A Multidimensional Approach to Oral Literature[1]

by Heda Jason

In a recent paper, Jacobs (1966) expressed the opinion that the bulk of folklore research today lags behind the current developments in the neighboring disciplines, be they social or humanistic (for summaries of the past scholarship, see Dorson 1963, Hand 1965, Thompson 1946). Jacobs' critique arouses serious thought; therefore it seems worthwhile to survey the literature and to see whether the work done in recent years justifies his harsh judgment or whether it might perhaps hold the germ of a new start.

Going through the older works and summarizing their approaches, one is led to ask the questions: How should we approach oral literature? Is it a survival of some previous stage of development of the society (its own society or some other)? Is it a reflection of its contemporary society? Is it created in order to express the psychological problems of the members of its society? Does it exist to be used as a weapon in some social conflict, or as a means of entertainment, whether of adults or children?

Let us adopt an eclectic standpoint and consider the recent work done in the following framework: oral literature is none of these alone—rather it is and does *all* of them together. It is a survival in that it grew together with its society in an uneven historical process (which included 'a diffusional give and take from cultures of other societies), and bears the marks of its own past. It is a kind of reflection of its contemporary society in that it is fitted to express the problems of it, be these social, psychological, or others. It may be used for harmless entertaining or as a weapon in some social conflict (inside a society, or between competing societies). It may be used ("function") in a serious ritual, central to the society's survival, or as a lubricant to keep the minor wheels of the society going. Above all these, the item of oral literature is a work of art—a work of artistic presentation—and as such can be handled by the methods of literary criticism (cf. Erlich 1955, Bogatyrev and Jakobson 1929, Konkka 1959, Nikiforov 1936, Todorov 1966).

The following discussion is in great measure an informal thinking out of hypotheses, a bringing together of available bits and pieces of analyses in order to build a tentative framework which may facilitate the continuation of the work. It is inevitable that many of the proposed assumptions will prove to be false and should be replaced as insight grows. (As my familiarity is primarily with Eurasian material, the reasoning unfortunately will draw disproportionately heavily on this material.)

UNDERLYING ASSUMPTIONS

In the approach here discussed, the item of oral literature will be put at the center of interest; i.e., the question will *not* be "What can I learn about the society I happen to be interested in from its oral literature?" (cf. Fischer's publications; Colby 1966; Hart and Hart 1966: 84; Spencer 1957), but the opposite. I propose beginning with the oral literature and asking, what are the innate qualities which shape an oral literature, what are the outer forces which shape it, and what are the interrelations of oral literature with its contexts (literary, cultural, social, etc.)?

Two units are considered:

1. The term "item of oral literature" will be used to refer to *the text and its performance*. This includes the

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[1] An earlier version of this paper was read at the Central States Anthropological Society Annual Meeting (Chicago, 1967). The ideas presented here first took shape while the author was studying with Professor S. N. Eisenstadt and the late Professor Y. Garber-Talmon; Professor A. Dundes took the trouble to go over the entire manuscript. My sincere thanks go to all of them. The failings are mine alone.

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interpreter and the audience, as well as the social context, of the performance.

In order that an orally used text can be considered as belonging to oral literature, it must have an artistic form; a greeting, a dream portent, or a weather prediction are, although traditional and orally transmitted, not artistically shaped. (The constant form of dream portents or weather predictions, "if . . . then . . . ," is the form in which the knowledge of the group can easily be communicated to an inquisitive outsider, but not the form used in in-group relations [cf. Dégh 1965: 80].) On the other hand, an incantation, a proverb, a riddle, or an anecdote, however short, will have an artistic form. Attention has been paid recently to material in the written medium (such as latrinalia [Dundes 1966]). It does not seem in this case to be an essential difference whether the items are found in written form; they are not copied or reprinted as is written literature, but are remembered and reproduced from memory as is other oral literature. They depend on the censorship of the society (Bogatyrev and Jakobson 1929) for their very survival, just as other kinds of folk culture do. Some items of these texts may have an artistic form, and these would belong to oral literature; others not having an artistic form would not.

The above is thought to be a working hypothesis, not a definition. All of the three criteria mentioned for delimitation of oral literature—traditionality, oral transmissibility, and artistic form—are given by rule of thumb and need further clarification.

2. The "repertoire of the oral literature of one society" will be considered a unit. It is assumed that a system of relationships underlies this unit and that it may be analyzed as other systematically organized artifacts of a society, such as the kinship system or the language, may be analyzed (see Erlich 1955: 169–81 for similar ideas held by the Russian formalists and the Prague school). The task would then be to devise a model for a synchronic description of the whole repertoire of oral literature of a single society. The description would account for the factors mentioned above, namely the inner organization of the material and its system of relationships with its synchronic contexts (see Bogatyrev and Jakobson 1929).

Like historical linguistics, oral literature scholarship has used a diachronic approach. The questions of historical change—reconstructing past stages of development, ascertaining how a particular oral literature came to look as it does today, or predicting the changes it will undergo tomorrow—lie outside synchronic description. In the diachronic approach oral literature is interrelated with its contexts, taken diachronically, and has to be handled diachronically too. This would be a separate task, and is excluded from the present framework.

It may be further assumed that other forms of traditional artistic expression—music, kinetic and visual arts —may be treated in a similar framework, and that all these together with oral literature, on some higher level of organization, have a common framework. Of the three, the products of "verbal art" (cf. Bascom 1955) seem to have the most transparent structure; the other two seem to be encoded in a more complex way (cf. Boas 1927; Fischer 1961; Lévi-Strauss 1963: 245–73; Munn 1966; and Nettl 1958).

STRUCTURAL ASPECTS

In a brief review of the recent literature I have found the following analyses of the problem of a structural approach:

1. Models for a particular item of oral literature (e.g., the structure of the "message" in an Australian myth [Berndt 1966: 267–70]; an Amerindian myth in relation to its society [Lévi-Strauss 1958]).

2. Models for a group of single items from related cultures, without emphasis on genre (e.g., narrative structure of Amerindian myths [Dundes 1964*b*]; narrative structure of myths from two related Oceanian societies [Fischer 1956*a*]).

3. Models for single items of a genre of oral literature from a particular culture (e.g., narrative structure of Jewish-Hellenistic exempla and fables, and "message" of sacred legends [Ben-Amos 1967]; narrative structure of a kind of Lithuanian legends [Dundes 1962*b*]; textural structure of Burmese riddles [Maung Than Sein and Dundes 1964]; the narrative structure of Jewish-Near Eastern sacred legends [Jason 1965]; the narrative structure of certain Chinese legends [Jason 1966*b*]; the narrative structure of Indian swindler tales [Jason 1966*c*]; the textural structure of Cheremis charms [Sebeok and Ingemann 1956]; the texture of Cheremis songs [Sebeok 1956, 1959]; the textural structure of Yiddish proverbs [Silverman-Weinreich 1964]; the narrative structure of Yiddish sacred legends [Silverman-Weinreich 1965]).

4. Models for single items of one genre of oral literature from different cultures (e.g., the structure of riddles [Georges and Dundes 1963]; the narrative structure of fairy tales [Nikiforov 1927, Propp 1928–58]; narrative structure of formula tales [Shklovskij 1929]).

5. A certain aspect of the whole repertoire of some genre in one culture (e.g., a historical scheme of Chinese popular novels and theater plays [Eberhard 1967: 30–31]; the relationship of certain content items in tales to similar items in the society in two Oceanian groups [Fischer 1956*b*, 1958]; Oceanian songs and their relationships to a certain aspect of their society [Fischer and Swartz 1960]; the "message," temporal and spatial schemes in Jewish-Near Eastern sacred legends [Jason 1968*a*, *b*]; a whole repertoire as the reflection of the personality of the members of the society [Kardiner 1945]; a time scheme for Winnebago myths [Radin 1933: 369; 1948: 8–9]; a time, space, and "purpose" ["message"] scheme for Yiddish sacred legends [Silverman-Weinreich 1965]; the so-called content analysis [Colby 1966; Jacobs 1959; Kalin *et al.* 1966; Maranda 1967*a*, *b*; Pool 1959; Sebeok 1957; Sebeok and Ingemann 1956; Stone *et al.* 1966]).

6. A basic model to account for all items of oral literature from all cultures (e.g., Kongas and Maranda 1962, model of narrative structure, sometimes combined with the "message"; see Waugh's 1966 comment on this).

7. The structure of the relationships between several items from a single culture (e.g., Greek and Amerindian myths [Lévi-Strauss 1960; 1963: 206–31; 1964; 1966]; in both cases it is the "message" of the content which is analysed).

8. The structure of oral literature looked upon as multidimensional (e.g., myths [Fischer 1966, Radin 1926: 21–23], legends [Azbel'ev 1966, Jason 1968*a*, Silverman-

Weinreich 1965], folk songs [Sokolov 1926, Suppan 1966], proverbs [Herzog 1936: Introduction], high literature [Ingarden 1960]; in general see Abrahams 1964; Ben-Amos 1967: 54–67; Dundes 1964*c*; Erlich 1955:218–43; Jacobs 1959:1–4; Littleton 1965; Nikiforov 1930; Propp 1963; Sebeok and Ingemann 1956:288–92; Vansina 1965; Waugh 1966).

DETERMINANTS AND THEIR ANALYSIS

The last approach is the conceptualization of oral literature as multidimensional. Starting with this assumption, let us suppose that a multidimensional network of co-ordinates underlies oral literature. A co-ordinate can be labeled "determinant." Each item of oral literature can be measured by every determinant; that is, it will have a "value" in terms of this determinant. (See Fig. 1 for the relations between the determinants and the position of the items on the co-ordinates of the network.)

So far it has been possible to establish 13 determinants; further work will no doubt change the list:

A. Formal artistic determinants
   - A1. Textural structure of the oral-literature item
   - A2. Dramatization of the item
   - A3. Narrative structure of the content

B. Content determinants
   - B4. Plot-elements
   - B5. "Message" which the oral literature bears

C. Cultural determinants underlying the content
   - C6. Value system
   - C7. Temporal aspects
   - C8. Spatial aspects

D. Social determinants manipulating the item of oral literature
   - D9. "Function" of the item in the social system
   - D10. "Use" of the item in the social situation
   - D11. Conscious shaping of the item by the individual

E. Real-world determinants
   - E12. The real world (physical, social, cultural)
   - E13. Psychic makeup of the individual.

The following brief discussion of the determinants will describe what is meant by each determinant, indicating some problems and giving examples of works dealing with this aspect of oral literature.

A. Formal Artistic Determinants

The formal artistic determinants seem to be the most highly structured qualities of oral literature and to be rather autonomous, having little feedback to the rest of the determinants (see Fig. 1). The structure of the formal determinants resembles in several aspects the structure of language. The resemblance is so close that once basic units and relations between them have been established, the material can be handled by concepts developed by structural linguistics. The texture (A1) and the dramatization (A2) seem to be more closely related to each other (the texture being the more important) than either is to the narrative structure (A3).

The formal features of oral literature seem to be one of the most important aspects of what comprises the traditionality of the oral literature; the features least

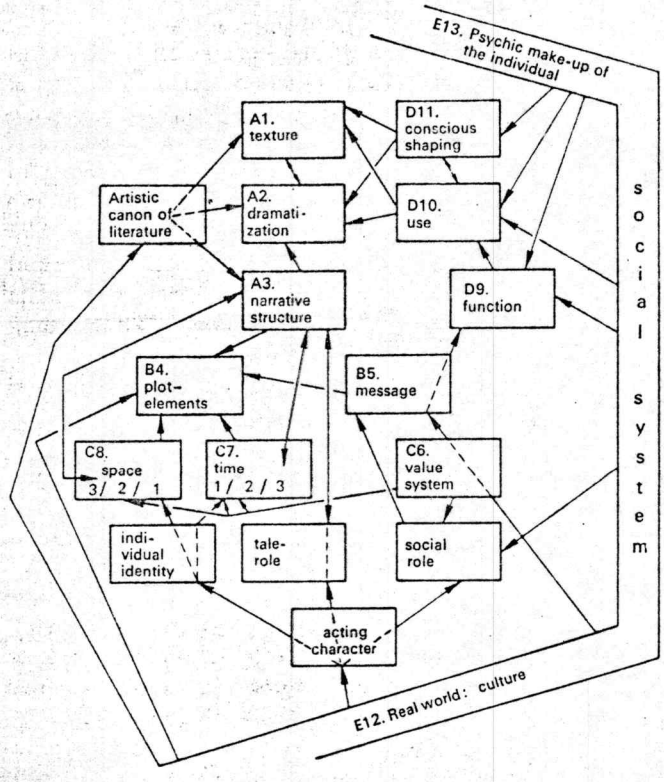

FIG. 1. Assumed relations between the determinants.

connected with traditionality seem to be B4 (plot-elements) and D11 (conscious shaping of the material). Determinants E seem to be only remotely related to this problem.

A1. The analysis of *the texture* includes such aspects as the grammatical structure (phonology and syntax), prosodic features, style, etc. As the texture presupposes a certain language, it ends at the sentence or verse level. The texture operates with traditional poetic means, which are varied by the idiosyncrasies of the performers amounting to a personal style; the range of this variation has not yet been explored. In fixed-phrase genres, which have as their basic unit the sentence of the language, we will have a structure of the texture only (e.g., Dundes and Georges 1962; Herzog 1936; Rybnikova 1961; Scott 1965; Sebeok and Ingemann 1956; Silverman-Weinreich 1964); in other cases the structure of the texture and the narrative structure (A3) will form two separate systems (e.g., Dundes 1964*c*; Fischer 1959; Hymes 1959, 1965; Jakobson 1933, 1952; Jason 1966*a*: 99–100; Lessa 1966: 31–33; Lord 1956, 1960: 30–67; Lotz 1942, 1954; Maung Than Sein and Dundes 1964; Nikiforov 1930; Sebeok 1956, 1960, 1962; Strohbach 1966; Suppan 1966: 41; Vansina 1965).

A2. Dramatization of the item: the texture is presented in a dramatized form, by a single performer or by several (as in large rituals). The situation of performer(s) vs. audience exists when the audience does not partake actively in the performance, but merely adds encouragement to the performer(s) and checks on the accuracy of his interpretation; as soon as the audience is expected to take a necessary (even if small) part in the performance, it becomes a performer itself.

The texture is dramatized by voice (including music), facial expression, and gesture (any traditional ethno-

graphy may contain descriptions of such performances). All three seem to be transmitted (at least in the outlines and organizing patterns) together with the verbal material, or the texture. A structural description of these three and of their interrelationships with the repertoire of the same entities outside the performance is needed to clarify their *langue* qualities and their relations to the structures of texture and narrative. Of the three means of transcription—verbal description, photographs and sound recordings, or sound film—the last seems to be the only adequate one (cf. Bascom 1954: 334; Haiding 1955; Jansen 1957; Kriss-Rottenbeck 1965).

A3. The narrative structure starts where the textural structure ends: it does not presuppose a particular language because it operates on units larger than the sentence and is not correlated to a verse or prose form of the texture. The narrative structure can be compared to a kind of "syntax," according to which the plot-elements—which can be compared to a "vocabulary" (B4)—are arranged into tales. The most productive units so far have been designed by Propp (1928, 1958) for fairy tales. He designed a unit of action in the tale (a "function") which can be compared to a syntactical function in a sentence of language; several such action-units form a higher-level unit (a "move") which may be compared to a sentence. "Moves" are organized into "whole tales." The latter have a deep and a surface structure. The function can again be understood as a sentence and broken down into smaller units. The content which fills in the "function-slots" is the "plot-element" (B4), which serves as a kind of vocabulary. The basic features of this structure seem to be, at least nearly, universal (European, Near Eastern, Indian, Chinese, African Negro, and North Amerindian prose and verse texts have so far been successfully analyzed). The universality of the narrative structure and its close similarity to the structure of language allow us to assume that investigation of the narrative structure will have feedback to the analysis of language.

A number of attempts at analysis following Propp's concepts have been made. See, for example, Ben-Amos' (1967) analysis of Jewish-Hellenistic fables and legends; Dundes' (1964*b*) and Georges' (1966) analyses of North Amerindian myths; Horner (1967) on African tales; Jason (1966*b*) on Chinese legends; Jason (1966*c*) on Indian swindler tales; Jason (1967*a*) on Yugoslav epic songs; Jason (1967*b*) on Amerindian tales; and Jason (1965) on Jewish-Near Eastern legends. For discussions of Propp's model see Bremond (1964), Dundes (1962*a*), Greimas (1965), Jason (1967*c*), Lakoff (1964—adapting Propp's analysis to that of Chomsky [1957]), Lévi-Strauss (1960). For some other attempts to describe the narrative structure see Dundes (1962*b*) on Lithuanian legends; Fischer (1956*a*) on Oceanian myths; Kongas and Maranda (1962) on various items from different cultures; Lüthi (1960: 37–53) and Nikiforov (1927) on fairy tales; Radin (1915, 1954–56) on North Amerindian myths; Sebeok and Ingemann (1956) on Cheremis charms; Shklovskij (1929) on formula tales; Silverman-Weinreich (1965) on Yiddish sacred legends; Skaftymov (1924) on Russian bylins; Sokolov (1926) on lyric songs; and Vansina (1965).

The acting character is a somewhat autonomous component of the narrative structure. Being a tale-role, it is part of the unit of action (the function). Each acting character has, however, besides his tale-role, a social role (i.e., he is a priest, a woman, a cobbler), and many have an individual identity (i.e., he may be a historical or pseudo-historical figure). These qualities relate the acting character closely to several other determinants. The social role of the acting character was found in one case to express the problematic points of the society's value system (see B5, C6); a historical or pseudo-historical figure will place the item in the historical frame (C7) and sometimes aid in placing the item in the right geographical scheme (C8). (Cf. Jason [1968*a*, *b*], Propp [1928, 1958: 3, 79–81]; Radin [1933: 356–58]; and Silverman-Weinreich [1965: 208]. Several chapters of Aarne's tale-type index [1910] are based on the identity of the actor.)

B. The Content Determinants

The content determinants, in contrast to the formal determinants, are rather culture-bound. They too can be compared to the structure of language, but in a somewhat looser way. The two content determinants are closely related: the plot-element expresses the "message" of the narrative, and vice versa, the intended "message" will determine which plot-element will be used.

B4. The plot-element can be loosely compared to the lexicon of a language. If the units of the narrative structure, Propp's functions, are conceived of as slots, just as syntactic functions can be, then the plot-elements fill in the slots, as a lexical entry fills in a syntactical function-slot. The function-slots seem to have more or less standard "fillers" which will form the "vocabulary" of the tales. (The work of the comparative folklorists is based on the recognition of this "lexical" unit as the basic entity. Hence their need of motif and type indices which list those units; the main indices are Aarne's type-index and Thompson's motif-index; most regional indices have been published by the Folklore Fellows Communications series. See also Jason [1966*a*: 100–1].)

B5. The message which the oral literature bears can be very roughly compared to a kind of semantic component: what does a certain item of oral literature "mean" to its bearers? Certain items center around the crucial points of the society's value system: they pose a problem and solve it in a narrated picture. One of the elements of this picture is the social role of the *dramatis personae* (a rich and a poor man shown competing, for example, will be seen to express a certain social conflict). The problem may be only posed, or it may be solved in some way, for instance so as to contribute to the stability of the existing social order; the official values of the society may be affirmed. When subsystems of a society are in conflict, each subsystem may have its own oral literature items, centered around its own problems and affirming its own values at the expense of the total society. Different genres of oral literature handle different kinds of problems and thus carry different messages (sometimes even contradicting each other). The problematic points to which the message responds are determined by the value system of the culture (C6). Several examples which illustrate this point can be found in the literature. Ben-Amos wrote about English and Scottish ballads

which handle conflicts between demands of different social roles on the same person (1963) and the message of Jewish-Hellenistic fables and sacred legends (1967). For a discussion of Jewish-Near Eastern sacred legends handling a wide gamut of human, social, and national problems, see Jason (1968*b*). It seems that Lévi-Strauss' work on myth can be related to this dimension; see also Bascom (1954: 343). Fischer (1966: 120–23) wrote on conflict resolution, Littleton (1965) on sacredness; Silverman-Weinreich (1965) on purpose. Waugh (1966) commented on Kongas and Maranda's work (1962: 173); Lüthi's (1960) work on fairy-tale as opposed to other genres might also be consulted. Material on content analysis might also be considered; see, e.g., Colby (1966), Jacobs (1959), Kalin *et al.* (1966), Maranda (1967*a*, *b*), Pool (1959), Sebeok and Ingemann (1956), Sebeok (1957), and Stone *et al.* (1966).

C. Cultural Determinants

Cultural determinants underlie the content determinants (B). The value scheme of the culture (C6) is the most important one and shapes certain aspects of the other two (C7, C8) to a great extent. While the first two groups of determinants (A and B) are qualities of the material itself, in this third group determinants external to the material are encountered. The temporal and the spatial schemata have both internal and external aspects.

C6. The value system of the culture, itself interrelated with the social system, will determine the problematic points and the conflicts to which a message (B5) will respond. The value system will determine to a great measure the shape of the historical and the geographical frames as well as the qualities of the various segments of time and space. The more central parts of the value system and the more severe conflicts arising in the social system will get greater attention: a greater proportion of texts will handle them. (The concepts social system and its value system are used here as developed by Parsons [1951, 1961].)

C7. The temporal aspect can be subdivided into three components:

1. The first component of the temporal aspect is the historical frame in which the item of oral literature is set. Every item explicitly or implicitly happened "sometime." These "sometimes" can be arranged into a sequence, divided into epochs. The basic and universal division is between mythical and historical epochs. Some other divisions may be unspecified historical past, time within a recollected number of generations, or contemporary time. Further divisions will vary from culture to culture. The choice of epochs or events (these are supplied by the real world, E12) which are remembered and which have oral literature relating to them will depend on the contemporary value system of the culture; i.e., events having a live, present meaning to the narrating society will be emphasized. If an acting character has an individual identity, his being mentioned will place the item explicitly in the historical frame.

With the introduction of the concept of a historical frame as a dimension of the whole oral literature, the special genre of historical legends or historical songs dissolves. See Dégh (1965: 79–80) on Hungarian oral literature, Ben-Amos' (1967) comment on tall-tales anchored in a time-scheme, and Hurley's (1951) on treasure-legends anchored in a time-scheme. For historical frames of repertoires of a genre in a particular culture, see Jason (1968*a*) on Jewish-Near Eastern sacred legends; Littleton (1965), and Radin (1933, 1948) on Winnebago myths; Propp (1963) distinguishes genres along a time-scheme.

2. The second component of the temporal aspect is the quality of time-segments in which the item of oral literature is set. The main break is between the mythical and the historical epochs (see Garber-Talmon 1951; Lévi-Strauss 1963: 203–31). The properties of the time-segments will be in some measure determined by the value system of the contemporary culture.

3. The third component of the temporal aspect is the sequence of events in a particular item of oral literature, which is arranged in an orderly way. It may be that this inner temporal structure will have stable models for particular genres in particular cultures; it may be assumed that this temporal structure will be connected somehow to the narrative structure (A3). (See a discussion of a single item by Fischer [1966: 113–15].)

C8. The spatial aspect can be described in the same terms as the temporal aspect:

1. The first component of the spatial aspect is the geographical framework in which the item of oral literature is set. Every item explicitly or implicitly happened "somewhere." These "somewheres" can be arranged into a frame, the dwelling place of the narrating community being in the center of the scheme, surrounded by concentric circles of progressively more distant geographic entities. The basic division is between the natural world and the supernatural world. Both are further subdivided (e.g., our village, our country, symbolic places, hell, etc.). This scheme seems to be universal. The exact content of the different segments will be supplied by the actualities of the real world and imaginary cosmology (E12).

The introduction of the concept of a geographical frame as a dimension of the whole oral literature dissolves the special genre of "local legends." See, for example, Ben-Amos (1967) on Jewish-Hellenistic tall-tales anchored in a space-scheme, Hurley (1951) on treasure-legends anchored in a space-scheme, and Jason (1968*a*) on Jewish-Near Eastern sacred legends. Propp (1963) distinguishes genres along a spatial scheme. Silverman-Weinreich (1965: 208–12) does the same for Yiddish sacred legends. For the geographic world picture of a raconteur, see Erdesz (1961) on a Hungarian narrator and Noy (1965) on a Jewish-Yemenite narrator.

2. One must also consider the quality of the space-segment in which the item of oral literature is set. Again, the main break is between the natural and the supernatural world. There seem to exist borderline areas, one of them being symbolic places. The nature of the qualities and their distribution will be determined partly by the actualities of the real world (E12) and partly by the respective society's value system (C6).

3. The space involved in a particular item of oral literature, like the sequence of events, is arranged in an orderly way. It may be that this inner spatial organiza-

tion, like the temporal, will have stable models for particular genres in particular cultures, and, similarly again, it may be proposed that the spatial structure will have some connection with the narrative structure (A3). (Cf. Fischer [1966: 115–17] on Oceanian myth and Lévi-Strauss [1958] on Amerindian myth.)

D. Social Determinants

The social determinants are non-literary forces and manipulate the item of oral literature externally. The three determinants of this group are interrelated to some extent, but it is not yet clear how.

D9. The oral literature functions in its society, it seems, partly in the expression and promotion of the value system and normative system. It seems that certain kinds of oral literature items (such as sacred tales [Jason 1968*b*]) serve the highest parts of the value system of the respective culture (cf. Parsons 1961). Other kinds, such as certain proverbs, may prove to be crystallized prescriptive norms of conduct, or may serve as verbal "rites of rebellion" (Gluckman 1963), as some European ballads idealizing illicit love-relationships do. The scheme of the value system underlying the material will determine the function of particular items. As the value system will vary from culture to culture, the function of particular oral literature items and genres will vary too (and will change when items cross cultural boundaries). (See, e.g., Malinowski [1926] on the function of origin myths; Colby [1966: 385] on tales as models for socialization; Fischer and Yoshida [1968] on proverbs; Herskovits and Herskovits [1958: 20–22]; Lévi-Strauss [1960, 1963, 1964, 1966] on myths solving insoluble problems of human existence and society; Eisenstadt [1965: 20–22]; and Vansina [1965: 50–51].)

D10. The use of the text in social intercourse is distinguished from its function. A proverb, a song, or a story will be used (performed, see A2) in order to fulfil some need—perhaps a role in a ritual, which is made up, among other things, of verbal materials. (Ritual is used to refer to any structured social situation, including instances of entertainment.) The use lies on the surface of the oral literature item, is readily observable, and hence is often recorded. The recording, however, most often is not done in a systematic way, i.e., as a functional part of the structure of the ritual (for an attempt to analyze the structure of ritual see Dundes [1964*a*] on games; the verbal material is not included in his analysis). Since the use, the texture (A1), and the dramatization (A2) lie on the surface of the oral literature item, they are readily accessible not only to the ethnographer but also to the native. Therefore, conscious changes are easily made in these aspects of the oral literature, and the quality and range of this variability is a question to be explored at the levels of the individual performer and of the community (see D11).

For more thorough discussion of various elements of this determinant consult the following references. See Abrahams (1966) on rhetorical theory; Bascom (1954) on social context; Dundes (1964*b*) on context; Fischer and Yoshida (1968) and McKnight (1968) on proverbs; Hain (1966) on riddles; Herskovits and Herskovits (1958: 25, 55); Jason (1966*a*: 94–96); and Vansina (1965: 50–51). See Hain (1951) and Blacking (1961) for special studies of proverbs and riddles as used in the social situation; many ethnographies contain notes on the use of oral literature in various rituals, although a systematic description is rare. This determinant is called by the Central and East European scholars the function of the oral literature. See Dégh (1962; 1965: 85–86) for recent summaries of the research in regard to prose narratives.

D11. The role of the performer in the conscious shaping of the material seems, astonishingly, to be quite small. An analogy may be drawn to language in order to explain the nature of the relation: the individual performance of the oral literature item can be looked upon as the idiosyncratic de Saussurean *parole*, the item of oral literature as an object is compared to the *langue*. The sum of the idiosyncrasies does not affect the *langue* to any great extent because the preventive censure of the society keeps the shape of the object—the *langue* oral literature—constant (after Bogatyrev and Jakobson 1929; see also Bascom 1955). It may be assumed that the role of the interpreter in the conscious shaping of the material will be greater when changing the features of the performance (texture, dramatization, and use) than in the shaping of the other determinants. It may well be that in certain situations which are critical for the society, the performer (who will then be a leader) may be seen to have a greater role in shaping those features of the oral literature item which center around crucial problematic points of his society's value system—as tribal myths or sacred legends may (cf. Aberle 1951: 72; Herskovits and Herskovits 1958: 18–19; Vansina 1965: 29).

There are a few occasional observations on transmission of oral literature items from performer to performer, and some observations also of changes which occur in the text in the course of transmission, but a systematic field study of them, either synchronic or diachronic, has not as yet been undertaken. (See Benedict [1935] on myths; Goldfrank [1948]; Anderson's experiment [1951, 1956] tested merely the memory of college students, and not the transmission of tales; for the only detailed discussion see Lord [1960].)

E. The Real World Determinants

The real world determinants stand completely outside the oral literature item and supply, so to speak, the building stones of it, which the other determinants organize.

E12. The real world: features of the physical surroundings, the social organization and the culture will be taken for granted, mentioned, and described, in oral literature. These ethnographic particulars will supply the language used in the texture, the kinetic and musical patterns of the dramatization, the individual identity and the social role of the acting characters, the events of the historical frame (which are evaluated by the value system), the features of the geographical frame (perceived through the culture), and material objects and social relationships, implicitly or directly mentioned, and other such material. The plot-elements (B4) will be built of these particulars (real ones or from the storehouse of the imagery of the supernatural). It has long been assumed that these particulars can be related from the literary text directly to the real world; i.e., that the culture is reflected in the tales in a direct way. This

seems, however, not to be the case: between the real world and its mention in the oral literature stands the whole complex structure of the oral literature. When appearing as a building stone in this structure, the ethnographic particular will have another meaning than when appearing in the real world. (For the view of a direct relationship of the two see, for example, Bascom [1954], Boas [1916, 1935], Colby [1966], Colby, Collier and Postal [1963], Fischer's publications, and Lessa [1961: 15–75; 1966: 11–31]. Hymes [1967] supplies the discussion of the tales for the reader who is not familiar with the culture in question; this, however, is not yet a full analysis. For the same type of analysis, see also Propp [1963] and Radin [1949]. See Lévi-Strauss [1958, 1960] for a departure from the assumption of a direct correspondence of reality and literature in favor of an inverted one.)

E13. The interrelations of the oral literature item (text and performance) *and the psychic makeup* of the members of the narrating community (both the interpreter and his audience): what is the kind and the measure of the unconscious shaping of the oral literature item? It may be safely assumed that the psychic makeup of the members of the narrating community will have some bearing upon the item, especially on its function, its use, and the conscious shaping of it (D9, 10, 11). (See for a limited investigation going into details Boyer 1964: it is not yet clear what the significance of the findings is.) The process of unconscious handling of the material by the interpreter is still not known. Statements about wish-fulfilment, tension-releasing, and other psychological functions, which imply a direct relationship between the text and its contemporary society, are not sufficient to explain oral literature. Such a relationship does not exist: both the society and its culture (of which oral literature is a rather autonomous part) developed in time, and did this in an uneven way. Oral literature is not so flexible as to respond to every change in the real world.

The detailed psychoanalytic interpretations of various items of oral literature in Freudian, Jungian, and other terms, amount already to a considerable library (see the bibliography by Grinstein 1950–64). A verification of this approach could help to bring us forward, either by supporting the findings or by invalidating them.

The so-called culture and personality school brought forth the concept of oral literature (and certain other mental artifacts) as a secondary institution, which owes its qualities to the particular personality structure of its bearers, the projection of which the oral literature is supposed to be. Such a conceptualization equates oral literature to products of psychiatric tests. This amounts to a disregard of the peculiar structure of oral literature. In addition, this approach does not intend to explain the oral literature, but the personality of its bearers, and thus is outside the scope of the framework we have imposed on ourselves. Since here the personality is inferred from, among other things, the oral literature, there is of course no way to explain the oral literature working backwards from the personality of the bearer (performer).

For a review of culture and personality studies and problems see Barnouw (1963) and Kaplan (1961); Kaplan's (1962) study may serve as an example of the approach; for an exposition of the concepts of culture and personality see Kardiner (1945). For a recent discussion of a particular myth see Lessa (1966: 42–48).

The establishment of manifest symbols only shows that they exist in the culture as well as in the oral literature as an integral part of the communication system of the society—a quite obvious thing. The knowledge of these symbols is as essential and basic for the understanding of the respective culture as the knowledge of the society's language. (See D12: These symbols are part of the building stones that are the material of oral literature, and should not be confused with supposed unconscious symbols.)

A knowledge of the variability of the oral literature item (text, its dramatization, and use) could eventually give clues to the possible role of the interpreter's psychic makeup, at least in the *parole*-shaping of the oral literature item. To date no systematic study has been undertaken on the subject.

Another aspect of the psychic makeup which promises interesting results, but has not received attention to date, is the question of the "grammar" which must exist (analogous to the grammar of the language [see Chomsky 1959]) in the performer's mind if he is to reproduce the oral literature item. There are at least five formalized parts (the texture [A1], the dramatization [A2], the narrative structure [A3], the inner time [$C7_3$], and space [$C8_3$] structures) and several schemes (message [B5], historical [C7] and geographical [$C8_1$]) which each could have their "grammar."

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE DETERMINANTS

This part of our framework is even more hypothetical than the descriptions of the determinants themselves. In the descriptions the interrelations have occasionally been mentioned. So far no investigation of them exists.

Some of the relationships seem to be hierarchical, others to be a relation of mutual interdependence, still others merely parallel. The determinants can be pictured as co-ordinates: some of them, such as the historical frame, are linear continua; others, such as the models for the narrative structure, will be discrete points on a line. Every concrete text will find its place on each co-ordinate, i.e., each text will assume a value in terms of every co-ordinate (value zero included). This place will depend on the relations between the co-ordinates (Fig. 1, p. 415). The co-ordinates form a multidimensional network: the oral literature *space*. Texts of the same genre will cluster in certain parts of the space. The dimensions of the cluster will define the genre. These genres will be analytical concepts and may not correspond either to native categories (where such exist) or to the current labels in the scholarly world, such as anecdote, myth, or proverb, which are now actually determined by rule of thumb.

A rough scheme (Fig. 1) may illustrate the relations between the determinants which were indicated in the text. The chart is not proportional; the boxes are arranged so that the inner qualities are in the middle, surrounded by the outer determinants. The details have been arranged for convenience in drawing the arrows: an arrow points to a possible one-directional relationship;

a double arrow points (*a*) to a possible two-directional relationship, and (*b*) to cases in which it is so far not clear in which direction the arrow should point; a broken line inside a box shows the connection of relations between several determinants. As the structure is multidimensional, and the relations obviously very complex, a realistic two-dimensional presentation of the space is presumably impossible.

Expressed in words, a summary of the relationships would be as follows: the texture (A1) and dramatization (A2) are interdependent and the narrative structure (A3) is in the background of both. As the texture (A1) and the dramatization (A2) are on the surface of the oral literature item, they are directly manipulable by the narrator: he (*a*) consciously shapes them (D11) (within the boundaries of the culturally accepted literary-dramatic artistic canon) and (*b*) chooses the item he will use (D10) (within the boundaries of the demands of the social situation [E12]). The use of an item and its shaping are to some extent interrelated. The function of the item (D9) is the result of the value system of the culture (C6), which forms the message (B5) of the item, and of the needs of the social organization (E12). The message (B5) is determined by the value system (C6) and expressed in the tale by (among other things) the social role of the acting characters. The plot-elements (B4) are supplied by the real social, cultural, and physical world (E12), and the requirements of the message (B5) and the needs of the narrative structure (A3) will determine which elements are used. The temporal (C7) and the spatial (C8) determinants are interrelated with the narrative structure in Part 3 (time/space within a single item); the real world (E12) supplies the elements of the time/space frames of the repertoire (Part 1), and the value system (C6) selects from among them. These elements are indicated in part by the individual identity of the acting character. The universal narrative structure (A3) is concretized in a culture by the artistic canon of this culture; it is interrelated with the time (C7) and space (C8) determinants; it is the background of the other two formal artistic determinants (A1, A2); and it serves to give form to the message (B5) the tale bears.

Abstract

Oral literature is considered by historical-philological folklorists as a cultural artifact which is of the nature of a survival, and by anthropological folklorists as a contemporary reflection of the culture of its bearers, i.e., it is considered as a means to investigate this society. The present paper takes an eclectic standpoint, claiming for oral literature the status of an artistic product in its literary form and in its function in society, and proposing a synchronic approach on the basis of already existing research.

La littérature orale est considérée par les folkloristes à tendence historio-philologique comme un produit culturel dont la nature même est une survivance, et par les folkloristes à tendance anthropologiques comme une réflexion syncronicale des représentants de la culture, considérant la littérature orale comme un moyen pour leurs buts anthropologiques.

L'article présent donne un point de vue eclectique et réclame pour la littérature orale le statut d'un produit artistique pour sa forme littéraire et pour sa fonction dans la société tout en proposant une approche syncronique sur la base des enquêtes accomplies.

Volksliteratur wird von den Philologen-Folkloristen als ein Kulturerzeugnis betrachtet welches die Natur eines Überrestes vergangener Zeiten hat; Anthropologen-Folkloristen betrachten Volksliteratur als eine gegenwärtige Reflektion der Kultur seiner Träger, d.h. als ein Mittel für anthropologische Zwecke. Der vorgelegte Aufsatz nimmt einen eklektischen Standpunkt ein und erhebt für die Volksliteratur den Anspruch ein Produkt der Kunst zu sein in ihrer literarischen Form und in ihrer gesellschaftlichen Funktion. Auf Grund der bereits vorhandenen, aber unzusammenhängenden Anfängen wird ein synchronischer Gesichtspunkt der Untersuchung vorgeschlagen.

Comments

by GEORGE A. AGOGINO☆

Portales, N. Mex., U.S.A. 1 II 69

The study of oral literature is like a fine gem with many facets, whose reflections may reveal historical, cultural, esoteric, or psychological aspects of society, past or present. Folklore, folk songs, and other oral tradition forms frequently transgress political and cultural boundaries, although they may be radically altered in motif and mood in doing so.

Many examples of oral literature are extremely old, representing various societies and various time periods and reflecting constantly changing attitudes and values, both political and cultural. Each society in this chronological-cultural time sequence selectively accepts, rejects, and changes oral literature to fit its needs and interests. As a result, it is extremely difficult to separate and classify all these altered motifs as to their specific origins and to place any value judgments on them in studying modern oral literature.

All societies, including modern ones, have some form of organized religion and some type of oral literature, including folk songs. These exist because society needs them. Oral literature, like a good mistress, can be many things to many investigators, depending upon the desire, need, and approach. Within its oral contents are clues to unwritten history, reflections of contemporary values, ideas, artistic-psychological needs of both the group and the individual, and the seeds of education which in an informal way mold and control the masses. Oral literature is very complex and individual components difficult to separate and evaluate. Attempts to study such traditional material scientifically without a well-established, universally acceptable research design will have little validity.

The Jason study correctly views the problem, recognizes its complexity, does not fall into particularistic unidirectional approaches, and accepts current limitations. Jason takes a small but important initial step towards a methodology for the study of oral literature.

The 13 determinants she suggests will need refinement, alteration, and revision. This is to be expected, for progress is not possible without risk, and the study of oral literature must undergo some scientific growing-pains before it can

reach the same systemic plateau as the social and humanistic disciplines.

by ALAN DUNDES☆

Berkeley, Calif., U.S.A. 13 II 69

It is a pleasure to have the opportunity to react to an ambitious and stimulating synthesizing essay concerned with critical issues in folklore theory, an essay written by one of the few international folklorists equally conversant with European literary-historical and American anthropological scholarly traditions. One can only applaud any attempt to bring together all the various factors influencing oral literature in even a most tentative hypothetical working model of these determinants and their interrelations. Nevertheless, as the author readily admits, this initial model is meant to be suggestive rather than definitive.

One critical issue is the bias of the author in favor of lore rather than folk. Many European (and American) folklorists are principally concerned with the lore for its own sake, an intellectual perspective harkening back to the antiquarian, butterfly-collecting days of 19th-century romantics imbued with the hope of using historical reconstructionist techniques to bolster nationalistic tendencies. Originally primarily historic-geographic (comparative method) in orientation, these essentially literary scholars have now accepted synchronic analysis as a useful addition to diachronic studies. One reason for this is that one can morphologically dissect a dead butterfly almost as easily as one can attempt to classify it (so as to mount it neatly in an orderly folder in an archive). This in part explains why Jason is *not* (her emphasis) interested so much in what she can learn about a folk by analyzing that folk's lore. She is only interested in a folk to the extent that an understanding of it can illuminate that folk's oral literature. In contrast, American anthropological folklorists are interested primarily in folk rather than lore, and they are only interested in lore to the extent that it can illuminate a folk. The question is thus: does a folklorist study lore to better understand the folk? or does he study a folk to better understand that folk's lore? Jason is honest about her bias, but it does affect the nature and general utility of her "multidimensional" model. For example, folklorists who care about lore rather than folk frequently are openly hostile towards psychological approaches, inasmuch as such approaches tend to explain the carefully reified and dehumanized tale types or motifs in much too human terms.

Jason's somewhat anti-psychological bias comes to the fore in her discussion of Determinant E13. She suggests that the psychic makeup of the raconteur and his audience will have some bearing on the conscious shaping of tradition, although she has previously stated (D11) that the role of the performer in the conscious shaping of tradition is so small as to be virtually insignificant. She seems to argue that there is no direct relationship between a text and its contemporary society and that in any case such a relationship would be insufficient to explain oral literature. Predictably enough, she uses historical reasoning (that oral literature developed through time in an uneven way) and even structural considerations (that considering folklore as a projective system "disregards the peculiar structure of oral literature") to denigrate alleged psychological interpretive excesses. My view would be that historical and psychological factors are definitely *not* mutually exclusive and that oral literature *is* potentially flexible enough to respond to any change in the real world. Similarly, the structural characteristics of oral literature are not incompatible with psychological interpretation. Rather, structural oicotypes can and should be meaningfully correlated with modal and individual personality configurations. Jason's "criticism" that the psychological approach does not intend to explain oral literature so much as the personality of its bearers is only meaningful in the light of her emphasis on lore rather than folk. I can only state my strong conviction that folklorists ought to be more interested in people and what makes them tick. The ultimate goal should be understanding the nature of man, not the nature of oral literature as an end in itself!

Having revealed my bias, I should like to illustrate what I consider to be the complete fallacy of Jason's statement that such factors as wish-fulfilment, tension-releasing, etc. are not sufficient to explain oral literature by citing an example from current oral tradition in the United States. An Alabama Negro reported the following joke about George Wallace, former governor of Alabama and unsuccessful third-party candidate, on a segregationist platform, for the presidency of the United States:

> Governor Wallace died and went to heaven. He knocked at the gate. A voice said, "Who dat?" [stereotyped Negro dialect for "Who's that?"] Governor Wallace shook his head sadly and said, "Never mind, I'll go to the other place."

I would argue that there is clearly wishful thinking in the initial statement that Wallace has died and in the final indication that he goes to hell. I would also suggest that tension is released by the fact that it is Wallace's own bigotry rather than "black power" which forces him to go to hell; Wallace chooses of his own free will to go to hell rather than enter a heaven where there is so much as one Negro. How can one possibly doubt that such an item of oral literature is directly related to the society in which it is told?

The same item can also be used to illustrate the flexibility of oral literature with respect to responding to significant changes in the real world, a flexibility Jason would apparently deny. In telling this joke and eliciting "oral literary criticism," that is, folk interpretations of lore (cf. Dundes 1966*b*), I discovered that white listeners differed with respect to what they understood by the use of "Who dat?" Some said they assumed that heaven was integrated; others said they assumed heaven was completely taken over by blacks. Surely, this joke is functioning as a projective text/test for the audience. Those who fear a takeover by black militants may react differently to such a joke than those who advocate an integrated society. The incredible flexibility of a single joke is as much revealed by one white's suggestion that the dialect meant that God or St. Peter was black (thus pointing up the "whiteness" of Christianity and its dramatis personae—in contrast to the "blackness" of sin) as by another white's understanding the dialect as indicating only that the menial job of doorman or gatekeeper in heaven was held by a Negro! The point is that oral literature can certainly entail a direct relationship between text and society, and can certainly provide a means of projection, and can certainly be infinitely flexible so as to serve the needs of countless cultures as well as diverse individuals within a single culture. (No doubt the same or a similar joke circulated in the 1930's, with Hitler encountering a Jewish accent at the gates of heaven.)

There are many other questions and problems arising out of Jason's model. Why are plot elements (B4) culture-bound but narrative structural slots (A3) universal? Despite Bremond's ingenious analyses (1966, 1968), the universality of plot structure remains to be demonstrated. And what precisely is the underlying logic in the grouping of Jason's 13 determinants? Is the message (B5) really more closely related to plot elements (B4) than to narrative structure (A3), as Jason's grouping would imply? Are value systems (C6) really of the same order as the temporal (C7) and spatial (C8) aspects of oral literature? Why wouldn't the latter aspects be simply examples of formal artistic determinants (A)? Fairy tales (as opposed to myths and legends) are usually

set in no particular place and in no particular time ("Once upon a time"), and this seems to be fairly widespread. Why is such a convention a "cultural determinant" (C) while such a textural feature as rhyme scheme or metrical system is an "artistic determinant" (A)? One could as well argue that textural features (A1) such as rhyme and onomatopoeia are extremely culture-bound (limited by the poetic features of individual languages) whereas plot elements (B4), e.g., motifs, and even messages (B5) frequently occur cross-culturally. If so, one could challenge Jason's assertion that "content determinants, in contrast to the formal determinants, are rather culture-bound" and maintain instead that formal determinants are culture-bound and that many content determinants are either universal or at least multicultural in distribution.

Another basic question concerns the rules for the use of an item of folklore, that is, "the ethnography of speaking folklore" (Arewa and Dundes 1964). Since this may entail the *individual's* interpretation and manipulation of these rules, should this factor be placed in Jason's scheme under C6, D10, D11, or E13? The "lore" bias may account for why there is a determinant (D11) for the performer's conscious shaping *of the material* but none for the conscious and unconscious decision-making process which governs why and when he elects to say what to whom in the presence or absence of third parties.

A final question concerns Jason's useful summary of the various types of structural analysis. The distinction between folk and analytic models needs to be drawn, and within the frame of analytic models one would do well to distinguish between syntagmatic and paradigmatic models (Dundes 1968).

But quibbling over the model and discussion Jason presents seems unfair. The author has modestly made no claims as to her model's completeness. Rather than cavil, one should accept the essay for what it says it is: an earnest plea for eclecticism in the study of oral literature. The arbitrariness and possible inconsistencies in Jason's scheme will seem relatively unimportant if her proposal succeeds in stimulating new research efforts in the analysis of oral literature, efforts which in all probability will materially increase our understanding of ourselves and our fellow men.

by PAULETTE GALAND-PERNET☆

Bourg-La-Reine, France. 20 II 69

Jason's article offers a useful focus for a discipline that still lacks direction in its examination of methods of analysis of oral literature. Her suggestion that each text be considered as the center of a network of different questions echoes the concern of many investigators. Her care in varying the illustrations seems to me laudable both for its realism and for its opening of rewarding new perspectives.

The simple gathering together of the questions that must be asked of each work is in itself an aid to research. While it may not always be easy, in the field, to obtain all the necessary information, the researcher will find it useful to keep in mind the comprehensive scheme Jason elaborates here.

As to the analysis, I share the author's view as to the importance of formal artistic determinants; my studies of Berber literature, particularly the poetry of the Shilha of southern Morocco, have led me to believe that the relationship between the artistic form of a work and its content may be stronger than has been suspected. (The importance of these relationships doubtless varies with the type of work; it is probably less for narrative than for poetry, at least in the area with which I am familiar.) One can cite examples in which the form of the text (A1, "texture") influences the presentation of ethnographic fact, both as it is (or appears)—cf. E12—and as it participates in a system of cultural values—cf. C6. Thus in a Shilha song the message (B5) of which is the expression of conflict, opposition to familial tradition, there is an accumulation of ethnographic details: refusal by a young girl of marriage with her paternal cousin, public declaration of the refusal, public testimony, the collective oath. Each of these elements is an element in some context or other in a real situation for Shilha society and also an element in the system of cultural values of that society; but these elements never occur grouped together in the cultural context "marriage." The accumulation of the elements here is a literary process: the problem is to express the conflict between daughter and traditional family in a setting that is well-defined and moving. The esthetic function here overrides the function of expression of the system of values (D9) in creating a distortion at the level of that system (C6) and of the reality that it reflects (E12). This process of accumulation can be found in other oral literatures, for example the epic literature of medieval France.

The role of the performer, among the Shilha singers of today, often seems to be that of a leader who states the problems of a society in crisis, torn between traditional and modern civilizations. The relationship between the "conscious shaping" (D11) and the text (A1) is particularly clear. Study of the repertoires (partial) of several Shilha professional singers permits one to observe, in certain cases, the part they play in the creation of the work—which is always a re-creation, by means of the materials dictated by tradition (formal literary language, for example, and set sequences for a number of motifs), and which is essentially a combinatory technique the effects of which can be seen at the level of the message as well as of the literary form. A new combination of traditional elements leads, more often than one thinks, to a change in the content of the message (Galand-Pernet 1965, 1967).

by KARL REISMAN☆

Waltham, Mass., U.S.A. 18 II 69

The building of frameworks is most helpful when the builder rises above the limitations of different viewpoints and sees new ways to relate them. In the absence of such powerful vision, frameworks are usually a clumsy way of stating one's thoughts—although such attempts may be useful when it is desirable to consider anew the subject as a whole.

A "multidimensional approach" certainly encourages a broad outlook, yet certain features of Jason's scheme seem unnecessarily restricted. There is a rigid separation of form and content, with form being seen as relatively free of cultural and social influence, and also an a priori separation of "artistic" from other traditionally patterned form. At the same time she seems in some confusion, for she sees her multidimensional approach as also a formal model (as in kinship or language studies) of the "repertoire of the oral literature of one society . . . as a unit." Her view of linguistic structure is partly to blame for this; one wonders if she has fully understood the item by Lakoff that she mentions.

Jason separates certain genres as having the potential for "artistic" form. Since all genres of common speech are, among other functions, means of expression, it is only reasonable to assume that aesthetic formal concerns will accompany a *range* of expressive utterances. In certain West Indian islands, formal patterns of contrapuntal speaking, as well as genres of boasting, cursing, etc., are treated with aesthetic concern, and performance qualities are noted and appreciated. The *forms* of speaking have been heavily weighted with cultural meanings yet still make up a large part of the regular body of daily speech. Whether there is a separate category of "artistic" forms rather than a gradation of formal concern is surely a matter for investigation in the particular case.

The nature of the formal structure of narrative and the relation of such structure to its meanings also seems to me an open question at this time. The existence of underlying meanings in

certain common structurings of tales (Lévi-Strauss, deep structure, psychoanalytic, etc.) does not obviate the fact that the feel of stories and the immediate meanings of their narrative structure are largely on the surface. The meaning of some of the sequences of events in Anansi stories, for instance, escapes me totally, and understanding would surely require commentary and a knowledge of cultural meanings of narrative form that are not self-evident in a notion of "function." In an Antiguan village, I observed stories being retold, with incidents borrowed from one to another or omitted in retellings, etc. This way of investigating how people segment narrative, while not sufficient, seemed to reveal that the interest was not primarily in coherent plot but in dramatic incident—scenes that could be built up in the listener's imagination or could climax with a well-known phrase in which all might join. The result was often quite scrambled. This is not the first time this interest has been noted in African materials, and it surely must have some relevance to structure.

Finally, we might ask if at this point we need another "approach" or rather more genuine knowledge: not just sound film, but observation and native commentary on text and performance (Sapir 1969; Fernandez 1967), on metaphor and idiom, on form and context; and adequate standards of anthropological philology such as Hymes (1965) has called for.

Reply

The comments, which are gratefully received, point out the failings of my article. The privilege of answering them provides the opportunity to clear up obscurities and emphasize points which would not fit the general framework of the article itself. As Dundes' comments are the most detailed ones, I shall begin with the points he has raised.

For some time, I have been at odds with Dundes regarding the value of the insights gained from the psychoanalytical approach to oral literature. A discussion of the American Negro joke that he has chosen to demonstrate his point will serve as a small illustration of my position, which is concisely stated in the article itself:

1. The relation of oral literature to its society: There is no doubt that the various genres of oral literature differ in their relations to society. Jokes are presumably more flexible and more closely related to reality, although, as Dundes states himself, this particular joke may well be one that is also told by people from other societies in a conflict situation and thus may be applicable to many situations. The structure of jokes is relatively simple, and one may conjecture that the simpler the structure of a genre, the more easily it correlates with reality. (This is, of course, only an assumption, absolutely unproven.) The flexibility in this joke lies in the individual identity of the actors (their being Wallace and a Negro, with all the attributes these two personages have in the society in question), which is a meaningful unit on the structural level of analysis (Det. A3, acting character).

2. The function of oral literature: The same joke can be easily explained, not, with Dundes, as wishful thinking, but as functioning (Det. D9) in the social structure of American society as a whole as an active expression of conflict and of Negro aggression. At the same time it is, as a joke, a socially allowed (if not sanctioned) phenomenon, and serves as a kind of "rite of rebellion" (Gluckman 1963), substituting for more destructive actions (such as rioting). Turning to the Negro subsociety, the joke plays an integrating role of showing one's own supremacy over the whites. These are symbolized by Wallace, who is stupid enough to choose hell.

3. "Oral literary criticism" is surely an important subject to study. Dundes gives us here examples of how whites interpret an element of the joke. (By the way, I would hesitate to call such an interpretation "literary criticism.") Since the assumption seems to be that the joke is told by Negroes for Negroes, I wonder why one would collect interpretations of it by whites. What one gets from whites, non-members of the narrating community, is something like the social psychology of the white society. Their interpretations can tell us nothing about the Negro society or about the functioning or lack of functioning of the joke as a projective test, or whatever, in that society.

4. I should like to cite as a contrast to this flexible joke the old Egyptian tale about the builder of Pharaoh's palace, Rhampsinit, and his son, the clever thief (Aarne, revised by Thompson 1961, no. 950). The tale has succeeded in surviving without a change on the *langue* level for some 3,000 years, and this through societies differing in social structure, ethnic composition, language, religion, the nature of internal conflicts, etc.

As for the other questions Dundes has raised:

The correlation of "structural oicotypes" (may we understand these as the models according to which the tales and songs of a culture are built?) with the personality (modal, individual, or whatever may be postulated) will surely be very interesting to see. So far incomparably more is known about the "oicotypal structure" of language (i.e., the grammars of particular languages), but how are we to correlate this structure with the modal personality of the members of the language community? I shall be happy to see a serious and well-founded attempt at such a correlation, be it with language structure or with the structure of oral literature (structure in the sense of my formal determinants).

With regard to the question of culture-boundedness and universality: the formal determinants (Det. A1 to A3) are universal in the sense that the basic units and relations of the analysis are the same for all cultures; each culture, however, will presumably have its own models, combining in various ways these universal units and relations, for its own genres of oral literature (thus a particular rhyme scheme will be a cultural model composed of universal units and relations). "Culture" here will mean more than a single society, rather a culture area—all of Europe, for example, or the Europe–Islamic countries–India region, may form a single area in this respect. The plot-elements (Det. B4), the "fillers" of the structural model, on the other hand, are taken from the particular culture: they determine whether the hero will be called John or Ivan; whether he will ride on a horse through woods or walk across a desert; whether there will be three or five brothers; whether the supernatural being that plays a certain tale-role will be a dragon with seven fire-spitting heads or a giant with human features. The very language in which the tale is composed is taken from the culture and will determine the particulars of the textural structure (Det. A1). In short, it is the "lexicon" of the oral literature that is by its very nature culture-bound.

Finally, Dundes misses a determinant which would contain the answers to the questions of "why and when he [the narrator] elects to say what to whom." It seems to me that determinant D10, "Use of the material," is designed precisely to answer this kind of question.

Let us now pass to Reisman's comments: Reisman suggests that we need a new approach less than we need more genuine observation, native commentary, standards of anthropological philology, and the like. There is no doubt that we need *all* of these. The eclectic approach is intended to focus attention on our need