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Meaning of Folklore

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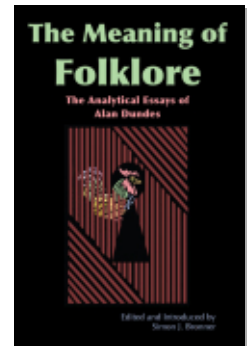
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METAFOLKLORE AND ORAL LITERARY CRITICISM

Introduction

Dundes combines the linguistic concept of “metalanguage” (a language used to make statements about other languages) with literary criticism (usually associated with thematic readings of expressive language in novels and poetry) to propose an “oral literary criticism” using the evidence of “metafolklore.” Dundes defined oral literary criticism as tradition-bearers’ comments on their traditions, and metafolklore as stories or sayings about folklore. For folkloristics, the significance of this kind of material is what it reveals about attitudes toward, and perceptions of, folklore from a native viewpoint. It can provide contextual information for folklorists assessing the role of folklore in a society or situation.

Dundes’s complaint was that long lists of beliefs, proverbs, games, and tales compiled by collectors typically left out the tradition-bearers’ commentaries that accompanied their rendition of the material. He pointed out that the information tradition-bearers provided often signaled meanings perceived by performers and audiences of folklore. The commentaries may describe something about the telling, but they may also be a type of folklore that makes statements about folklore. For instance, I have frequently heard from my Pennsylvania neighbors, who eat pork and sauerkraut on New Year’s Day to insure good luck, that the reason for this is expressed in a traditional saying: “Pigs root forward and chickens scratch backwards.” They thus view eating pork as leaving the past behind and pushing ahead to the new year. Folklorists have asked the question, however, about the combination of pork with sauerkraut, to which residents often respond, “It’s a tradition,” suggesting a link to German heritage in the region, or to the now routine annual family gathering on New Year’s. Comparing that tradition to other New Year’s food traditions involving items which expand (such as black-eyed peas and rice in the South), and using the principle of like actions producing like results, I interpreted my neighbors’ tradition as being based on the idea that both pigs and cabbage symbolize tremendous growth in a year. Pork also has a cultural context, since, for many residents, it raises images of Pennsylvania German farm life, but the tradition is not restricted today to residents of German background, and commercial supermarkets promote the consumption of the folk dish by advertising it before the New Year.

Since Dundes’s essay was originally published in 1966, soliciting commentary about collected material has now become standard fieldwork procedure. See, for example, William

Wilson's "Documenting Folklore" (1986), and Martha Sims's and Martine Stephens's chapter on "Fieldwork and Ethnography" in *Living Folklore* (2005). Yet as Jan Harold Brunvand noted, in introducing Dundes's essay in his *Readings on American Folklore*, while folklorists give more attention to the meanings tradition-bearers provide for their expressions in various situations, as a result of Dundes's concept, "many folklorists stop, however, with symbolic interpretations where no final proof can be found for the suggested meanings" (1979, 405). That is, the analyst collecting the oral literary criticism might hesitate to propose "symbolic interpretations" that are outside the awareness of the tradition-bearer. Dundes pointed out that the "deep meanings" of the material may be repressed, because they are disturbing, or disguised within the metafolklore. An example is Dundes's interpretation of a popular American girls' ritual of summoning a ghost out of a mirror in a darkened bathroom by repeating "Mary Worth," "Mary Whales," or "Bloody Mary" multiple times. The metafolkloric commentary on the ritual, in a birthday or pajama party event, as "Bloody Mary" was significant, according to Dundes, connecting it with bleeding as a sign of maturation. Its oral literary description as a tradition restricted to girls suggested a meaning to Dundes that the girls did not directly acknowledge: a projection of anxieties about menarche. The cultural context is the definition of menstruation, in a male-dominated society, as something unpleasant and disgusting. Dundes concluded, "Rather than being persuaded by their culture to feel shame and embarrassment about menstruation, the ritual might be construed as an attempt to celebrate the onset of menses" (2002a).

Of note in the essay is Dundes's call for a "Thematic Apperception Test" for folklore. Folklorist Wolfgang Mieder reported that proverbs, especially, have been used in various psychological tests as measures of intellectual functioning and verbal comprehension (1978). Psychologists have also come up with tests to assess "superstitious behavior" and "paranormal belief" that relate to folklorists' collections of beliefs. A danger is that such tests pathologize faith and belief as abnormal, and do not take into account the cultural contexts and social situations in which beliefs are expressed. Further, oral literary criticism may reveal attitudes that tests miss. Many people may conversationally express the traditional phrase "knock on wood" to insure that a string of luck continues, for instance, but would not say they are superstitious. Folklorists tend to relativize belief according to the traditions from which people come, rather than for personal functionality. In sum, oral literary criticism and metafolklore can be especially important tools in assessing individual, as well as social, differences in attitudes toward tradition. For psychological literature on tests to assess belief, see Tobacyk and Milford 1983; Pronin et al. 2006; Rotton and Kelly 1985; and McClearn 2004.

Dundes demonstrated the use of oral literary criticism in a later essay, also reprinted in this volume, on the anti-Semitic blood libel legend. There, he analyzed as a kind of lore the frequently expressed commentary that the story is either true or not. Another location in which oral literary criticism and metafolklore are analyzed, expanding the present essay's discussion of Yoruba folklore and the metafolkloric saying "A proverb is like a horse," is in "Proverbs and the Ethnography of Speaking Folklore" (Dundes and Arewa 1964). In it, Dundes underscored the use of folklore as a means of communication, and offered examples not only of how particular Yoruba proverbs were performed in a particular setting, but also of how their meanings were perceived, based on the commentary of the tradition-bearer, Arewa. Especially evident throughout his essays on the concept of folklore found in this volume, Dundes frequently referred to the popular comment, "That's just folklore," as a kind of folklore in itself, revealing ambivalent modern attitudes toward tradition. He

often used it to launch a discussion of the disconnection between the objectively viewed centrality of folklore in modern everyday life, and people's subjective popular perceptions of it. For him, it underscored the dire need for the serious study of folklore, and its challenge of achieving academic respectability.

A number of titles by other authors feature Dundes's idea of metafolklore, including Limón (1982); Lichman (1982); and Shenhar (1987).

Metafolklore and Oral Literary Criticism

THE THEORETICAL ASSUMPTION THAT FOLKLORE was limited to a survival and reflection of the past was a crippling one for the study of folklore in context. For if in fact folklore did reflect only the far distant past, then clearly there was no point in bothering to attempt to collect the present context of folklore. A past-oriented folklore collector would tend to regard his or her informants as relatively unimportant carriers of precious vestigial fragments, fragments which might prove useful in the central task of historically reconstructing the past. For the execution of historico-comparative studies, one needed only minimal information concerning the place and date of collection. It is clear that for the kinds of theoretical and methodological questions that nineteenth century folklorists were asking, e.g., "what was the original form of an item of folklore and what were the genetic relationships between various forms or subtypes of that item of folklore?" place and date of recording were sufficient.

In the twentieth century with the increasing amount of ethnographic fieldwork, it became glaringly apparent that folklore reflected the present as well as the past and that there was certainly a context in which folklore was used. Nevertheless, custom is strong even among scholars and the "butterfly" or "object-curio-collecting" philosophy has continued. Long lists of proverbs are published in folklore journals accompanied by no explanation of either use or meaning. Anthropologists append to their ethnographies a token section consisting of folktales and myths but with little or no comment on their relationship to other aspects of the culture. The "object-collecting" philosophy is itself a survival of the antiquarian days of folklore studies. Folklore texts without contexts are essentially analogous to the large numbers of exotic musical instruments which adorn the walls of anthropological or folk museums and grace the homes of private individuals. The instrument is authentic as is the folklore text, but the range of the instrument, the tuning of the instrument, the function of the instrument, and the intricacies of performing with the instrument are rarely known.

It was Malinowski who was most vociferous in calling for context. In his important 1926 essay "Myth in Primitive Psychology," he repeatedly pointed out the fallacy of collecting mere texts, calling them mutilated bits of reality. Here again is the notion of folklore as fragments, but not fragments of the past, fragments of the present. In one formulation, Malinowski observed, "The text, of course, is extremely important, but without the context it remains lifeless."¹ More recently, Bascom has continued the call for context. Auguring well for future folklore field research is Goldstein's praiseworthy concern for context in his valuable *Guide for Field Workers in Folklore*. He specifically lists "folklore processes" as one of the principal kinds of folklore data to be obtained in the field.² In another recent development in the study of folklore context, it has been suggested that the ways and means of using folklore are just as highly patterned as the materials of folklore themselves. The identification of the rules for the use of an item of folklore, or the

“ethnography of speaking folklore” as it has been termed, suggests that to the “laws” of form (Olrik) and the “laws” of change (Aarne) may be added the “law” of use.³ The discovery of such laws or rules opens a new area of folklore research.

The current interest in the collection of context, however, has partially obscured the equally necessary and important task of collecting the meaning(s) of folklore. One must distinguish between *use* and *meaning*. The collection of context and preferably a number of different contexts for the same item of folklore is certainly helpful in ascertaining the meaning or meanings of an item of folklore. But it cannot be assumed that the collection of context per se automatically ensures the collection of meaning. Suppose a folklorist collected the following Yoruba proverb:

A proverb is like a horse: when the truth is missing, we use a proverb to find it.⁴

Let us assume that he or she also collected the typical context of this proverb in which it is employed in an introductory capacity prior to uttering another proverb which was designed to settle a particular dispute. The introductory proverb announces to the audience that the arbitrator is planning to use a proverb and reminds them of the great power and prestige of proverbs in such situations. But from this text and context, does the collector know precisely what the proverb means? What exactly is meant by comparing a proverb to a horse? While the meaning(s) of a proverb are unquestionably involved in an individual's decision whether or not the quotation of that particular proverb is appropriate in a given context, the folklore collector may miss the meaning(s) even though he or she has faithfully recorded text and context. One cannot always guess the meaning from context. For this reason, *folklorists must actively seek to elicit the meaning of folklore from the folk*.

As a terminological aid for the collection of meaning, I have proposed “oral literary criticism.”⁵ The term is obviously derived from “literary criticism,” which refers to a host of methods of analyzing and interpreting works of written literature. Even a beginner in literary criticism soon discovers that there are alternative and rival interpretations of one and the same work of art. The identical phenomenon occurs in the case of folklore which for the sake of the discussion we may call “oral literature” (although this unfortunately tends to exclude nonverbal folklore). For each item of oral literature, there is a variety of oral literary criticism. This is an important point inasmuch as folklorists, despite the fact that they are accustomed to thinking of variation in the texts of folklore, often wrongly assume that there is only one correct meaning or interpretation. There is no one right interpretation of an item of folklore any more than there is but one right version of a game or song. (We must overcome our penchant for monolithic perspectives as exemplified in monotheism, monogamy, and the like.) There are multiple meanings and interpretations and they all ought to be collected. One could ask ten different informants what each thought a given joke meant and one might obtain ten different answers. It is difficult to determine the gamut of interpretation because there has been comparatively little collection of oral literary criticism.

The interpretation which is made is inevitably from the collector's point of view. There is nothing wrong with analytic as opposed to native interpretations, but the one does not eliminate the need for the other. Unfortunately, in a few instances, the analyst-collector suggests that this interpretation is really the natives' own interpretation. Melville Jacobs, for example, tries to “see the literature as it appeared to Chinooks,”⁶ but one wonders if the Chinooks would have agreed with Jacobs' interpretations. Jacobs has reconstructed oral literary criticism but this may not be the same as the oral literary criticism he might have

collected. The nature of his criticism is revealed in his discussion of Clackamas Chinook humor when he speaks of his methodology. “. . . I enumerated 130 instances in the Clackamas collection *where I was certain* that an audience at a folkloristic recital responded with smiles or laughter” or “. . . I took each of the 130 fun situations and attempted to pinpoint each fun generating factor or stimulus to humor *which I believe* to have been present in them” make the analytic bias clear.⁷ Jacobs was not present at a Clackamas Chinook tale-telling session—he collected the tales from a highly acculturated informant in relative isolation—and he can give little more than educated guesses. Even in our own culture, it would be difficult to guess whether or not a “funny” story got a laugh and more particularly to know just at what points in the joke laughs were stimulated. One must not only record laughter (distinguishing types of laughter—a giggle, a bellylaugh), but one must try to find out what was funny and why the audience members laughed or did not laugh.

It is not easy to collect oral literary criticism. Much of it has probably never been consciously formulated. Yet the meanings and traditional interpretations of folkloristic materials are transmitted from individual to individual and from generation to generation just as is folklore itself. But some types of oral literary criticism are easier to collect than others and it might be well to mention them first.

One source of oral literary criticism comes from folklore itself rather than directly from the folk. There are a limited number of folkloristic commentaries on folklore. As there is a term “metalanguage” to refer to linguistic statements about language, so we may suggest “metafolklore” to refer to folkloristic statements about folklore. Examples of metafolklore or the “folklore of folklore” would be proverbs about proverbs, jokes about joke cycles, folksongs about folksongs and the like. Metafolklore is not necessarily intragenre. There are proverbs about myths, for example. The previously cited Yoruba proverb would be an instance of metafolklore. It is a folkloristic commentary about a folklore genre, namely, the proverb: “A proverb is like a horse: when the truth is missing, we use a proverb to find it.” This clearly indicates an attitude towards a key function of proverbs in Yoruba culture, the function being the determination of truth in problem situations or disputes. Of course, since metafolklore is still, after all, folklore, it is necessary to elicit oral literary criticism of the metafolkloristic texts themselves. The meaning of the Yoruba proverb, according to one informant, is that by mounting a horse, as opposed to goats, sheep, dogs, and other animals found among the Yoruba, one can quickly obtain a superior perspective. From the back of a horse, one can see further than one can from the ground and the immediate local problem may be seen in a new and better light. A proverb is like the horse inasmuch as it also provides a speedy and efficacious means of getting above the immediate problem-situation and of placing it in a perspective which is more likely to result in finding a just and proper solution.

An example of a metafolkloristic joke is the following: It was a dark and stormy night and this guy goes up to this old farm house. He’s a salesman and he says to the farmer, “I’m a salesman, my car broke down, and I need a place to stay.” And the farmer says, “That’s all right, but there’s just one thing, we have no extra rooms to spare so you’ll have to sleep with my son.” And the salesman says, “Oh my God, I must be in the wrong joke.” Here is a folk comment on the nature of the traveling salesman joke cycle. Invariably the jokes involve the seduction of the farmer’s daughter and/or wife. In most jokes in the cycle, as you may know, the farmer explains to the salesman that he can stay but that the only available space is in his daughter’s room. This is thus a joke about a joke cycle and it draws attention to one of the critical content features of the cycle. Once again, one could elicit oral literary criticism of this bit of metafolklore. One might find, for example, that the substitution of

homosexuality for heterosexuality is particularly significant in the light of our culture's taboo against homosexual activities. The mere suggestion of such activities to a traveling salesman, the epitome of unrestrained heterosexual impulse, is so shocking as to call a halt to the story. In other words, at the very mention of homosexuality, the American male wants out because this activity is "wrong": the salesman is in the *wrong* joke. (The breaking out of the joke is analogous to the breaking of the "fourth wall" in theatrical parlance.) Actors normally regard the proscenium as the fourth wall of a room. Occasionally, an actor will break the convention and will speak directly to the audience. Some plays, like this traveling salesman joke, specifically call for the breaking of the conventional vehicle.

Sometimes the metafolklore may comment on the formal features rather than on the content of folklore. For example, consider the following metafolkloristic joke based upon the "knock, knock" cycle.

Knock!
Who's there?
Opportunity.

Here attention is drawn to the distinct characteristic reduplicative opening formula of jokes in this cycle: knock, knock. The use of just one "knock" is incorrect but is rationalized by reference to a proverb: "opportunity only knocks once." Such parodies of and plays on folkloristic forms can be useful sources of the folk's own attitudes towards their folklore.

Another source of overt literary criticism besides metafolkloristic texts consists of the asides or explanatory commentary made by raconteurs as they tell tales or sing songs. These asides are sometimes unwisely eliminated by the overscrupulous editor but they should not be. Two examples from a Potawatomi informant may illustrate the nature of these asides. At the beginning of one tale, my informant said, "Well there was once, there was a little boy. There was always a little boy, you know, and . . ." ⁸The line "There was always a little boy" is a folk confirmation of one of the important characteristics of certain folktales, namely that the protagonist is a little boy. Such a comment might be particularly valuable if the folklorist-collector did not know in advance what kinds of tales were in his informant's repertoire. The comment indicates that there are a great many tales with little boys in them and it also serves to authenticate the particular tale he is recounting. It is as if to say that traditional tales must have little boys in them as protagonists and so in this traditional tale I am about to tell there is this required stereotyped character.

Another self-critical aside made by my informant came in a version of *Big Turtle's War Party*. In the mock plea (Motif K 581.1, drowning punishment for turtle) episode, the villagers are devising ways to kill the captured turtle. First they discuss throwing him into a kettle of boiling water, but the turtle threatens to splash the water and scald their children. Next, the villagers suggest tying him to a tree and shooting him with buckshot—at which point the narrator observed "I don't know whether they had any buckshot in those days or not" before concluding with the final throwing of the turtle into a river à la the tarbaby rabbit into the briarpatch. This commentary challenges the historical accuracy of the tale. Given the time setting of this American Indian tale—when animals were like people, the occurrence of such an obvious acculturated element of material culture as buckshot upset the sensibilities of my sensitive story-teller. However, he did not deny or alter the traditional tale as he knew it. He merely inserted a partial disclaimer, thereby expressing his own parenthetical doubts.

The problem with metafolklore and with the raconteur's asides is that they provide at best only an incomplete picture of the folk's evaluation of their folklore. For some folklore, no metafolklore has been recorded; for some genres few asides have been published. What is needed is the rigorous and systematic elicitation of oral literary criticism. A tale or song might be treated by the folklorist-collector much as a modern psychiatrist treats a dream. As the psychiatrist asks his dreamer-patient to "free associate" and to comment on the various elements in the dream, so the folklorist-collector should ask his informant to "free associate" in the same manner, attempting to explain or comment on each element in the tale. Too often the text-hungry folklorist immediately after the recitation of a tale or song will say, "That's fine, do you know any more like that . . ." and he will not patiently seek to have the informant provide a folk exegesis of the tale just told. Perhaps the collector should consider the item of folklore collected as a projective test or should we say "projective text" and in that event he should ask the informant to make up a story about the story.

Even more desirable would be to elicit the oral literary criticisms of both raconteur and audience. The meaning for the tale teller is not necessarily the same as the meaning for the audience or rather the different meanings for different members of the audience. It is incredible that folklorists speak of *the* meaning of a folktale. Moreover, the existence of multiple meanings suggests communication blocks. One might assume that if A and B, members of the same culture, both know a given folklore text that this text serves as a strong bond linking A and B. However, if A and B interpret the text differently, then A's addressing it to B might result in misunderstanding rather than understanding. The following may serve to illustrate multiple meanings.

There is a folk metaphor (proverbial phrase) "to have an axe to grind" and to me it means to have a bias as a lobbyist might have. If I said, "Watch out for so and so, he has an axe to grind," I would be warning against accepting what that individual said at face value inasmuch as his words or actions would be influenced by what I considered to be a vested interest. Archer Taylor told me that he thought the metaphor connoted the asking of a favor inasmuch as it takes two men to grind an axe, one to spin the whet-stone and the other to hold the axe. Thus if one individual came to another and announced that he had an axe to grind, he would be asking the other person to stop what he was doing and help him grind the axe. The dictionary supports this interpretation by saying "to have an object of one's own to gain or promote."⁹ However, there is another traditional meaning of this metaphor, the meaning of "grudge." According to informants, "to have an axe to grind" is similar to having a "bone to pick" with someone. One informant related that if he had neglected to do one of his assigned household chores, say taking out the garbage at the end of the day, the next morning his mother would say to him "I've got an axe to grind with you, you didn't take the garbage out last night." The informant explained that "I've got an axe to grind with you" meant "There's going to be friction, sparks were going to fly, just as sparks fly when an axe is ground." I discovered that my wife also uses this meaning. Our neighbor's dog occasionally knocks over and riffs our garbage can. My wife indicated that she would think it appropriate to call up our neighbor and say, "I have an axe to grind with you," meaning there was something she was angry about. Here then are two distinct interpretations of the same folk metaphor.

In some instances the meaning may be fairly constant, but the evaluation of the common meaning may vary. For example, the proverb "A rolling stone gathers no moss" means that a person who moves around from place to place, not staying in any one place for very long, will never belong to a place, or look as though he belongs to that place. The oral literary critical difference concerns whether this is good or bad. In the older tradition, it was

bad and the proverb might be cited to keep someone from roaming too far and wide, to urge him to stay at one place. But in modern usage, at least in some quarters, the accumulation of moss is considered to be a negative characteristic and the “rolling stone” is conceived of as the ideal unencumbered life. Admittedly these differences could be gleaned from printed contextual instances of the proverb in novels and newspapers, but the point is that folklore collectors ought to obtain direct oral interpretations of the proverb at the time of collection.

As has been noted, it is not always easy to elicit oral literary criticism. The folk know and use folklore without bothering to articulate their aesthetic evaluations. For some types of oral literary criticism, e.g., symbolism, an indirect method of eliciting might be recommended. The problem in symbolism is that the folk may not be completely conscious of the one or more symbolic meanings of an element of folklore. This is understandable in view of the fact that it is often the taboo activities and ideas which find expression outlets in symbolic form. If the folk consciously recognized the symbolic significance of the joke or folksong element, this element might not be able to continue to serve as a safe, socially sanctioned outlet. (Cf. the popular belief that analysis of a work of art interferes with or ruins one's enjoyment of it.) Fortunately, much of the symbolism in folklore is baldly stated and may be obvious enough to some of the members of the culture concerned. But the study of symbolism would surely be greatly advanced if symbolic interpretations of folklore were obtained from the folk rather than from Freudian folklorists. No one likes to accept an *ex cathedra* pronouncement that a shoe can symbolize female genitalia. Even the folkloristic “evidence” such as is provided by nursery rhymes among other genres leaves the issue in some doubt.

There was an old woman who lived in a shoe
She had so many children she didn't know what to do.

People don't live in shoes and the possible connection between a woman's living in a shoe and having lots of children requires explanation. The sequel verse: “There was another old woman who lived in a shoe, she didn't have any children, she knew what to do” suggests the sexual nature of the symbolism with the implicit statement that a knowledge of contraceptive measures can allow a woman to live in a shoe and not have children. One might also consider the possible symbolism in:

Cock a doodle doo!
My dame has lost her shoe
My master's lost his fiddling stick
And doesn't know what to do.¹⁰

Maybe there isn't a reference to a woman who has lost her vagina matched by a man who has lost his phallus, but if not, the logical connection between a shoeless dame and fiddle stick-less master remains to be seen. But the point is that one should not guess at such interpretations; one should go to the primary sources and ask the folk. Let field data prove or disprove armchair guesswork. What does the shoe suggest to the informant? Can the informant draw a picture of the old woman and her shoe? Perhaps a modified Thematic Apperception Test based upon the nursery rhyme (or other folklore) can be devised and administered. While it may be true that not all informants will be equally facile in articulating oral literary criticism, some will be able to do so. Even a passive bearer of tradition (as opposed to the active bearer who tells the tale or sings the song) may be able to contribute

an interpretation. Folklorists should be just as anxious to collect variant interpretations of a folksong's meaning as they are to collect variants of the folksong's text!¹¹

As a final argument for the collection of oral literary criticism, I would note the interpretation of the word folklore itself, especially among the folk. The meaning of "folklore" in the phrase "That's just folklore" is similar to one of the meanings of myth, namely falsehood, error, and the like. I suspect that it is this pejorative connotation which has encouraged some folklorists to consciously avoid the term substituting instead "verbal or spoken art," "oral or folk literature," and many others. More serious is the fact that this "folk" interpretation of the word "folklore" makes it difficult for the discipline of folklore and its practitioners to gain academic status. If folklore is error, then a Ph.D. in folklore is the height of folly, and the notion of a whole discipline devoted to error is unthinkable in the academic context of the search for truth. To use the term folklore without an awareness of the folk interpretation of the term is unwise.

One final point concerns the necessity for the continued and repeated attempts to elicit oral literary criticism. It is a commonplace that each generation reinterprets anew its folklore, but do we have records of these interpretations and reinterpretations? Sometimes the text is altered to fit new needs, but probably it is the interpretation of texts which changes more. The task of collecting oral literary criticism from a folk can never be completed any more than the task of collecting folklore from that folk can be. Even if both texts and interpretations remained almost exactly the same over a long period of time, this would still be well worth knowing. It might be an important index of the overall stability of that folk. Here also is an opportunity to use the scores of texts without commentary which line library shelves and archives. These texts may be taken *back into the field* and folk *explication de texte's* sought. Our goal for future folklore collection should be fewer texts and more contexts, with accompanying detailed oral literary criticisms.

Notes

1. Bronislaw Malinowski, *Magic, Science and Religion* (Garden City: Doubleday 1954), p.104.
2. William R. Bascom, "Four Functions of Folklore," *Journal of American Folklore* 7 (1954), 333-349; Kenneth S. Goldstein, *A Guide for Field Workers in Folklore* (Hatboro, Pa: Folklore Associates, 1964), p. 23.
3. See E. Ojo Arewa and Alan Dundes, "Proverbs and the Ethnography of Speaking Folklore," *American Anthropologist*, 66:6, Part 2 (1964), 70-85. For the laws of folklore form, see Axel Olrik's classic paper "Epic Laws of Folk Narrative," in *The Study of Folklore*, ed. Alan Dundes (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1965), pp. 129-41. For the laws of folkloristic change, see Antti Aarne, *Leitfaden der Vergleichenden Marchenforschung*, Folklore Fellows Communications No. 13 (Helsinki, 1913), pp. 23-29.
4. In Yoruba, the proverb is;

Owe	l'esin	òrò;	bi	òrò	bá	sonù
proverb	is horse	word	if	word	got	lost
òwe	l'a	fi	ńwá	a		
proverb	is we	use	finding	it		

For the proverb and its explanation, I am indebted to E. Ojo Arewa.
5. Alan Dundes, "Texture, Text, and Context," *Southern Folklore Quarterly*, 28 (1964), 263; Arewa and Dundes, op. cit., p. 73.
6. Melville Jacobs, *The Content and Style of an Oral Literature* (Chicago, 1959), p. 3.
7. *Ibid*, pp. 178-179. Italics mine.

8. This first example was published, see Alan Dundes, "The Study of Folklore in Literature and Culture: Identification and Interpretation." *Journal of American Folklore*, 78 (1965), 139. The second example was published as "A Potawatomi Version of Aarne-Thompson Tale Type 297A, Turtle's War Party," *Norveg* 21 (1978), 47-57.
9. *Webster's New World Dictionary of the American Language*, College Edition (Cleveland and New York, 1960). This is the meaning found in *The Oxford Dictionary of English Proverbs* (2d ed.; Oxford, 1948), p. 17; Archer Taylor and Bartlett Jere Whiting, *A Dictionary of American Proverbs and Proverbial Phrases 1820-1880* (Cambridge, 1858), pp. 10-11.
10. The rhyme of the old woman who lived in a shoe is number 546 in the canonical *Oxford Dictionary of Nursery Rhymes*, ed. Iona and Peter Opie (Oxford, 1951). The Opies suggest (p. 435) that "the shoe has long been symbolic of what is personal to a woman until marriage." The Opies do not mention the sequel verse which dates from the 1890's in American Ozark tradition. See Joseph C. Hickerson and Alan Dundes, "Mother Goose Vice Verse," *Journal of American Folklore*, 75 (1962), 256. As for the "Cock a doodle-doo" rhyme, number 108 in the Opies' collection, one finds not even an oblique circumlocutory hint of any symbolic interpretation. Nursery rhymes should really be studied further. One wonders, for example, why the three blind mice (Opies' number 348) tried to run after the farmer's wife. If it were an Oedipal theme, then the cutting off of the presumptuous mice's tails would be appropriate symbolic castration.
11. It should be mentioned that recently a number of folklorists have observed that the meaning of the folklore to the folk must be investigated. For typical statements see G. Legman, *The Horn Book: Studies in Erotic Folklore and Bibliography* (New Hyde Park, N.Y.: University Books, 1964), p. 285; Goldstein, op. cit., (Hatboro, 1964), pp. 23, 106, 140. Linda Dégh, in description of the future tasks of folklore collectors (written in Hungarian) urges folklorists to leave the explanations to the storyteller and the members of his or her audience, see *Ethnographia*, 74 (1963), 1-12.