one-to-one relationship between the sun (author/encoder) and a flower (reader/decoder). Second, as general as it is, the model violates a basic rule of folklore communication. Oral art is intensely interactional, but it is not a one-to-one relationship aimed at teaching personal values. The oral performance is a highly structured phenomenon in which the teller, if he wishes to be heard at all, must adopt the stylistic devices of his society to lead his audience on a fictional voyage which they have charted for him. Though the most gifted narrators put much of themselves into their tales by universalizing their own feelings, they can only be sure they have made themselves understood insofar as they share the general values of the society. The situation is interactive, but the nature of the interaction is stylized and impersonal.

The physical dynamics of folk art performance are so intense that a mass of conventions are needed simply to keep art from boiling over into an explosive reality. The teller cannot physically distance himself from his audience in the way a writer does. At the same time, the tales themselves--as Freud, Benedict, Alan Lomax, and others have shown⁵⁰--embody many of the central conflicts of the culture from which they arise. They frequently involve topics such as incest, fratricide, cannibalism, and unnatural cruelty--acts which are detested by the culture but which the particular systems of tensions in the group lead them to contemplate, at least subconsciously. When stories dealing with such taboo actions are told to an assembled group, how could they be told except with the techniques of fantasy? Physical distancing is not possible in an oral performance, so the fictions of objective style and faraway places and times must be substituted. And even then, the narrator, as a carrier of such stories, is often subjected to social distancing; once he has left the house where he has told the tale, he may be excluded from the company of those who most admired his performance.⁵¹

When writers composed, not for unseen readers but for live audiences--as Chaucer and Shakespeare did--the relationship between oral and written art was very close indeed. Today, the writer who is sensitive and responsive to his distant audience can approximate the structures, styles, and meanings of oral art. But with the development of closet dramas, closet novels, closet art, an entirely different sort of esthetic has developed. This elite esthetic has been endlessly praised by closeted critics, but one wonders if the "new art" has as much social and cultural significance as critics claim.

The writer of recent years has had no visible audience for the creation of his works. The "I" which intrudes into his work is an effort to establish contact with the audience he will never see--an audience which does not select him, but which he himself selects. His next-door neighbor may never read the author's book; and even if he does, he may dislike it intensely. On the other hand, such considerations may never even enter the author's mind. He may confess and portray on paper acts which he might never tell aloud, or which his neighbors may never allow him to tell. The social function of his art has been degraded entirely. Instead of telling tales to his friends in order to make shared work more bearable or shared leisure more fulfilling, the new author writes stories which are read only by isolated individuals, and often read specifically as an excuse to avoid the company of friends and neighbors. By process, written art is distinctly antisocial.

The celebrated mimetic quality of great art literature, its "truth of sensation" as expressed in highly individualistic works, is in fact no more highly developed than the esthetic of the folktale; rather, it is the imaginary replacement of a vanished community, a signed paper document which records the fragmentation of society. The "I" of the mimetic author is, for all who read his works, our only compensation for the fact that we are alone.

NOTES

1. Margaret Schlauch, "The Man of Law's Tale," in Sources and Analogues of Chaucer's Canterbury Tales, ed. W. F. Bryan and Germaine Dempster (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1941), p. 161.
2. Among the nineteenth-century scholars who first noticed the artistic achievements of oral narrators were Edwin Sydney Hartland, "The Art of Story-Telling," in The Science of Fairy Tales (London: Methuen & Co., Ltd., 1891) and the early members of the Finnish school, as described by Elli Kõngas-Maranda, "The Concept of Folklore," Midwest Folklore 13 (1963): 78-88.
3. Kaarle Krohn, Folklore Methodology, trans. Roger L. Welsh (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1971), pp. 46-49.
4. Martti Haavio, Die einzelnen Kettenmärchen "Hahn und Henne", Folklore Fellows Communication 99 (1932), pp. 28-31. Wesselski's criticism of Haavio's methods are summarized in Emily Kiefer, Albert Wesselski and Recent Folklore Theories (Bloomington: Indiana University Publications, Folklore Series, no. 3, [n. d.]), pp. 47-48.
5. Linda Dégh, Folktales and Society, trans. Emily M. Schossberger (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1969), pp. 153-54.
6. Dégh, Folktales and Society, pp. 235-54.
7. Fannie Hardy Eckstorm and Phillips Barry, "What Is Tradition?" Bulletin of the Folk-Song Society of the Northeast 1 (1930): 2-3.
8. Albert B. Lord, The Singer of Tales (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1960), p. 129.
9. Sandra K. D. Stahl, "Style in Oral and Written Narrative," Folklore Preprints Series, vol. 3, no. 1 (Bloomington: Indiana University, 1975).
10. Lord, Singer of Tales, pp. 21-29.
11. Marc Azadovskii, A Siberian Tale Teller, trans. James R. Dow, Center for Intercultural Studies in Folklore and Ethnomusicology, Monograph Series, no. 2 (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1974), p. 23. See also Dégh, Folktales and Society, p. 166.
12. Dégh, Folktales and Society, pp. 104, 146-63.
13. Dégh, Folktales and Society, p. 154.
14. Roger Sherman Loomis, "Arthurian Tradition and Folklore," Folk-Lore 69 (1958): 2.
15. Hector Munro Chadwick and N. K. Chadwick, The Growth of Literature, 3 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1932-40). Veselovsky's major works are untranslated. An English-language survey of his projects can be found in Y. K. Sokolov, Russian Folklore (New York: Macmillan, 1950), pp. 100-108.
16. André Jolles, Einfache Formen (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 1930). A brief English-language summary of the contents of Jolles' book, together with an expanded interpretation of Jolles' thesis, is offered by Kurt Ranke, "Einfache Formen," Journal of the Folklore Institute 4 (1967): 17-31 (hereafter cited as JFI).
17. Francis Lee Utley, "Oral Genres as a Bridge to Written Literature," in Folklore Genre ed. Dan Ben-Amos (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1976), p. 13.
18. Dégh, Folktales and Society, pp. 105-106.

19. John Francis Campbell, Popular Tales of the West Highlands (Paisley: Alexander Gardner, 1860-93); John G. McKay translated Campbell's remaining unpublished manuscripts in More West Highland Tales, 2 vols. (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1940; 1960). Sean O'Sullivan, Folktales of Ireland (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966).
20. Archer Taylor, "Folklore and the Student of Literature," in The Study of Folklore, ed. Alan Dundes (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, 1965), pp. 41-42; Georg Vrabie, "Sur la technique de la narration dans le conte roumain," Laographia 22 (1965): 607.
21. Dégh, Folktales and Society, p. 168.
22. An excellent discussion of Wilhelm Grimm's artistic interpolations and editorial philosophy appears in Alfred and Mary Elizabeth David, "A Literary History of the Brothers Grimm," JFI 1 (1964): 180-96.
23. Robert Scholes and Robert Kellogg, The Nature of Narrative (New York, 1966), p. 55.
24. Irme Tákos' tale appears in Linda Dégh, ed., Folktales of Hungary (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965), pp. 3-15. Jim Couch's "Little Black Hunchety Hunch" is found in Leonard Roberts, Sang Branch Settlers (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1974), pp. 212-16, 359-60.
25. Hélène Bernier, La fille aux mains coupées, Archives de Folklore, 12 (1971): 65-66. See also pp. 67-68, where another French-Canadian narrator of the same tale also tells two distinctly different versions.
26. Azadovskii, A Siberian Tale Teller, p. 23.
27. Dégh, Folktales of Hungary, pp. 28-45, 307-308.
28. O'Sullivan, Folktales of Ireland, pp. 151-64.
29. Dan Ben-Amos, Sweet Words: Storytelling Events in Benin (Philadelphia: Institute for the Study of Human Issues, 1975), pp. 52-53.
30. John G. Cawelti, Adventure, Mystery, and Romance (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976), p. 19.
31. "The Unchristened Child," rendered as recorded in Scots Gaelic, with a facing English translation, in McKay, More West Highland Tales, vol. 1, pp. 308-29.
32. Margaret Schlauch, "Gower's Tale of Constance," in Sources and Analogues, ed. Bryan and Dempster, pp. 181-206.
33. Stith Thompson, The Folktale (New York: Dryden Press, 1946), pp. 176-87.
34. G. Malcolm Laws, American Balladry from British Broad-sides (Philadelphia: American Folklore Society, 1957), p. 66.
35. Laws, American Balladry, p. 66.
36. Scholes and Kellogg, The Nature of Narrative, p. 4.
37. Axel Olrik, "The Epic Laws of Folk Narrative," in The Study of Folklore, ed. Dundes, pp. 129-41.
38. See Bryan and Dempster, eds. Sources and Analogues and Francis Lee Utley, "Some Implications of Chaucer's Folktales," Laographia 22 (1965). Among all of Chaucer's plots, those which are most likely to be his own inventions belong to the "dream vision" genre. The dream visions (The Book of the Duchess, The Parliament of Fowls, The House of Fame)

show a wide inventive license in terms of plot, but it was the nature of the dream vision genre to allow and even encourage such invention. From Dante to Langland, the dream vision seems to have been the most personal of medieval narrative genres, allowing the author to use the dream as a frame to validate his intimate thoughts--thoughts which he would not be allowed to express so openly in any other context. Folklore genres, like literary genres, vary widely in the amount of creative freedom allowed the artists who tell them. Thus, as Daniel Crowley (I Could Talk Old-Story Good) has noted, animal tales in the Bahamas are told with more inventive license than other genres are told in that society.

39. Here, I am excluding Chaucer's early dream vision poems which in all probability followed plotlines created by the author. Dream visions were unique in their day: the public expected originality in such poems. Using a dream as the disguise in which to hide his own conscious thoughts, the medieval poet had this one genre as a vehicle for nontraditional material and direct personal expression. Thus, Dante was able to condemn his personal enemies to hell in the Inferno.
40. In a recent American case, a court decided that the novel, Fail-Safe (a fast-paced, humorless thriller), and the black-humor movie, Dr. Strangelove, are in fact the same story. No oral artist would imagine that these two different tales were identical.
41. Scholes and Kellogg, The Nature of Narrative, p. 23.
42. Dégh, Folktales and Society, pp. 88-93.
43. Neil R. Grobman, "A Theory for the Sources and Uses of Folklore in Literature," Folklore Preprint Series, vol. 4, no. 1 (Bloomington: Indiana University, 1976).
44. Grobman, "A Theory," pp. 8-9.
45. Lord, Singer of Tales, pp. 13-29.
46. Francis P. Magoun, "The Oral-Formulaic Character of Anglo-Saxon Narrative Poetry," Speculum 28 (1953): 446-67; James H. Jones, "Commonplace and Memorization in the English and Scottish Popular Ballads," Journal of American Folklore 74 (1961): 97-112.
47. Lord, Singer of Tales, pp. 77-92.
48. A notable exception is Cyril Cystov, "Zur Frage der theoretischen Unterschieden zwischen Folklore und Literatur," Studia Fennica 20 (1976): 148-58.
49. James R. Dow and James P. Sandrock, "Peter Rosegger's Erdsagen: The Function of Folklore in the Work of an Austrian Heimatsdichter," JFI 13 (1976): 231-238.
50. The arguments of Benedict, Freud, and other psychoanalytic interpreters of the content of folktales are briefly summarized by Richard M. Dorson, "Introduction," in Folklore and Folklife: An Introduction, ed. Richard M. Dorson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972), pp. 21, 25-27. Alan Lomax presents his psychological theses in Folksongs of North America (New York, 1960).
51. Dégh, Folktales and Society, pp. 163-84.