

## THE MORAL LORE OF FOLKLORE

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Fruitful ambiguities in the title of this series, *Future of American Folklore*,<sup>1</sup> allow me to air concerns about the present state of our discipline and to address the future with hope.

Hope seems an odd, anachronistic word to use today. Hard times, we are told, grip us. These are days for restraint, retrenching, and complaint. Yet this is a time of unbelievable prosperity. Piles of money rise on the horizon, limiting our vision, causing us to curl back on ourselves, shriveling into inaction. It is not difficult to understand how the rhetoric of hard times works. When those who have no real problems grouse about what a tough situation they are in, then they cannot be asked to share, they cannot be asked to help those whose problems are real. They can keep their wealth to themselves. The problem we do have is that we let the genuine economic worries of others become our own unfounded economic worries, and then we permit economic worries to spill over into the rest of our lives, inspiring us to act conservatively and timidly, even in our scholarship. Despite the hardships of many of the people we must champion, these are boom times for our discipline. It should be a time for brave, critical scholarship. Despite the times and the multitudinous signs of academic cowardice around me, I am optimistic and I wish to appraise our condition and then consider our future in a hopeful mood.

My appraisal will be no jeremiad. Yet when I focus my thoughts on folklore's future, I find myself prodded and guided by a jeremiad, by a rich and angry critique recently articulated by a noble historian, Lee Benson, directed at his own discipline but extended by him to all of the social sciences and so, by implication, to folklore.<sup>2</sup> Benson's clean attack upon history provides me with a way to begin my consideration of folklore. Loosely, and at a respectful distance, I will follow Lee Benson to explain why I am optimistic about folklore, to tell you why the meek will inherit the academy.

There was a time--to relay Benson's tale simply--when historians were both scientists and moral

philosophers. This golden age does not lie in some dim time out of mind. Less than a century ago historians were driven by both scientific and moral motives.

To define moral philosophy, Lee Benson returns to Karl Marx. While I lean in Benson's direction politically, my ideological heritage is more English than continental. I would isolate a different source, name different heroes. Still, as a folklorist I am perfectly comfortable with the essence of Benson's definition of moral philosophy as an argument over selfhood and responsibility. A moral scholarship, I agree, should provide people with ways to gain consciousness and ways for them to understand their role within the larger needs of society.

The historians toward whom Lee Benson reorients us were moral philosophers and they were scientists. As scientists they engaged with reality in such a way that engagement led to intellectual progress.

The history of history, in Benson's retelling, is not complex. Slowly at first, then rapidly after the First World War, historians abandoned moral philosophy and became engrossed in the scientific dimensions of their enterprise. As history broke loose from its moral foundations, its science permutated into mere professionalism. The way to promotion and pay became the performance of tight, solid, petty exercises. Historians prospered; History decayed. The purpose of history--the demand written into its pedagogic function--is to address through facts from the past the issues of selfhood and responsibility. But that purpose withered and lay forgotten as historians got better and better at their jobs, as they employed more rigorous technologies and applied them to increasingly insignificant topics.

Consider our discipline, folklore, in the frame I borrow from Lee Benson. Science first. If science is a matter of engaging with reality so as to create progress, then folklorists can claim--in the most important aspect of our task--steady progress. Our greatest responsibility, finally, is preserving folklore. From the days when scholars wrote down what they remembered, to the days when texts were taken from dictation, to the days of exact mechanical recording, to the very present when ethnopoetic modes of transcription claim our

attention and improve our texts--<sup>3</sup> throughout our history it is easy to trace steady advancement in recording reality. That is progress, scientific progress, but if we continue to attend to Benson, we will feel that in another realm of the science of folklore, our progress has been matched by regress.

Like other social scientists, folklorists have worked to improve their practice by borrowing ideas from the natural sciences. Our modes of observation and recording have probably been refined by our notion of the ways that scientists proceed. But when we built borrowed ideas into structures of explanation, our borrowings were inappropriate and foolish. One cannot explain people in the way that one explains stars or onions or wolves. Volition is inalienably essential to human being (as anyone who has spent a serious hour with a new baby knows). We can observe people as though they were natural phenomena, but any explanation that does not account fully and richly for human will simply miss the point. The scientific explanation of behavioral surfaces looks orderly. Finally it is hollow, worthless.

In folklore, a mad scientist's vision of science came to prevail. Instead of doing as scientists did, matching data to appropriate methods and theories, we parodied science and became obsessed with something we hideously termed methodology. Methods are means, but they became for us ends. It became enough for us to do little jobs efficiently. Though we spoke the word "theory," we scrove to transform theories into methods that would enable us to do those little jobs. Take this simple instance from our history. Context was a key word in the late sixties. Bent upon method, unmindful of theory, we distorted contexts into objects to record carefully, thus avoiding the explanatory force of the idea. Context is a theory of textual meaning.<sup>4</sup> Yet we made text and context into an opposition, and then we strangely recomposed contexts into texts, complex sensate items to record, when context is that which is invisibly woven into texts, into songs or singing events, into houses or whole landscapes, to make them meaningful. Context is one way to approach human motivation, to get at purpose, at creativity and meaning. The idea is lost when a context becomes

but a big text to record. We turned away from theoretical context to concentrate on methodological context and we left texts without meaning, artists without will.

We surrendered explanation to description, theory to method. We lost our purpose while becoming professional, and we began to do those little exercises for which Lee Benson chides his colleagues. As the pay check swells, one gets more involved in facile, easily accomplished tasks; one gets better and better at doing them, at defending their results, and pretty soon we are doing what Marc Bloch said we must not do, and that is to let our sophistication run in neutral gear. Bloch called it a crime, a crime to treasure methods and allow erudition to feed upon itself.<sup>5</sup> Yet we were culpable. We flew after new ideas while ignoring the reasons for choosing one idea over another or for having ideas in the first place. The result: many highly professional, idle and impotent projects.

Not long before his death, Alan Merriam and I chanced to take a trip together. (Sadness as well as joy always accompanies my returns to Indiana.) Merriam said what most disheartened him was to see the vast power of anthropology, his grand, hearty discipline--the greatest discipline of the twentieth century, I believe--harnessed to tiny, trivial tasks.

The whole field of social science is littered and clotted with intricate and exacting studies of topics that do not matter. As a science, folklore has moved smoothly forward in recording procedures, from reconstructed texts to ethnopoetic analysis, and it has stumbled backward into scientific professionalism. But our story is more confused, more encouraging. At exactly the moment when we were most excited by what we called "theory," and what Lee Benson suggests was largely inept mimicry of science, the key moral issue of folklore remained alive. It still kicked in the arguments over the definition of folklore.

The ideas we discuss when defining our study do not fit our scientific aspirations. We are embarrassed that we continue to wrangle over our definition when scholars in other disciplines do not. We demean our own arguments by likening them to games, or trivializing them as mere academic calisthenics, treating them as though they had no bear-

ing on life itself. Yet we continue in our introductory classes and books to worry about the definition, and when the "folk" idea connects with public opinion and the marketplace, as with folk-song in the sixties and folk art today, our urge to define becomes energetic, even hot. That is good. It is why I am optimistic about our discipline. For in the definition abides the moral lore of folklore.

Definitions can set limits or they can highlight centers. Intelligently, we have never defined what definition meant, and while seeming to talk about boundaries which when established would render one thing folk and another not, our hearts have lay more in the work of defining a center, of giving definition to an enduring idea. That idea has always engendered argument and has never yielded any conclusions. And that is right. Arguments over the definition of folklore are not like arguments over the boiling point of water. No instrument can test their accuracy, no artificial rules can silence them. Each generation must state the definition anew, debate it afresh, because folklore's definition is not factual and free of value. Its virtue is that it is charged with values, saturated with opinions about how one ought to live in the world.

After listening to a long, spirited argument among the young stars of folklore, one of the great old folklorists, a man now dead, rose and left the room, saying to me as he passed (I was a graduate student at the time, thrilled to be standing silently at the edge of such talk): "Well, when they finally define folklore, I'm quitting." He was correct because no one, no committee or government agency or scholarly oligarchy, has the right to decide finally what folklore is or how it should be studied. He was correct more because the continuing, unstoppable argument over the definition has kept folklore's moral philosophy alive. When the issue of the definition ceases to be interesting, we should all quit.

It is true that the ideas in the definitional argument have been lamentably disconnected from our common practice. But they have not been abandoned utterly, and that is the main reason why I am not as sad about folklore as Lee Benson is about history, even though I believe his model of decline

fits folklore well enough to sound the alarm in our shop too.

Over a decade ago when I was teaching courses in theory here at Indiana, and when I thought of folklore as sophisticated, a noted linguist at this university told me with a fatherly smile that folklorists were the hunters and gatherers of academe. we were a tribal people, still rooting about in reality, hunting down and gathering up facts that we brought back alive. In those days we remembered when folklore classes did not exist in most universities, and we were delighted to be allowed to enter the university, set up camp, and practice our numble, archaic trade. They had let us in and we honored the established disciplines around us by stealing all we could. While the more advanced people around us slept, we slid in the shadows past their fires, rifled their baggage, stole their books, learned their language, and came to be able to ape their culture in a way that we at least found convincing. In our excitement we did not stop to ponder whether their theories sorted well with our traditional preoccupations. We learned the schemes of those we perceived to be higher in the academic hierarchy than ourselves, then applied those schemes to our own topics. We felt mature. Benign outsiders probably took our growth to be a sign of advancement from savagery to barbarism. but we were, like them, professional.

In those days of growth, the sixties, there was a dangerous drift toward abandoning the old argument over the definition. Status as a professional discipline obviated the need to argue. For many, folklore became whatever professional folklorist chose to study. Yet there was resistance to that false definition, and an implicit concept of folklore persisted. When folklorists met in public places--on government panels, for instance--they found that they agreed about what was folklore and what was not, whether or not they could articulate a definition abstractly. A simple proof of the existence of a deep operating definition lies in the fact that of the simultaneous movements to incorporate material culture and popular culture into folklore, one was successful, one was not. Material culture, as a topic of study, was swiftly, completely accepted as part of the discipline, while popular culture never has been,

and that is because the definition of folklore shifts at its borders but holds at its center.

It is fortunate for us, and of great historical importance for our discipline, that when theories exhilarated us, when material culture was gaining acceptance, and many were abandoning the argument over the definition and replacing it with empty talk about professional standards, a major folklorist, Dan Ben-Amos, remained concerned about the definition, and in the landmark volume, **Toward New Perspectives in Folklore**, he gave his generation its definition. Not everything is folklore. Dan Ben-Amos said folklore was artistic communication in small groups.<sup>6</sup> The particular arguments that Dan Ben-Amos mounted in behalf of his formulation are historically interesting. They are part of the polemic of his article's period. Today his arguments are no longer compelling but his brilliant definition continues to focus the thought of modern folklorists, precisely because it states in modern terms the key moral proposition of folklore's old tradition and because the words he chose hold great power in our commonplace language.

Let me talk about the words he chose. "Artistic" is the first word. It shares roots with artificial and artifact. Art consists of things made with artifice. Not so long ago in our civilization, the artist was an architectural decorator, a craftsman, like a carpenter, a weaver, a bookbinder. Art begins as that which is hand-made, not natural, but artificial, intended, created. To us, art means that--and much more, for time has deposited layers of meaning over the original idea of the intentionally hand-made. By selecting "artistic" and not "art," Ben-Amos limited the degree to which the common idea of art can be built into the definition of folklore. But even saying "artistic" we entail two other concepts. First is the idea of the aesthetic. The aesthetic excites the senses. We use the word anesthetic casually in medicine to mean that which kills feeling. The aesthetic is the opposite. It enlivens feelings, exciting the senses. The idea of the aesthetic cannot be reduced to pleasure. The senses can be unhappily, painfully excited. But if excited, they are involved, not disconnected and inert, but engaged actively. If folklore is artistic, then it is aesthetic. It compels the

involvement of its creators' feelings. Folklore is not everything. It is, first of all, that which is created by someone who is involved in--and committed to--its creation. Therefore, folklore stands against alienation, alienation of the kind that separates a worker from his product, a speaker from his language. Saying that, we express one of our discipline's traditional values. Folklorists are appalled by alienation, by that which prevents people from preserving active control over their own creative energies. Asserting that folklore is artistic is to say that folklore is hand-made (made with the control of its producers) and aesthetic (created out of the full sensual involvement of its creator). The folkloristic actor is gathered wholeheartedly into the act of doing, lost into creativity. No one does something artistic instinctively or nonchalantly or by coercion. The artist does what the artist chooses to do. By beginning to think about the first word in our definition, we find ourselves having taken a strong stance against forces that alienate people from their right to create. And that is but a beginning, for art, to us, means more than hand-made and aesthetic. Art is more than craft. It is always craft, but it is craft that embodies profundity. The second idea that art inevitably raises--second to the idea of the aesthetic, the involved--is profundity. Art expresses important ideas. Though we often reduce profundity to intellection, to philosophy (just as we reduce the aesthetic to pleasure), profundity, as Robert Plant Armstrong demonstrates in his great trilogy on the affecting presence, takes many shapes. Art can expose philosophies, or power, or nameless moving essences. Art is made with involvement so as to expose profound forms or feelings or ideas. Saying folklore is artistic, then, is to take a stand against alienation and against triviality. Folklore is important, not cheap, not shallow, but profound. The variety of profundity most moving to the folklorist is implied by the next words Dan Ben-Amos chose.

The second word is "communication." It shares roots with community and communion. Communication means connection. Communication joins separately volitional entities, logically linking intention with response. When the communication is artistic,



when it is folklore, it comes of self involvement, but it is not intended to leave the self in isolation. Communication connects; it effects the connections of community that unify people, and it effects the connections of communion that bring people together while joining them to all that lies beyond them. That is, just as folklore stands against alienation and triviality, folklore stands against radical individualism, against solipsism. Artistic communication cannot be an autoerotic gesture or an attempt to mystery. It must be an intention to connect, a force that uses the self and the personal perception of profundity to make connections to that which exists beyond the precious self.

The third element in Dan Ben-Amos's definition is "small group." The small group is the immediate referent to the artistic self. Saying "small group" brings to mind anthropological and sociological ideas about how people interact in intense face-to-face situations. But size is not the issue, nor is the problem one of social organization. Finally the folklorist asks not so much how people interact as why they interact. What matters is the force that makes groups cohere. The implication is that folklore engenders personally involved connections among people who exist in ongoing associations. To form ongoing associations, people agree to argue about deep ideas of right and wrong. They may differ in opinion, but they are oriented toward the same basic values. Values hold people together in groups. Their artistic communications work to bring those values into consciousness so that the members of the group, whatever its size, act for or against a shared sense of morality. Individuals are good or bad, but as artistic communicators in ongoing associations, they do not exist beyond values, without morality. So folklore, as a discipline, not only stands against alienation, triviality, and solipsism, it stands against amorality.

This antagonistic position of the folklorist is written into our most recent, most active definition. If we return to Lee Benson's critique, we discover in our definition an address to the very properties that Benson names as essential to a moral philosophy. Folklore, by definition, is a matter of concern over selfhood. Folklore in-

volves my talents, my will, my feelings, my sense of the profound. At the same time, folklore, by definition, is a matter of concern over responsibility. My idea of the profound is shared and I use my talent to express it so that moral connections can be made. I use myself responsibly. Folklore is, precisely, a unification of selfhood and responsibility. By using words that connect--"artistic communication," not "art and communication"--our definition does not propose that the self and the collective might coexist. It argues for their reciprocity, suggesting that they should exist interdependently. Creating folkloristically, the individual elects to use personal power for collective, moral ends.

Our definition incorporates our traditional values (we cherish at once creativity and connectedness), and it should guide our research. The unification of my personal needs with my wish to live well among my fellows--this desire guides my performance. Performance, by dint of the great genius of Bell Hymes, has become a word of vast significance for us. It is right that performance should dominate our thinking and guide our choice of subject. Creativity alone is not enough to make performance, nor can performance arise purely from connectivity. We are called by the convergence of the power to create with the will to connect. We should study the ways in which self, society, and values merge, erupting in action that is not alienated, not trivial, not solipsistic, not amoral.

Speaking now I have no sense of being pressured by some superorganic agent or government policy or tyranny of the social scene into using the English language. I do not feel disengaged from the language. It seems, instead, to be part of me. When magnificent tradition, the product of centuries of development and the creation of millions of people, gathers itself like a storm to break through my mouth, when I feel there is an idea within that must be shaped for presentation to those with whom I wish to be united, performance begins. Past and present, personal and collective fuse in performance. At certain moments, conventional dichotomies--individual versus society, self versus culture, action versus tradition--are obliterated, falsified, and performance becomes the

reality. English is my language. I use it to connect to you. When I sing the song I want to sing and which I think you want to hear, or which I think you should hear because of the predicament we share, performance can happen. Folklore can exist.

The moral core of folklore lives in the conjunction of the artistic with the social. That core is to be found in Dan Ben-Amos's definition and in Dell Hymes's prescription for study. Our idea is not that people should be artistic and that they should exist in communities. It is that simultaneously people should be able to fulfill themselves while contributing to the commonweal. Forces that prevent people from being able to do so, forces that coerce us to sacrifice our creativity for the common good or that assure us that our creativity need not be socially responsible --such forces can be condemned on the basis of folkloristic science.

A part of the charm of the oral formulaic theory lay in its elimination of the oppositions of performer and audience, tradition and action. It helped bring us toward the idea that art, communication, and small groups could be gathered into a single act. And much of the power of Dan Ben-Amos's definition resides in the fact that it codified the old values of our discipline in words appropriate to an era dominated, however subtly, by existential philosophy.

If we review our history of definitions, we will find Ben-Amos's to be the modern statement of an old tradition that has shifted its terminology while preserving its focus upon connections between selfhood and responsibility. This moral philosophical concern is fundamentally romantic and the major changes in folklore's definition have come in response to changes within the overarching philosophy of romanticism which have been, in turn, responses to new readings of the human condition.

Before there was a word folklore, there was a definition of folklore. I will call it Rousseauian. In the eighteenth century, thinkers held the belief, the hope, that an individual could encompass and speak the national soul. It should be possible for one person to absorb and then express the heritage of his people, the will of the collective. In Scotland, that thought led to Mac-

pherson's forgeries and Robert Burns's attempts to be the national poet. He worried in correspondence over his claim to the inheritance of dead rebels and whether it was appropriate for the national poet to be an exciseman, and he was told he should be a farmer. He was not much of a farmer, but it fit the role he was trying to fill. The first full edition of Burns' works, published to aid his widow, does not begin with a biography but with an account of Scottish peasant culture. Imagine beginning a collected edition of Shakespeare with an essay on the Elizabethan bourgeoisie. Today when we present a great poet sprung of the soil we do not begin with the collective, ethnographically, we begin with a marvelous individual, biographically. The biographies of Patrick Kavanagh do not start with essays on indomitable Irish peasantry. But in the period of the Rousseauian definition, it was right that a biography would commence in the national matrix, that a poet would become confused about whether a piece was his or theirs; Burns claimed the tradition for himself and also credited the tradition with his own works. It is interesting for us to try to disentangle the artist from the art, but the truly interesting thing is that we can never be sure where Burns and his informants separate. The point is that in his day there was a theory (which he understood) that an exceptional individual could serve as a vehicle for the common spirit.

That theory guided the first generation of serious folkloristic fieldworkers. In the early nineteenth century, T. Crofton Croker searched the Irish land for expressions of the Irish spirit, and in his first great book, published in 1824, he presented ancient architecture, archaic beliefs, and modern seditious street ballads. He followed quickly with his books of stories that expanded in their comparative scope through correspondence with the Grimms, and then published a book of popular songs.<sup>10</sup> His books of tales are rightfully cited as crucial in the history of our discipline,<sup>11</sup> but his book of songs has been neglected. That is because the stories had international relations and came from poor rural people, while the songs were largely local (an appropriate emphasis for Ireland) and many came from known, recent authors. Croker's stories and songs both fit the

definition of his age, but scholars in later times, operating with a different definition, could not feel that Croker's popular songs were really folk-song. Croker, for example, featured the poet Honest Dick Millikin, who died in 1815 (when Croker was seventeen) and who was an urban lawyer. But that seems strange only if we press late nineteenth century assumptions about "the folk" back into the middle of the Rousseauian concept of folklore. For Croker, folklore could be architecture or gravestones, customs or fairy stories, and it was bound not by class but by national spirit. It could be urban or rural, it could come from rich or poor. What mattered was that it incarnated the authentic tradition of Ireland. A lawyer writing alone in his study could embody the Irish tradition for an instant and express it in his verse. That idea is to be found in English language poetry from Milton to Whitman, and it persists in modern folk-life scholarship. It let Croker sweep wide in his interests, searching for works of art which, like the poems of Burns and the ancient tales of the peasants, bodied forth the collective spirit.

A generation passed, folklore gained a name, problems changed and so did the definition of folklore. I will call this next definition Pre-Raphaelite. Most of us were raised with the Pre-Raphaelite definition. It developed early in the era we inhabit, in the middle of the nineteenth century, and its proposition is that folklore exists in opposition to industrializing modernization. If industrializing modernization is a product of the capitalistic bourgeoisie, then folklore is the product of a precapitalistic peasantry. If industrializing modernization is a matter of social and conceptual fragmentation, formal education, professionalism, and materialism, then folklore depends on social and conceptual integration, on informal education, amateur action, and spiritual values. If industrializing modernization brings the nation-state, then folklore crosses political boundaries and thrives in communities, in localities and regions, among ethnic and religious groups, in families. In Pre-Raphaelite terms, folklore became a negative projection of a critique of modernity. The worst features of modern life were codified, their reverse was imagined, and that was folklore. If modernity brings exploitation through

alienation, cheapness through triviality, moral failure through radical individualism, desperation through the destruction of small-group orientation, then folklore fights back. If modernity brings standardization, mass production, then folklore results from nonstandardization, from variation. If modernity means constantly changing fashions, folklore means stable traditions. The purpose of fashion is to create class disjunction; the purpose of folklore is egalitarian integration of the little community.

That kind of forceful critical thinking softened during the twentieth century, but its legacy survived in the definitions that still dominated the discipline when Dan Ben-Amos and I were in graduate school. Its critical virtues were not eliminated when folklore was redefined as artistic communication in small groups. In the worst industrial situations, workers do not control the design, construction, and use of their products. They do not do what they want to do. Their products are not art. The leaders of the nation-state strive to replace allegiance to small groups with ideological alignments that undermine our capacity to communicate with our peers. In isolation, we have no small groups to give our art to. As definitions changed, folklore's core concerns held firm. Are people in the modern world able to achieve creative engagement, responsible selfhood? Our study answers in the affirmative.

The words of the definition changed. Its core remained stable. But the perspective demanded by the definition did change. The Pre-Raphaelite perspective was external. It adopted the position of the archivist or the visitor to a museum. Its intent was to describe patterns in products. The new definition requested an internal perspective, a view from the angle of the actor. It centers within a creator who is operating volitionally among conditions beyond control. It is an existential definition -- and I remind you that existentialism is twentieth century romanticism -- and so it fits the times that we occupy.

From the Rousseauian through the Pre-Raphaelite to the existential, folklore's definitions have preserved a concern with the relationship between personal creativity and collective values.

During the most recent definitional change history was deemphasized and action was emphasized (as seemed appropriate for an existential formulation), but no change was made in the idea of folklore as a phenomenon. The change lay in the location of perception. The Pre-Raphaelite definition described patterns exhibited by objects. Basically it held that the objects worthy of the name folklore display a pair of apparently contradictory traits: folklore is more variable than mass produced objects, and yet more stable than fashion. First, folklore varies. It is not standardized, rather it varies with time and space, adjusting itself to conditions. Finally, variation is the record of the individual creator of the object being so involved in the act of creation that when the object appears in the world it carries some impress of its creator's being, and so differs from things made by other people. At the same time, folklore is traditional. It preserves patterns of continuity despite the disruptive forces of history. Tradition is the result of the use of the shared past by an individual in order to communicate, in order to make connections in the present. Communication requires tradition; tradition requires communication. From an external point of view, folklore is the sum of products that simultaneously display variation and tradition, uniqueness and continuity. If we relocate ourselves so we stand with the creator, in his or her world, then we find that variation is a way to describe the result of an involved, artistic act, and that tradition is a way to describe the restraint, the acceptance of convention that is necessary to effect communications with other members of an ongoing social assembly. To be artistic, creativity must be free, variable. To be communicative, creativity must be restrained; it must be channeled through conventions; it must utilize the past to build the future; it must be traditional. The fusion of variation and tradition, of freedom and restraint--of selfhood and responsibility--is what we call folklore and what we study as performance.

Simply, folklore is the way that one answers at once the needs of the self and the needs of the collective. If the needs of the self demand solipsistic or antisocial formation, then we may have art, but we do not have folklore. If the needs of the collective demand a suspension of self rea-

lization, then we may have nobility but we do not have folklore. Folklore happens when the individual willingly takes control of the collective destiny. In focusing upon such moments, folklorists approve of such acts; they make judgements and take political positions. Standing in favor of self realization through creativity, folklore stands against alienation and exploitation, against slavery, demeaning labor, and hypocritical dogma, in favor of freedom. While favoring freedom, folklore stands against excessive individualism, in favor of mature restraint, communication, responsibility. At once folklore opposes the worst aspects of modern labor and modern art.

What is the future of folklore? If folklore rises out of the successful coordination of personal needs with collective needs, it would seem to have little future. A grim reading of an age shot through with selfishness and cowardice, with false ideologies and wage slavery, would lead us to believe our job is obsolescent. And if we sit back, comfortably stewing in our own pessimism, believing the lies perpetrated by those who call themselves our leaders, then our jobs should be eliminated. But I believe our work to be crucially important, so I will place myself within the old folkloristic tradition of critique and prescribe action for the future in a friendly manifesto.

First, we must continue to argue over the nature of folklore and the definition of our discipline, avoiding the complacent attitudes that have enervated more established disciplines. Folklore is not simply what professional folklorists choose to study, nor is it enough to do one's private work efficiently. As we argue over what folklore is, we preserve the intrinsic value structure that has nurtured our discipline for a long time. We must learn to shrug off accusations of irrationality when we criticize vicious superstitions that parade in the clothing of science. We must learn not to mind being called sentimental and romantic by those who hate and fear the people we celebrate. We must hold to the old values. But we need not agree. Agreement would not be useful. We should remain passionate about the central issues of the discipline. They are probably the central moral features of human existence. They deserve heated disagreement.



Second, we should resist attempts to separate our study from our daily lives. When study is contained wholly by academic tradition, it decays rapidly into professionalism. Precisely through engaging with the world and worrying about the common experiences we have, we will keep our discipline fresh and our studies useful to ourselves and our small group. Our arguments about artistic communication should be, themselves, artistic communications that raise for us profound problems. As we strive to maintain connections between study and action, between personal and collective needs, there will be three major fronts on which we will fight for the future of folklore.

Understanding the idea of responsible selfhood, it becomes our task to keep it alive in the world. We will do this in our own work, making sure that our scholarship meets our own standards, that it never becomes alienated and unartful, uncommunicative, unproductive, and irresponsible. And we must help others do the same. Like us, they should be allowed to do good work. That means folklorists should be involved in revivals, in making decisions concerning excellence, in struggling to keep excellence with us. I will not be abstract. Let me offer an example, a model: Ralph Rinzler. He helped to preserve the Ingtown Pottery when it was imperiled. Today at Ingtown Vernon Owens is master. He is heir to a tradition that stretches back to the eighteenth century in the North Carolina Piedmont and beyond to Staffordshire. It is one of the world's great ceramic traditions and within it Vernon Owens is a consummate artist, deft, sensitive, brave, and serious. Were it not for the folklorist Ralph Rinzler and his associates, it would be difficult, perhaps impossible, for Owens to do the work he wants to do, practicing his trade, enhancing his skills, offering his handsome products to the world. Ralph Rinzler did not attempt to revive the Carolina tradition falsely by becoming a potter himself. Instead he worked so that Vernon Owens could work. That is good work for a folklorist. At the Smithsonian, Ralph Rinzler helped set up good new markets for traditional workers, and that too was proper folkloristic enterprise. Rinzler appreciated Cajun music. He did not buy a fiddle. Instead he used money from the Newport Folk Festival to build

support for Cajun music within Louisiana, helping Dewey Balfa become the great force he remains in the performance of his own music and in the stimulation<sup>12</sup> of musical traditions throughout the South. Folklorists should work against the profiteers by getting money to people who wish to keep their own arts alive.

One front which we fight for folklore is revival, and Ralph Rinzler has shown that we can be victorious. There is no reason why you should not try your hand at potting or Cajun fiddling. (Ralph Rinzler is a superb musician himself.) Such attempts can increase your capacity for empathy. But finally they are unimportant. What matters is finding people who have the urge to communicate artistically, to create traditionally, and supporting them so they can continue.

A second front on which the future will be contested lies within the government. The lamentable record of governments in handling folklore is not sufficient reason for pretending governments do not exist. It is true that when governments appropriate folklore, art is lowered into propaganda. One government uses folklore to support the regime by appeals to homogeneity. Another elects to authenticate itself by displays of pluralism. Either way folklore is distorted. When governments give support to folklore (just as when they offer support to scholarship), dependencies develop, subtle shifts occur, and ultimately folklore's (or scholarship's) power is destroyed. The democratic spirit is confused when government officials believe that they ought to help the folk. The folk--to parody Pogo--is us, and we don't need no help from no government. But we do not need our government to harm us either, so we do need help within the government. We need civil servants willing to work to undermine the power of the government so that life can unfold without its disruptions.

Primarily as a result of the work of Archie Green, we now have in many state governments and within the federal government people on our side. Not all of the activities of the Folklife Center in Washington seem proper to me, but Alan Jabbour is doing good folkloristic work when he attempts to influence other government agencies so that they will be more circumspect, more respectful in their

in their approach to folk cultures. We have little need for photographs of quaint weatherbeaten gentlemen from our government, little need for brief colorful quotations, but we do need people in government who are sophisticated about its nature, who have the courage to confront its evil and sabotage its plans. The essential domestic purpose of our government is to support an economic system that is dedicated to the destruction of the human right to perform. Your government wants you to surrender creativity, to buy costly ephemeral junk, and to accept bodily comfort as an end in itself. You should not wish to perpetuate small groups. Your government wishes you to exist in mute isolation, vulnerable to ideological manipulation. Simply, then, folklorists who believe that everyone has the right to be creative and to exist in small groups in accord with their own values--folklorists are obliged to resist the government's intentions.

At this moment, Alan Jabbour is working on the Cultural Conservation Report.<sup>13</sup> Historic preservation legislation protects important buildings. Perhaps legislation can be devised that will protect important cultures. No longer would the Army Corps of Engineers be allowed to seize farmland, banish its inhabitants, and destroy their community, in order to turn their home earth into parks for tourists. We need neatly attired, politically savvy wobblers who can speak the bizarre language of Washington, in which nouns become verbs or letters, who can communicate artfully in that small group on behalf of folklore. We need allies in government who can slow the government down.

I have isolated two of the fronts on which the battle for folklore will be fought and named two men who are already successfully in action. The third front, and the one I consider most important (I would be a hypocrite if I did not believe it to be most important since it is the one I have chosen) is scholarly. Here I see our opportunity dividing to provide us with a pair of ways to act in order to bring our lives and thoughts into oneness in the service of folklore.

As we orient our energies beyond our community of scholars, it is our responsibility to learn to connect to the needs of the people we study. It is that simple: we must learn to become interested

in what the people who interest us are interested in. First of all, that would be scientific. The emic impulse lies at the very center of our existentially redefined discipline, and our science would be carried to its proper conclusion if we learned to communicate artistically about the things that the people we study artistically communicate, striving to become concerned about the matters that concern them. Remember, we do not study stones, we study people and they can tell us what is important to them. Our task is being patient. Lady Gregory said that a folklorist's virtues are patience and reverence.<sup>14</sup> Reverence comes from patience. Moving slowly, you learn their interests, you come to share their orientation, their understanding. Their texts take on meaning. Science is served. Lady Gregory was interested in language. She waited and was led from now people talked to what they said, toward why they said it. She shifted with them from words to fairy stories to legends and ballads to values. That is the natural style of the scientific ethnographer: to follow innocently, learning new and deeper things.

If our science reorients itself to align with the thinking of the people we study, one alteration in emphasis will be necessary. Within our little community, the scholar most valued is the one who displays analytic skills while connecting interestingly to our own tradition of concern. But if we wish to serve the people we study, we will find they have little need for our analysis. If it is right, they probably already know its essence. The talent we do have that can be of use to them is that of collecting and presenting texts. They are working hard to preserve texts, and we are capable of helping them do it. Recently I composed two tellings of one tale concerning life in a small community in Northern Ireland.<sup>15</sup> For my community, I wrote **Passing the Time in Ballymenone**, full of analysis and digressions that I hoped would be useful to my colleagues. I made sure that **Passing the Time**, like my other books on Ireland, would have an Irish publisher and so be available to Irish people, but for the people of Ballymenone I wrote **Irish Folk History**, consisting entirely of texts. Lacking deep analysis, lightly annotated, it is not a book to please the professional, but it pleased my friends in Ballymenone. They feel honored by the big book, I am glad it has gotten

wonderful reviews in the local papers, but the book Ballymenone likes is the small one, which I sent to every household in the community. More than the books' royalties (which, of course, I give to my major "informants"), the small book is my repayment for their help. **Irish Folk History** is a set of texts to which people can bring their own contexts, their own interpretations, which they can enliven with their own analysis so as to teach themselves about themselves. Michael Boyle, James Owens, Joe Flanagan, Ellen Cutler, wonderful old Hugh Nolan--most of those who contributed to my work are dead now. But Ballymenone has their texts, pure on the page. Those texts are what they want. They construct their own culture. They do not need us to formulate it for them. But old people die, old wisdom vanishes, and we can help future generations by preserving the texts they must interpret as part of their own quest for maturity.

Folklorists must learn enough about the people they study to be able to make useful gifts to them. Laudably, the Folklore Institute has responded to the needs of the people of Indiana. Linda Dégh has led in the collection of Indiana tales and their preservation in **Indiana Folklore**. Warren Roberts has led in the collection of Indiana's material culture and its preservation in a museum where the people of the state will be able to see it forever.

Currently, Indiana University is sponsoring an important oral history project. One good use of our expensive training would be to cooperate in such endeavors. Historical understanding is crucial to modern people. From history they learn naturally and emotionally about causes and systems, but the history that teaches them must bear upon their lives, must in some measure be gathered from them. Oral history is one technique for engaging people in the historical process, for increasing their understanding of their conditions and their potential for overcoming conditions. The common people, people like us, must gain presence in the world of historical writing, so oral historical study calls the folklorist. It is the kind of work we are good at, and it is the kind of work the people want us to do. No problems of rapport or research design will arise. We should go to the people, describe our skills, and ask what they want us to do. Often their request will form as oral history. Here at Indiana I once taught the Afro-

American folklore course (now fortunately in the capable hands of Bill Wiggins). I talked about field research with leaders of Bloomington's Black community, and then organized the class to cooperate in producing an oral history of the Second Baptist Church, a central institution in the community, which we edited, typed, duplicated, and presented to the Church on the occasion of its centennial. The folklorists did fieldwork and learned about Afro-American culture. The community received a document that it wanted. Everyone benefited.

As scholars we have a scientific obligation to discover what the people are interested in, and then we have a social obligation to work with them to preserve that which they wish to see preserved.

One of our scholarly obligations requires orientation to communities beyond our own. We must talk usefully about life. Another obligation directs us to engagement within our own academic community. We must know its traditions and honor them through arguing with them and guiding them by forming our observations and explanations so that they will lead to collective intellectual advancement. That demands care and rigor and seriousness. It also demands that we avoid becoming so comfortable in our little corner of the academy, so wrapped up in our own tiny tradition that our language and formulations cease to be generally accessible, immediately compelling, and widely interesting.

Have you ever noticed how differently faculty members talk in faculty meetings than they talk in scholarly articles? In meetings or at parties--in locations where they really want to communicate--scholars talk like the people folklorists study. They tell stories, they strive for artful shapings of deep ideas, they favor the particular over the abstract. Abstractions mystify. One speaks of economics, for example, in order to hide the real issues. No one has ever seen an economy, touched one, heard one. All we have experienced are manifestations of actions that we name economic. The idea of economics is a matter of faith, a matter of piling metaphor on abstraction on metaphor on abstraction. We could begin to cut through the nonsense by asking simple direct questions: "Do you like your work?" "Who benefits most from this exchange?" To ask, "How does the economic sys-

tem function?", is to leave scores of strange assumptions and conventions peculiar to our own culture unexamined, unquestioned, and intact. Our questions should get to the point, and our conclusions should be framed in language that allows people from outside our discipline to test them against their own traditions and experiences. Our scholarship should be communicative. It should enable connections to be made between our discipline and other disciplines, between academic and nonacademic communities.

No discipline has the potential that folklore does for dismantling the barriers that have risen between the university and other communities. We study the daily lives of people, their commonplace speech and work, their artistic and ethical aspirations. We would be false to our study, inept in its performance, if we did not learn from them and reorganize our lives in accordance with our study so as to make our own community more concerned with effecting social connections through artistic communications. Folklore is poised perfectly to make connections.

In collusion with the people we study, we, the meek, the hunters and gatherers, could gain the power to save the academy from its rush toward professionalistic irrelevance. If the people need local history, then we will provide it through oral history and artifactual analysis. If they want texts and old artifacts saved so that they will be able to examine themselves in the mirror of their own creations, then we will record and transcribe and help in the expansion of archives and museums. They will learn what we are trying to do, and as fieldworkers we will learn their needs, so that when they come to us in the university, we will be able to teach them things that we know they do not know but which we believe they must know in order to achieve their goals. We will follow when we can, lead when we must, and at the end of all, perhaps, the university will become once again a force in civic life of the nation.

At once we will be concerned with other communities and worried about our own. If we develop proper attitudes toward the people we study, and then tyrannize over our secretaries or bully our students, limiting their potential for artistic communication, then we have not grasped the heart of folklore's message.

Within the academy, our task is to affirm the nonacademic. We celebrate that which by convention-

al definitions lies beyond academic scrutiny. Taking oral history seriously, believing folk art is fine art, knowing poor people can be brilliant, we engage in an endless--and endlessly fruitful--dialogue with our colleagues about what is good and how life should be conducted. In accepting the role of defenders of the nonacademic within the confines of the academy, we act correctly as folklorists and we move toward becoming true scholars.

Jean-Paul Sartre has taught us what a scholar is not.<sup>16</sup> A scholar is not a technician disengaged from the real world, lost in pursuits constricted by academic tradition. Reality calls.

Reflexivity is essential to the scholar. We cannot be scientific if we eliminate the observer, writing ourselves out of our own texts as though reality did not include us. But if reflexivity so coils upon itself that our texts display ourselves, rather than using ourselves as witnesses to reality, then the scholar's potential for changing the world for the better is lost.

Theory is essential to the scholar. We must formulate generalizations and explanations in such a way that they will be of use to many others. But if what we call theories become mere conglomerations of bibliographic reference, or abstractions divorced from real situations, then they serve to obscure rather than to illuminate the world. When our theories are made of vapor and stated in dense jargon, then, it seems, their purpose is to gain us a livelihood while covering a form of exploitation in which we use other people for our own ends. When the "informant" becomes one who makes a product (or "carries" a culture) that only the folklorist knows how to use and process properly, when elaborate theories serve to separate the creator of folklore from its significance, then informants become folklore's lower class; folklorists use informants like rich people use poor people, like E. Said has said the West uses the East.<sup>17</sup> Westerners have taken the products of the East, the beautiful carpets and delicious spices, then they have used Near Eastern people as exotic objects to manipulate in art, literature, and science. White Americans have consumed Afro-American music and use Black people as things to depict and study. Folklorists have similarly used "the folk" and they have used theories to hide the fact by arguing that it is



the folklorist, not the person who creates the folklore, who understands and can explain its meaning. Using others for our pleasure and benefit is indecent. Lofty abstractions and layers of impenetrable jargon often function to obscure that indecency while providing money to academics and preventing them from becoming true scholars.

To be scholars we must recognize, first of all, that reality is not divided in the way that the academy is. No single discipline can compass reality's complexities, so all seekers for truth must move beyond the discipline that trained them and provided them with a good point of entry. Ultimately every scholar becomes an amateur. Declaring that you are a historian, meeting a fact, determining that it is sociological, and then saying, "Well, I'll leave that to the sociologists," is tantamount to saying, "Truth does not interest me. My goal is in the preservation of academic distinctions." Separate disciplines may be necessary to budgetary officers, and even to the ongoing dialectic energy of university life, but they cannot be allowed to inhibit individual scholars during their struggles for understanding.

As truth (and not disciplinary traditions) must remain foremost in the scholar's mind, so reality must precede the self. It is not that we should forget our training or abandon our personal concerns, but we must learn to suspend our own traditions so that we can go where the facts take us. In the social sciences, passive and inductive procedures are not mystical or absurd. Our goal is understanding human beings, and human beings are conscious; they can get us on the right track, consulting with us as our work proceeds, helping to evaluate our conclusions. All we need is mastery of the language of daily discourse, a sense of immanent meaning, patience and reverence.

The scholarly folklorists who forge the future will wish to engage with reality. They will cease writing prolegomena that outline exactly in unreadable language what we might do if we ever got around to doing it. They will do their work and speak forcefully about it, teaching by example rather than by abstract prescription. They will no longer arbitrarily bracket and ignore aspects of reality, such as time. Eventually, they will surrender the strange convenience of synchrony, letting history rush into their studies, providing them with a way to explain as well as describe what is happening.

Professionalism killed philosophy. There is no more philosophy, Sartre tells us, only students of the history of philosophy and groups of people who enjoy assembling intricate puzzles without references to reality. Anthropology has taken philosophy's place, for anthropologists continue to question Western thinking against the whole of the world's complexity. And yet, not so long ago, James Deetz, an important anthropologist addressing his colleagues at the University of Pennsylvania, said that folklore had stolen the heart of anthropology. He meant (in our terms) that anthropologists had become absorbed in professional problems, they had left moral philosophy behind and come to rest within the frame of Lee Benson's critique, while folklorists continued to bumble about in the field, attempting to understand people. We humble folklorists still go into the world enflamed by the moral perplex at the core of our definition. We still grapple with reality to try to improve our thinking.

The future of the folklore scholar is to be a brave amateur, a realistic philosopher who believes in the scientific investigation of the moral issue of cultural construction, who studies how self and society interpenetrate in performance.

As scholarly folklorists we must work to save the university. We must talk directly about what we feel our colleagues and fellow citizens need to hear. We must affirm the study of artistic communication in small groups as both a scientific investigation and a moral philosophy that teaches people that they can be at once creative and useful. At last, we must take our own message to heart and in our work strive to be both artistic and socially responsible.

## NOTES

1. This piece of writing is a version of a largely extemporized talk delivered at Indiana University in the series "The Future of American Folklore," in February 1982. I am grateful to Linda Dégh and her colleagues, my friends, for the invitation and to Thomas Walker and Jeanne Harrah-Conforth for providing me with a transcript of the talk which I edited to make it a bit more readable.
2. I was deeply moved by a presentation that Lee Benson made to a faculty seminar at the University of Pennsylvania, on December 15, 1981. The participants in the seminar to Assess the Social Sciences received from Benson two papers: "Doing History as Moral Philosophy and Public Advocacy: A Practical Strategy to Lessen the Crisis in American History," originally presented to the organization of American Historians, April 1, 1981; "Changing Social Science to change the World: A Discussion Paper," originally presented to the Social Science History Association, October 21, 1977, and subsequently printed in **Social Science History**.
3. There are different schools of "ethnopoetic" analysis. Dennis Tedlock made a major contribution to folklore scholarship by breaking texts into lines in accordance with pauses and using typography to suggest loudness. Dell Hymes has furthered that idea in a style of transcription that reveals the poetic structures that enhance the work's significance. The thinking of both of these men inspires me as I perform the exciting task of transcribing texts from tapes. Key statements of their separate rationales are: Dennis Tedlock, "On the Translation of Style in Oral Narrative," in Américo Paredes and Richard Bauman, eds., **Toward New Perspectives in Folklore** (Austin: University of Texas Press for the American Folklore Society, 1972), pp. 114-133; Dell Hymes, "Discovering Oral Performance and Measured Verse in American Indian Narrative," **New Literary History** 8 (1976/77):431-457.
4. In the midst of a long contextual analysis of historical narrative, I digress explicitly on the nature of context in **Passing the Time in Ballymenon** (see note 15, below), pp. 33, 520-522.
5. Marc Bloch (Peter Putnam, trans.), **The Historian's Craft** (New York: Random House, 1953), p. 86.
6. Dan Ben-Amos' essay "Toward a Definition of Folklore in Context," first published in the **Journal of American Folklore** in 1971, led the Paredes and Bauman volume (see note

3 above), pp. 3-15. It has been reprinted along with other of his important essays in this handy compilation: Dan Ben-Amos, **Folklore in Context: Essays** (New Delhi: South Asian Publishers [1982]), pp. 2-19.

7. Robert Plant Armstrong has worked admirably and seriously to free aesthetic philosophy of its West European "high art" bias, and in doing so has contributed magnificently to folklore. His major works: **The Affecting Presence: An Essay in Humanistic Anthropology** (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1971); **Wellspring: On the Myth and Source of Culture** (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1975); **The Powers of Presence: Consciousness, Myth, and Affecting Presence** (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1981).

8. The basic text is Dell Hymes, **Foundations in Sociolinguistics: An Ethnographic Approach** (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1974). Many of his earlier papers listed in his bibliography remain crucial. Of particular use to folklorists is Hymes' essay, "Breakthrough into Performance," Dan Ben-Amos and Kenneth S. Goldstein, eds., **Folklore Performance and Communication** (The Hague: Mouton, 1975), pp. 11-74.

9. I refer to J. Currie, ed., **The Works of Robert Burns**, 4 vols. (London: Cadell, Davies, and Creech, 1801) and to the correspondence reprinted in William Wallace, ed., **Robert Burns and Mrs. Dunlop**, 2 vols. (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1898). On Burns as both poet and informant, Mary Ellen B. Lewis writes interestingly in "Some Uses of the Past: The Traditional Song Repertoire of Robert Burns," in Linda Dégh, Henry Glassie, and Felix J. Oinas, eds., **Folklore Today: A Festschrift for Richard M. Dorson** (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1976), pp. 325-333.

10. T. Crofton Croker's main works: **Researches in the South of Ireland, Illustrative of the Scenery, Architectural Remains, and the Manners and Superstitions of the Peasantry** (London: John Murray, 1824); different editions of **Fairy Legends and Traditions of the South of Ireland** (first series 1825, second series 1828); and **The Popular Songs of Ireland** (London: Henry Colburn, 1839).

11. On Croker, see Richard M. Dorson, **The British Folklorists: A History** (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968), pp. 44-52.

12. A primary document concerning the good work of the Newport Folk Foundation, from the days when it seemed right to spread the wealth and support authentic diversity, can be found in "Secretary's Report," in Henry Glassie and Ralph Rinzler, eds., **Newport Folk Festival** [program book] (New York: Newport Folk Foundation, 1967), pp. 6, 41-42, 44.
13. Ormond Loomis submitted the final draft of the report, **Cultural Conservation: The Protection of Cultural Heritage in the United States**, to the National Park Service and the American Folklife Center on July 15, 1982. It is 95 pages long and provides much useful reading for folklorists.
14. Lady Gregory's apt characterization of the qualities necessary to the folklorist come in her truly great folklore book, **Visions and Beliefs in the West of Ireland** (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970, first published 1920), p. 15.
15. Henry Glassie, **Passing the Time in Ballymenon: Culture and History of an Irish Community** (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, Dublin: O'Brien Press, 1982); **Irish Folk History: Texts from the North** (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press; Dublin: O'Brien Press, 1982). My earlier book on the same community: **All Silver and No Brass: An Irish Christmas Mumming** (Bloomington: Indiana University Press; Dublin: Dolmen Press, 1976; paperback edition: Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press; Dingle: Brandon Books, 1983).
16. Here and later I refer to Jean-Paul Sartre (John Matthews, trans.) **Between Existentialism and Marxism** (New York: William Morrow, 1976), and especially the essay "A Plea for Intellectuals."
17. Edward W. Said, **Orientalism** (New York: Vintage Books, 1979).